



# Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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## TRISSELS CHURCH CEMETERY

By Eunice Geil Smith

Where is a congregation's history found? A variety of sources might include archives of historical records, pictures and artifacts from past decades, and oral stories passed down the generations. It is also true that a church's cemetery is a record of a congregation's history. In addition to the inscriptions on the stone monuments, oral and written stories remember the spirit and inspiration of the lives of those who worked, worshipped, and are now buried there.

In the early years of the Mennonite Church in Rockingham County, Mennonite families gathered in homes to worship. Burial of the dead on family land was the common practice. When the decision was made to construct the first Mennonite place of worship in Rockingham County, the purchase of land included a graveyard. The first meeting house and cemetery is known as Trissels Mennonite Church.

Here are a few stories shared on a walking tour of the Trissels Cemetery on July 16, 2000. Thanks to those who related family oral history. Information also came from tombstones, cemetery records, written family histories, and courthouse records.

Row N22—The Joseph Trissel's family graves are some of the oldest graves. Joseph (Aug. 23, 1786 – May 10, 1867) was the son of David Trissel Sr. Joseph's wife Barbara (May 1, 1786 – Dec. 18, 1826) was one of the earliest known burials in the cemetery.

David Trissel was an early landowner in the Cedar Run area, and Trissels Church takes its name from the family.

Recent Trissel family members erected a new tombstone for the four children of Joseph and Rebecca Paul Trissel. The children died within a short time of each other: Nov. 19, 1862, Nov. 27, 1862, Dec. 17, 1862, and Jan. 24, 1863. It would be interesting to know why they died during this period of the Civil War.

One of the most striking things discovered while walking through the cemetery is that there are large numbers of children buried here. Many lie in unmarked graves. Life in the 1800's and early 1900's was very hard on both children and women of childbearing years. Dan Showalter shared that diphtheria and influenza were both responsible for multiple deaths in many families.

### Early History of Trissels

Tradition says that Trissels Church dates from 1822. For the sum of \$15 Abraham Neff and wife Catherine sold one acre of land including a graveyard to the said fraternity of the Mennonite Church on 31 May 1823.

According to C.E. Nair, author of History of the Cedar Run Community, the church was located in the SW corner of the lot. A lane passed between the land lying to the west and the church with the graveyard.

Horses were hitched to the east and north of the church.

The building was 20' by 25' and was enlarged to 30' by 40' in 1850. In 1900 they built the second church on a new location. The land was traded away for land on the south side of the cemetery. It was recently purchased again and is now used for the newest part of the cemetery.

Timothy Showalter removed the first board when they tore down the first church. Most of the materials were sold at auction, but they used the foundation stones for the 2<sup>nd</sup> church built in 1900. While construction went on, Trissels' regular first Sunday of the month meeting was held at Cedar Run Church of the Brethren.

Row J07-08-- Jacob (1834 - 1907) and Frances (1840 - 1901) Fifer who sold and gave land for the building of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Trissels church are buried at Trissels. They owned much of the land around Trissels at one time including the Rhodes home at the bottom of the hill and the Charles Halterman farm behind the church. On June 2, 1892 Jacob Fifer, wife Frances, and Noah Spitzer sold to Jacob Fifer and trustees of Trissels, for the sum of \$20, land lying on the south side of the graveyard. In 1900 the Fifers gave additional land to the south of the graveyard. Receiving trustees were Perry E. Shank, Christian Brunk, and J.W. Martin.

These men were very active in the church at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and instrumental in building the second Trissels church.

J13—Noah Spitzer (1827 - 1912) served as a trustee at Trissels and was involved with the land purchase for the 1900 building. Noah and Sarah (1832 - 1901) Spitzer had 9 children. Seven sons (Juit, Lute, Otis, Angelo, Aldine, Rollie and Stuart) are buried at Trissels with their families. Just as now, Trissels then was a congregation of families, and you will find family relationships among the many buried here.

Row I15-- Edgar S. Pennington (1837 - 1902) In 1894 E.S. Pennington and wife Anna sold to the church a three-corner strip of woodland between the graveyard and the highway for \$40. Trustees were George Brunk, Jacob Fifer, and Noah Spitzer.

Row B and C—The 19 Penningtons buried at Trissels are all related. Edgar and Anna's children—Thomas, Ida, Clinger, William, and Alpheus, are buried at Trissels.

