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Ministry and Work in the Mountains

In 1967, Roy F. Good received ordination in the Central District of the Virginia Mennonite Conference. Roy, his wife Kathy, and their family spent many years in ministry in the mountains of West Virginia. Read Roy's summary of their work in and near Harman, W. Va.

Gary Smucker writes in this issue about Lynn and Ora Tusing, Mennonite sisters who lived in the mountains near Mathias, W. Va. The Tusing sisters had many friends and customers who came to their mountain home. The Tusing sisters' twentieth-century story is a testament to the impact of ministry in the mountains.

Harvey Yoder tells the story of Mennonite composer and hymn writer Harry Showalter, who spent most of his adult life in Ohio, but who has roots and family in Virginia.

Read about Crest Hill Community Church, a "Mountain State" congregation of the Virginia Mennonite Conference, with a listing of pastors since 1900.

In these days of change and uncertainty, we can affirm with the Psalmist that when our eyes look to the mountains, we find help that comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Crest Hill Community Church (above), Wardensville, W. Va. Photo by Editor



Lynn Tusing (1905-2000) at her spinning wheel. Lynn and her sister Ora Tusing (1896-1974) lived on a mountain farm near Mathias, West Virginia. The world beat a path to their mountain home because of their skills as weavers. Read Gary Smucker's article **about the Tusing women in this issue.**

Photo from Lost River Artisans Cooperative and Museum, Lost River, W. Va., used by permission

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The Tusing Sisters, Their Life on the Mountain

by Gary Smucker

Ora and Lynn Tusing lived a quiet life on a farm at the top of a mountain in West Virginia. Yet the memory of these two Mennonite women lives on in a number of ways that would probably surprise them if they were living today.

Ora and Lynn lived an isolated life high on the mountain, but the world beat a path to their door. The reason many people came to their door was special skills that they had. They spun wool on a spinning wheel to make yarn and wove the wool and linen to make coverlets and blankets. People came to their home to learn about weaving and spinning.

Members of the Tusing family were known as strong Christians and faithful to the Mennonite Church. When several groups of Mennonites combined to worship at the Mathias



Loom used by the Tusing Sisters

Photo from Lost River Artisans Cooperative Museum, taken by Gary Smucker

Mennonite Church, the decision was made to continue the cottage meetings [worship in a home] at the Tusing farm because of the difficulty for them to travel to Mathias (Wenger). Many people journeyed up Branch Mountain to worship with the Tusing sisters after their parents were no longer living and the rest of the family had moved from the farm.

John and Katie Shank often went to worship there (Stewart 2020), and Harold and Anna Lee Emswiler were mentioned as guests in the video about the sisters. Mim Mumaw reports: “I well remember going to the Tusing sisters for church when it was my father’s turn to preach [John R. Mumaw]. Our family of seven made up most of the group gathered. I still have a coverlet woven by them” (Mumaw 2020). I remember Dan Smucker Jr., my dad, telling about visits to the two sisters on the top of the mountain when he preached in West Virginia.

The sisters were missionaries from their home because they participated in the church by knitting bandages for the leper ministries of the Mennonite Church. They faithfully prayed for and corresponded with missionaries, and in their home after they were gone was a collection of letters of thanks from missionaries (Schmitt 2003).

Authors came to visit Ora and Lynn too. In March of 1973 the *Smithsonian Magazine* published an article about the sisters’ life and work with spinning and weaving. *Goldenseal*, the West Virginia magazine of society in the state, published an interview with Lynn after Ora was gone. In 2003, a video called “The Texture of Life, The Tusing Sisters of Branch Mountain” (Schmitt 2003), was released. The video lives on in You Tube format for anyone

in the world to see.

The Lost River Artisans Cooperative and Museum near Lost City, West Virginia, has looms and spinning wheels and a collection of other artifacts from Ora and Lynn Tusing in their museum. The Museum is a place to visit to find out more about the lives of these remarkable women.

The Tusing sisters lived near Mathias, West Virginia. If you drive up Howard's Lick Road through the Lost River State Park and continue up Branch Mountain, you can still see the farm spread out over the top of the beautiful plateau where the two of them lived. They stayed on the farm most of the time because they didn't have a car. They chopped wood, baked bread, churned butter, made soap, had a garden, and raised farm animals; and they did the other things necessary to survive on an isolated farm. The mailman took the cream that went to Harrisonburg to make butter. The telephone kept them in touch with family and friends.

Ora was the older sister, and she worked more in the home. She cooked and did the housework. She was a bit stricter than her sister and would not play the card game Old Maid even during the week. She was known for quoting proverbs and mountain wisdom (Schmitt 2003). Ora suffered from rheumatism, but she still managed to chop wood for the stove. Earlier, Ora worked as a midwife in the Harrisonburg area. There are people around who can thank the memory of Ora because she helped assist their entry into the world (Tusing 2020).

Lynn milked the three cows twice a day and



Ora [Leora] Tusing, left (1896-1974), and Lynn [Bertha Lynn] Tusing (1905-2000) at their spinning wheel.

Photo by Arnout Hyde Jr., used by permission of the Arnout Hyde Jr. estate

did most of the farm work. When she climbed the top of the field to bring in the cows, she could look west over the South Branch Valley into Moorefield. She was taller than her sister, and more likely to play cards with visitors. She spent her life on the farm. She chopped wood too and took care of the sheep, pigs, and chickens. Lynn taught herself to hunt and enjoyed supplying the home with game. The hole in the screen of the upstairs bedroom is from when Lynn shot a bear though the window. At least that is a story circulating in the family. (Tusing 2020).

Ora [Leora] Tusing was born in 1896 and lived for 78 years. Her sister, Lynn [Bertha

Lynn] Tusing, was born in 1905 and lived for 95 years. They were born to William and Sarah [Funkhouser] Tusing and had seven brothers and sisters.

In the afternoons, while there was still daylight to see their work, after a hard morning of work on the farm, Lynn and Ora worked with looms and spinning wheels to make the coverlets and rugs that brought them fame. The wool came from the sheep on the farm. They cleaned the wool and then carefully carded it to smooth the fibers. Then they made yarn using the spinning wheels. Finally, one of them sat down at the floor heddle loom to weave the yarn through the linen threads that were fitted on the loom. An embroidered cloth hung in front of the weaver to remind her how to make the pattern. (Thomson 1973).

The world beat a path to the Tusing sisters' door because of their fame as weavers on their one-hundred-year-old loom. But people also came because they were fascinating, enjoyable people who lived a way of life from a past era. The Smithsonian author wrote, "From behind their glasses [Lynn's specked from the morning milking in the barn] they present the amiable expressions of people who like their lot. The sisters are not easily vexed. They like the company they keep, the food they eat.... They like their craft." (Thomson 1973) They were pleasant company for visitors. That seems to be the main reason that many people visited the sisters and called them their friends.

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Lynn Tusing (left) and Ora Tusing dressed to go to church.

Photo from Lost River Artisans Cooperative and Museum, Lost River, W. Va., used by permission

Living and Serving in West Virginia

by Roy Good

I'm not sure if I can claim to be a native West Virginian or not. Back in the 1930s my parents, Paul and Eula Good, served in the Onego area of W.Va., which is where the first awareness of my existence became known. They moved back to Harrisonburg before I was born. My first twelve years were spent in the Harrisonburg area. Then in 1952 my parents were called to W.Va. again, this time to the Harman area where I lived for the next three years of my life. My father pastored the

Lambert congregation for four years. We lived in the Job mission home which had been the home of mission pastors since the early 1900s.

While a junior in high school at (then) EMC, I became acquainted with the young lady who was to become my wife. Kathy and I were married on April 18, 1959. In the years that followed, as we made frequent trips to W.Va. (I was deacon at Lambert), we began to wonder if the Lord was calling us to move to that area. Then one Sunday evening, the churches of W.Va. gave a program at the Weavers Mennonite Church. We were there to hear it. I well recall, that at some point in the program, Kathy and I looked at each other, and there was an unspoken agreement between us. We belong with that group. We took what we perceived as our calling to Bishop Mahlon Blosser, and about a year later, in 1967, we found ourselves moving to W.Va., with our three daughters, Sandy, Patty, and Sherry (a son, Alan, was born in W.Va.). At first, we lived in a house in the town of Harman, but when Bro. Warren Kratz died we moved five miles to the Job mission home. So now, I was living with my family, in the same house that I lived in as a teenager, and pastoring the same congregation that my father had pastored more than a decade before. Alvin Kanagy had pastored there in the meantime.

The Lambert church was built in 1949. Previously the congregation had met in a nearby elementary school house. At one time the area was a sizable community, but many people had moved to where jobs were available, which had its effect on the congregation. But then, things began to turn around. New people began coming. About the same time, it began to occur to me that Virginia conference had been sending pastors to this congregation



The Good Family. From left, seated: Patricia Eckard, Roy Good, Kathy Good, Sandra Ressler. Back row: Sherry Showalter, Alan Good.