Row V04—Henry H. Showalter (1842 - 1923) was a Confederate soldier. It is said that when he was shot through the lung, the doctor was able to draw a handkerchief through the path of the bullet, and Henry's breathing stopped when the wound was disinfected. He married his nurse Mary Catherine (Kate) Brown. It was shared that he was known for making fine brandy. The theory was suggested that he shot Elder John Kline, but was never proved. He and his two wives are buried next to the Brown section.

### **Burkholder Cemetery Stories**

Row P05—Margaret Huber Burkholder—The oldest grave in the cemetery (died in 1798). Her husband Peter was one of the earliest landowners in the area. He died while on a trip to Pennsylvania. And is buried at Groffdale in Lancaster County, PA. She was Henry Burkholder's great-great-great-great grandmother. She was buried here in this cemetery before it became part of Trissels.

Henry Burkholder shared the following story. This Peter Burkholder's father left Switzerland. They stopped in Germany and there he passed away from some kind of infection. Before he died he talked his wife into continuing on to America. They landed in Philadelphia and settled in PA for awhile. In 1790 the family came from PA in a wagon and settled in this house at the foot of the hill where Jim Rhodes lives now. The Burkholders owned all this land and she was buried here before it was sold to the Trissel family. According to Henry, the tombstone was not readable, and after Nancy Hess helped them locate it, a new stone was put up in 1979.

We have a mystery stone marked 1814 with the initials M.B. near Margaret Burkholder's stone. Church records say it might be Ulrich Burkholder.

### **Showalter Cemetery Stories**

Row L10—Daniel Showalter (1738 - 1822) is the oldest Showalter buried here. Dan Showalter, son of Timothy, calls him the granddaddy of all the

Showalters. Son Joseph (1776 - 1838) is next generation and his son Daniel (1802 - 1889) is the third generation.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Daniel (3<sup>rd</sup> generation) to be buried here was the last to preach in German. Nobody liked to hear him preach according to Dan. There were many Lutherans in the mountains who couldn't speak English. They were delighted when he would come to preach in German to them. He rode on horseback.

From Jim Showalter, son of HDH—

Daniel(1839 - 1887), father to HDH, had a brother Michael who joined the Southern army. Daniel did not. In an attempt to escape punishment for not joining, he began traveling to Ohio where he would have been safe. But he was captured in Wheeling, WVA and imprisoned in Libby Prison in Richmond. Conditions were terrible with poor sanitation and starvation. His health was always poor after that time. His wife, Mary (1842 - 1932) attempted to keep the farm and family going alone. This is the farm where Glen Showalter, son of Howard Dewitt lives today. Mary was able to raise the \$500 needed to buy his freedom. He returned home, but died at the age of 48 due to his health. His father Daniel outlived him by two years and died in 1889. His son HDH was 4 years of age at the times of his father's death. HDH later bought the home place, supported his mother and crippled brother and raised a large family.

From Jim Showalter—

H14-Gabriel Dewitt Showalter (1868 - 1904), son of Daniel, was a veterinarian in Washington D.C. He serviced the Senators' horses, but then contracted TB in Washington. He went to Canada to take a freeze treatment and came to the valley to his mother's home to recuperate. He contracted meningitis here and died. Howard Dewitt Showalter got his middle name from him.

Row G—Howard Daniel Hercus Showalter (1882 - 1969) and wife Flora Grove (1886 - 1956) He is remembered for spending many hours working at the church keeping up the grounds and as treasurer and Sunday school teacher. He was a director of the Valley National Bank. He owned farms and raised cattle. His father was Daniel (1839 - 1887). His daughter Doris Trumbo shared that he had a strong bass voice. He loved to sing and often led the singing. In later years he lost his voice because of

paralysis of the vocal cords. He couldn't sing or speak well. People had problems understanding him, and that was very hard on him.

The story was shared about how he got his name. "I am not sure where the Howard came from, and Daniel was a family name. I understand that Hercus was the name of the family visiting when they decided he needed a proper name. He went by the name Tommy until he was six years old."—Doris Showalter Trumbo.

2E22—Dean Showalter (d. 1959), twin to Darryl, is a son of Jim and Joyce. He is the 7<sup>th</sup> generation Showalter buried at Trissels.

2C10—Alicia Showalter Reynolds (1970 - 1996) is the daughter of Harley and Sadie and granddaughter of Edith and Owen Showalter, son of HDH. She is the 8<sup>th</sup> generation Showalter buried at Trissels.

Row O25—These tombstones are written in German. Christian Funk (d. May 22, 1853) owned land at the mouth of Cedar Run. He was a farmer and a tombstone cutter who also made sickles. His wife Susannah Geil Funk (d. Dec. 14, 1859) and five of their infant children are buried here. He collapsed while leading singing at Trissels and never made it home according to Harry Brunk's History of Mennonites in Virginia 1727 - 1900.

### Turner Cemetery Stories

D36 and D37-- Adam Turner (d. 1894) and wife Mary (1835 - 1915)

D35-- Hallie Turner Clutter—daughter of Adam

D31-- Kate Lee Turner (1904 - 1984) She was a daughter of Preacher Hop Turner and a schoolteacher.

D32-- Frank Turner (1911 - 1997) was a son of Hop Turner

From Gloria Turner Swope (Adam was her great uncle)--

According to John Wayland's A History of Virginia for Boys and Girls, Adam Turner killed a total of 154 bears. He killed his first in 1872 at the age of 13. The most he killed in one year was 17. Adam taught

school, and was a supervisor of the school district. He was involved with politics. Wayland says that he was responsible for bringing Virginia white tail deer back to Rockingham County. His daughter Hallie Turner Clutter carried mail on horseback.

D27 and D28-- John (1911 – 1982) and Alice Dare Turner Fulk (1883 – 1969) She was a daughter of Adam Turner.

### **From Charlie Halterman—Fulk Cemetery Stories**

John Fulk, Homer Fulk's father, was one of the first to raise turkeys in houses. He built roundhouses so the turkeys wouldn't pile up in the corners. The houses were not very big, just like a big silo. After they commenced putting up regular houses and using wire around the brooder stoves to keep the birds from piling up, the roundhouse idea ended. He was the first one who had the idea to put turkeys out on the range. He built a brooder stove. Charlie Wampler took him to Washington to get a patent on it. It was a wood brooder stove that was kind of a square, as opposed to Mark Showalter Sr.'s brooder stoves that were round-shaped. John Fulk got tired of making them and his sons were not interested in making them, so he stopped.

Charlie Halterman sold eggs to him for hatching. John Fulk sold good birds. He took the culls out and gave them away. Later he got into the feed business. "He was a fine man."

### **Mason Cemetery Stories**

Row H26—Cora Mason (1885 – 1965) was a Granny woman. A Granny woman came into the house and helped a new mother. Cora was Dan Showalter's Granny woman, and helped Susie Showalter at Dan's birth. She was a sister of George Mason and daughter of Daniel Mason. Her bakery in Broadway was located beside Ace Hardware where Rueben Dove had a candy store in the 1950's. John Geil remembers that his Grandfather Joseph W. Geil had bread delivered from her bakery regularly. She moved to Harrisonburg and baked pies for EMC in later years. Norvell Trumbo shared that Cora Mason brought him to Trissels as a young boy oftener than anyone else. She had a model T and always made sure he had a ride to Trissels. It was an open car. "At her bakery, if my mother or I had anything to sell, she'd sell it for

us. I'd sometimes make things from wood to sell. She was a kind old lady."

Ida Showalter, daughter to Timothy Showalter, shared that Cora taught her Sunday school class. Cora didn't like it in the auditorium where there was one class after another, so she took us up to the pulpit. She expected us to watch her rather than what was going on out there. She made us memorize a lot of scripture. Ethel Showalter Strite, daughter to HDH Showalter, shared that Cora left money to the General Mission Board when she died. She lived frugally and never married.

C13—Brother to Cora—George Mason (1889 – 1979) was a machinist. He was one of the first ones to work at Broadway Metal Works according to Mark Showalter Jr.

In the graveyard are many Mennonites who attended Trissels, but also there are numerous people from Brock's Gap and Cedar Run. Most of the smaller churches did not have cemeteries so Trissels was used. A grave lot did not cost anything so people who did not have a church would use Trissels graveyard. Trissels cemetery was one of the earliest cemeteries in the area. It filled an important need for the community around it which speaks to its special role in the lives of the early landowners and families around Trissels church.

## **Trissels Church (1900 building) Memories**

By Daniel Showalter

I have many memories of going to church at Trissels when I was a boy. I loved to go there. I loved to go there better than Zion. It was in the woods and a number of community people attended that I knew. My 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Lillian Pennington was one. Cedar Run had their church one hour earlier because some of the people wanted to come to Trissels for the preaching.

The preachers used a calendar. Each church had services on its scheduled Sunday. Some weeks the preachers of Northern District were scheduled to go in the mountains. When the preachers were appointed to come to Trissels, they would come. The members

didn't know who was going to preach, but the preachers did. When it came to going to the mountains, it seemed like Perry Shank, Sam Shank's father, and my father, Timothy Showalter, had more turns than anyone else did.