Photo from Roy Good

for seventy-five years, so I began to pray that I would be the last imported pastor. The first answer came in the person of Richard White. He and I had been classmates at Harman High in the 1950s. He was an ordained deacon. Then one Sunday morning Boyd and Shirley Wyatt and their family showed up at Lambert. As a youth, Boyd had lived in the Lambert area and had attended church there. They were (and still are) living some twenty miles away. As time passed, it became clear that God was calling him to a pastoral role. At first, he worked mostly with a very energetic youth group. At that time, the Good family was becoming more and more involved in a singing ministry. We arranged to be away from Lambert about one Sunday a month as Boyd became more involved in pastoral and preaching ministry. He has now pastored the congregation for almost forty years. In recent years, Lambert became an independent community church.

Our four children attended the same school and rode the same bus. The older two had all twelve grades in the same building. The younger two finished out at EMHS. In 1981, it seemed that our time in W.Va. was over, so we packed up and moved back to Harrisonburg. Looking back, I remember some of the chal-

lenges we met, and our reaction to them. Some I wish we would have handled differently. Yet overall, we are very honored to have been a part of the church in W.Va. We expect to see some of the fruits of our ministry in heaven, and to rejoice with them.



Meadow Crest Old Order Mennonite meetinghouse and horse barn, 9325 Nazarene Church Rd., Bridgewater, Va. The meetinghouse, about nine miles west of Dayton, Va., was built in 2018.

Photos by Editor taken May, 2020

Naomi Shank Brunk (1912-2005)

by the Editor

Naomi Shank's parents died in the pandemic after WWI that swept the world, killing millions. Naomi's father and mother, Daniel and Abbie Shank, died from the virus on the same day, February 17, 1920, and were buried at Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Va. They left six children under the age of nine. Naomi had just turned five. Irvin D. and Sallie Showalter took Naomi into their home and raised her, and Naomi grew up in the Trissels-Zion congregation. Naomi volunteered with Civilian Public Service as a dietician, and in 1956 she married Harry A. Brunk. She helped Professor Brunk work on his history books, including the two-volume set, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*.

Naomi has a significant collection of files and photos in the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives. While working on the Trissels



Mennonite Church bicentennial history book this summer, the Editor discovered an 1874 wedding photo of Naomi's maternal grandparents in her collection. The Editor knows of only one Virginia Mennonite wedding photo taken prior to Martin A. Lahman (1854-1904) and Catherine Shank's (1855-1932) photo



Naomi Shank Brunk and History Professor Harry A. Brunk were married in 1956. Naomi grew up in the Trissels-Zion congregation. The Brunk couple attended Weavers.

Photo from Naomi Shank Brunk collection

from 1874. According to Naomi Shank Brunk's notes on the back of the picture (right), they had eighty grandchildren and eighteen great-grandchildren when Catherine passed away at age seventy-seven in 1932.



Martin A. Lahman (1854-1904) and Catherine Shank (1855-1932) wedding photo, October 29, 1874. This is a remarkable photo in that it is one of the earliest wedding photos of a Virginia Mennonite couple.

Photo from Naomi Shank Brunk collection, VMC Archives

On July 1, 2020, the Virginia Mennonite Conference and the Eastern Mennonite University Library entered into a new agreement to store and manage the Virginia Mennonite Conference archival materials. The new agreement lasts through 2029. The Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives are kept in 600 square feet of space on the Hartzler Library's first floor. Since March 2020, the EMU Library and Conference Archives have not been accessible to the public. This summer, however, the understanding and very helpful librarians of the Hartzler Library allowed the Editor to use the approximately twenty boxes of Trissels Mennonite Church files so that the bicentennial history book project could move forward. Lord willing, the bicentennial of the oldest continuous Mennonite church in Virginia takes place in the fall of 2022. The Editor is the author of the Trissels history book. Many thanks to the Hartzler Library professional librarians who are keeping the Conference archives safe during the COVID-19 era. The Menno Simons Historical Library and Archives is one of the finest Mennonite research centers in the United States. At some point, we pray, the VMC Archives will again be open to researchers. Contact the Librarian in the EMU Historical Library for research questions related to the VMC Archives. You should be able to receive limited help during this time when the library is closed to the public.

Old Order Hymn Composer Has Valley Roots

by Harvey Yoder

*Not to the strong is the battle,
Nor to the swift is the race,
But to the true and the faithful
Vict'ry is promised through grace.*

- Harry Showalter, 1957*

Harry Showalter (1889-1992), a little known Old Order Mennonite (a member of the Ohio Wisler group), composed the words and melodies of 18 gospel songs and hymns, and wrote tunes for four more. He lived to be over 102, and wrote most of his published songs and hymns when he was in his 80's and 90's.