What did the 1900 building look like? It was a white church. There was a walk that went into it and had a step or two. The church had two doors, one for the women and one for the men. Down the middle of the room ran a wooden divider and you could just see the heads of the people over it. The reason they had the partition was so that when we had communion the women wouldn't get embarrassed when we washed feet.

We did not sit in families. The women went in the right door and the men used the left. The little children sat with their mothers. When they got bigger, they would sit back with their friends. The boys and girls did not mix. The men's side had two rows of pews and the women's side had the same thing. The boys like to sit in the back corner where they couldn't be watched. They liked to catch flies and talk. About the same time they added a balcony, they took the partition out and the families started to sit together. Behavior was so much better then.

In the front they had the "amen" corner, usually the older men sat in that. On the opposite side they had a place where the older women and preacher's wives sat.

Having spittoons in the church was before my time, but behind the stove there was a short bench. When old men came from other churches like Cedar Run, there was a sawdust box to use for spitting their tobacco behind the stove.

There were two stoves. One was on the men's side and one was on the women's side. The stove was a beautiful stove. It was cast iron and had a girl holding a basket of fruit on the front. If the service was long, looking at the basket of fruit made me starve to death.

Howard Showalter supplied wood for the stoves. Then Trissels had a wood furnace put into it. They did not use wood from the trees around the church unless the tree was dying or was one that was going to give trouble. The trees were much like they are now. The trees in the buggy days were used to hitch

the reins of the buggies. They would come in and hang the rein on a horseshoe nailed to the tree. It would be there until they came out, and then they would unrein the horse and back the buggy up and be on their way. Howard Dewitt Showalter remembers a row of cherry trees down here along the fence. He shared, "We youngsters would go out there to eat cherries. We started before they were ripe."

Unless there was something special planned, when I was a boy 80 - 100 people came to Trissels. There weren't many horses in my time. I remember more about cars. My father (Timothy Showalter) and Wilmer Geil were the last to get cars. Howard Showalter (HDH) had a big family. He was the father of Carl, Owen, Howard Dewitt, Jim, Doris Trumbo, Kathryn Shank, Mary Emma Eby, Ethel Strite, and Mazie's husband Jake. He had a big Lincoln car. I was about 6 or 7 years old when my dad got a car. I was born in 1916, so that was about 1922 or 1923.

The pulpit was on the east end. One preacher would preach, but if there were a couple other preachers there, they sat there too. The length of the sermon depended on who was preaching. When the preaching was done, the other preachers would get up and say, "I bear testimony to what the brother has said." If he was impressed about something he might talk about it.

There was quite a bit of singing. On the fourth Sunday night Trissels had a singing. They called on different ones to lead songs. Someone would lead a song and then they would appoint brother so and so to lead. They would always ask my father to lead "Rise, Glorious Conqueror." My sisters at my father's funeral used that song. He could really put the power behind his good bass voice. Eddie Geil liked to lead songs real slow. Often he would say, "Slower, please." Women never led singing. They did teach children in Sunday School.

I didn't have a favorite preacher. Everyone liked Hop Turner. They liked Abraham Heishman and Lewis Shank. He often was a little bit long, but nobody cared because he was so interesting. He would shut his eyes when he preached. Perry Shank would also shut his eyes when he preached.

In 1950 Trissels decided to build a new church. They needed a bigger church. When they moved some of

the district events from one church to the other, Trissels didn't have a turn because of the lack of room. There was no place to serve the meals. Trissels decided they didn't want to be left out on things so they decided to build bigger. Some people raised a big objection to it. Lindale had two communions. Brennemens no longer existed, but Lindale had a communion to celebrate Brennemens. Then they had one to celebrate Lindale. Communion was open to other churches. Often when Zion had their communion, Trissels people went to Zion. There were a lot of Shanks and Showalters at Zion. The Howard Showalter family went to Trissels. The George Showalter family went to Zion. There was not a lot of competition between the churches. They were considered one congregation.

*Daniel Showalter, son of Timothy and Susie Showalter, shared these memories with Eunice Geil Smith on July 16, 2000. They were transcribed from a tape recording of a question and answer session with minor editing.*

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

-C.S. Lewis, Miracles

*"We know next to nothing about history; a single second of lived time contains more than can be recorded."*

-C.S. Lewis Christian Reflections

*"What historians retain of the past is like the contents of an old drawer."*

-C.S. Lewis Christian Reflections

### **Membership:**

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