Born on August 13, 1889, Harry was the fifth child of Hettie (Rohrer) and Daniel Pennybaker Showalter who lived near Singers Glen, just north of Harrisonburg. His parents named him Henry R. (for Rohrer), after Hettie's oldest brother, but growing up with his four older siblings (and later four younger ones), he acquired the nickname "Hen," which he very much disliked. So over time he became known by his family and others as "Harry," the name he went by for the rest of his life.

Harry's parents' farm along Snapp's Creek was not far from the village of Singers Glen, sometimes referred to as the birthplace of gospel music in the American South. It was here that Joseph Funk had set up a printing press over fifty years earlier and published, among other works, *Mennonite Hymns* and the *Harmonia Sacra*. Joseph Funk's mother was the daughter of Jacob Showalter, Hettie's ancestor

who emigrated to the new world in 1750, so the two families were related.

Music was always an important part of Harry's life. According to his sister Mabel, "When Harry was just a boy, he sat on the back step with a songbook while other children played." And at the early age of ten, soon after his family moved to a farm near Rushville, he attended his first singing school at the Bank Mennonite Church, taught by Jake Showalter, which added to his interest in hymns and hymn singing.

Harry and his siblings were known to have strong voices that blended well. He enjoyed singing tenor with his siblings at home, harmonizing with his brother John, who sang bass, and his sisters Ida and Annie, who sang alto and soprano.

In December of 1910, at age 21, Harry embarked on a year-long trip by train that took him all the way to California, visiting relatives and working part-time jobs along the way. Upon his return he became a baptized member of the Pleasant View Old Order Mennonite Church near Dayton, but in the summer of 1913 he moved to Columbiana, Ohio, and became an active part of the Wisler Old Order group, with whom he lived and served the rest of his life as a song leader and trustee.

One of his primary reasons for his move to Ohio was his romantic interest in Sadie Weaver, and the couple were happily married at her home in November 24, 1914. It was during the year prior to his marriage that he composed his first song that was later published, one that seems fitting in its references to both the blessings and griefs that were to become a part of his remarkable life:

*Often when we sit and ponder o'er the cares
that life may bring,*

*We can only look to Jesus, our Redeemer and
our King;*

*Tho sore trials may surround us, or our way
may be more smooth,*

*'Tis by these blessings or afflictions that He
doth our motives prove.*

*While mistakes are ever near us, and our mo-
tives miss their aim,*

*We should not become discouraged, but be-
lieve that Christ, the same;*

*Yesterday, today, tomorrow, will forgive us if
we come*

*With hearts possessing godly sorrow and an
honest, pleading tongue.*

*Disappointments may surround us, chasten-
ings may come severe,*

*But we have the blessed promise that a com-
forter is near;*

*Whom the Lord loves He will chasten, and He
scourgeth every son*

*Whom He receiveth into glory, ever say, "His
will be done."*

*In our upward, pilgrim journey, may we to
each other show*

*Love unchangeable, unfading, that in peace
we onward go;*

*Till the summons at death's portals shall our
weary eyelids close,*

*Then may we meet those gone, immortal, who
are free from cares and woes.*

Harry and Sadie were blessed with their first child, Esther Virginia, on December 18, 1915. Tragically, their joy turned to grief as Sadie developed a high fever, became extremely ill and died the day after Christmas, leaving Harry to care for little Esther with the help of

friends, relatives, and Sadie's sister Melissa.

On August 19, 1920, Harry married Melissa, and the couple had five children together, three girls and two boys. Their first child, a daughter, lived only two days, and the fourth, a son, died of pneumonia at five months of age. Then his beloved Melissa died of heart failure on June 27, 1963, leaving him a widower for the second time at age 73.

Esther, his firstborn daughter, looked after her father as long as she was able, but died December 16, 1990, nearly two years before Harry's death on August 10, 1992. Harry was buried on what would have been his 103rd birthday, three days later.

Harry had composed only one other published hymn, *Not To The Swift Is The Battle*, by 1957, and it was not until he was a widower in his 80's and 90's that he went on to write texts and tunes for a total of 16 others. He also composed tunes for four other texts, two written by his granddaughter Elizabeth. John Overholt, publisher of the *Christian Hymnary*, did most of the four-part harmonizations for his songs.

All of these 22 hymns and gospel songs were published by his son Elmer Showalter in 1988 as *Hymns of Tribute*. Six of the hymns can also be found in Overholt's *Christian Hymnary*, and eight in the 1987 *Zion's Praises*.

Here is the last verse of Harry's final composition, *Love of Jesus*, written in 1986, when Harry was in his late 90's:

*Why not work for Jesus while it's called today,
For the night will come when when work is
done away;*

*You'll receive a bright reward, To be present
with the Lord,
And the saints that reign throughout eternity.*

His granddaughter Elizabeth wrote the following tribute:

*To write a hymn is not so hard
When inspirations come.
Take up your pen and write them down
To fit the tune you hum.*

*This talent God has given you
Will be remembered long;
For near and far hearts will be blest
Who sing your sacred songs.*

Sources

“The Swift Years Come and Go--Life of Harry Showalter” by Naomi Rosenberry and Alta Showalter, self published 1989.

“Hymns of Tribute II” published by Elmer Showalter in 1988 (second printing 1991).

Phone conversations with granddaughter Elizabeth Showalter of Columbiana, Ohio and with niece Lois Showalter of Dayton, Virginia.

* These words, the first lines of verse one of Showalter's *Not to the strong is the battle*, appear to have been borrowed from the refrain of Fannie Crosby's *Conquering now and still to conquer*. Crosby lived from 1820-1915.

This article comes from Harvey Yoder's blog, used by permission, at <http://harvyoder.blogspot.com/2020/07/old-order-hymn-composer-has-valley-roots.html>

Crest Hill Community Church, Wardensville, West Virginia

by the Editor

Around 1900, Mennonites established a mission preaching station in Wardensville, Hardy County, W.Va. Ministers like Samuel Shank Jr. and John S. Coffman had preached in the community in the late nineteenth century. The Heishman family moved into the area around the turn of the twentieth century and gave leadership to the Northern District church of the Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Many pastors have come and gone at Crest Hill, as shown in the chart on the next page, prepared by Philip J. Yoder. Crest Hill Mennonite Church was renamed as a community church around 2000. Regular Sunday attendance in 2020 is approximately thirty. Members at the church today live in the community, and in recent decades only the pastors have roots in the ethnic Anabaptist Mennonite heritage. Whereas in the past, there were many congregations in West Virginia part of the Virginia Mennonite Conference, today only Crest Hill and Mathias Mennonite are located in West Virginia.

Find current Crest Hill photos on the front and back of this issue, and see a picture below from Ida Showalter's collection in the VMC Archives, taken in the 1930s or 1940s.



Crest Hill Community Church, Wardensville, W. Va.: Survey of Pastoral Leadership	
1875	Mennonites move into the Baughman Settlement. John S. Coffman (circuit riding)
1905	Thomas Heishman family moves out of Baughman Settlement to Crest Hill area
1921	Mennonites assume charge of Crest Hill from the Presbyterians (c.f. Lewis Shank)
1924	Maryland Brethren assume charge of Crest Hill
1926	Mennonites assume charge of Crest Hill once again. (c.f. William Heishman)
1940-53	Abraham Heishman. No regular services
1954-60	A. T. (Teddy) Rollins
1961-62	David Augsburg
1963-64	No pastoral leadership
1965-68	Lewis P. Showalter
1966-70	Amos Rudolph. Licensed to preach, was not pastor
1972-76	A. T. (Teddy) Rollins
1976-81?	John Shank
1978-89	Sanford King (Mary)
1989-90	Matt and Glenda Cabbage
1991-95	Lloyd Horst (Elverta)
1995-99	Butch (Ernest) Miller (Lydia)
2000-00	Dwayne Stutzman (Normalou). Led the initiative to change the name from Crest Hill Mennonite to Crest Hill Community.
2001-19	Milford & Carolyn Lyndaker
2019-2020	Philip J. Yoder



Crest Hill Community Church, Wardensville, W.Va. This church came into the Virginia Mennonite Conference in the early twentieth century. It is a part of the Northern District of the Conference. Philip J. Yoder is pictured here, in a photo from 2020.

Photo by Editor

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If you have an idea for an article or picture for the *Historian*, contact the Editor at elyoder@gmail.com.

All past issues of *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*, from 1994-2020, can be found at mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net. This site includes a link to over 1,600 photos related to Mennonites in Virginia, provides a way to subscribe to *Historian* online, and connects readers to the Editor's history blog.

An annual individual membership fee for the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians is \$10.00 per year, which includes a subscription to the *Historian*. Additional family memberships are \$5 each. Send membership fees to James Rush, e-mail at jameslrush@comcast.net, phone 540-434-0792, or U.S. mail to James Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22802.