



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

A quarterly periodical dedicated to the history and culture of Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, USA

A New Look at Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole, 1852-1932

Thirty years ago Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church burned to the ground. From materials Paul Kratz collected, find a summary of the fire in this issue.

The first burial in the Rhodes Cemetery, Broadway, Va., took place in 1808. Recently Robbie Rhodes arranged a visit to see the cemetery. See photos and an essay in this issue.

We are glad to include an essay by Harvey Yoder about a Brethren Mill owner, Daniel Bowman.

Finally, read an overview of a recent seminary thesis about the origins of Eastern Mennonite School and Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole, our feature essay.



Do you remember the fire at Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church, Rockingham County, Virginia, on April 14, 1989? The Mt. Clinton meetinghouse burned to the ground in that tragedy thirty years ago. Photo taken by Lee Ann Good Biller, contributed by Paul L. Kratz.

Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians summer tour will be Saturday, June 1, in the morning. The Harrisonburg tour focuses on new immigrant churches, including Spanish speaking, Laotian, and Swahili speaking churches. We will travel to several different church locations and speak with leaders in these churches. The tour will begin at 9 am and finish with a lunch served around noon. We are not hiring a bus but will ask participants to drive to the locations, all close to Harrisonburg. The cost will be around \$15/person, including lunch. Look for more specific information in your church bulletin in the next several weeks. The contact person is Jim Hershberger at 540 908 8005 or jimhersh254@gmail.com.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- *A NEW LOOK AT THE BEGINNING OF EASTERN MENNONITE SCHOOL*, AN OVERVIEW OF EVAN K. KNAPPENBERGER'S SEMINARY THESIS
- *FIRE AT MT. CLINTON MENNONITE CHURCH, 1989*, BY ELWOOD YODER
- *BRETHREN MILL OWNER DANIEL BOWMAN*, BY HARVEY YODER
- *RHODES CEMETERY VISIT*, BY ELWOOD YODER

Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church, above left, taken
by Jennifer Bolander, 2012.
Mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net photo

A New Look at the Beginning of Eastern Mennonite School

An Overview of Evan K. Knappenberger's Seminary Thesis
by Elwood Yoder

My surprise from reading Donald Kraybill's 2017 centennial history book about Eastern Mennonite University was the minimal attention given to Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole's important role in establishing the school. In the past twelve years of reading and researching Virginia Mennonite history, I've discovered Lewis J. Heatwole's (1852-1932) essential leadership in the origins of Eastern Mennonite School. It seems to me that without L. J. Heatwole's vision and determination to get a school started in 1917, the entire enterprise may have failed.

Donald Kraybill emphasized other key leaders at the beginning of Eastern Mennonite, and he acknowledged L. J. Heatwole's role, but I wished he would have written more about the local Virginia leader's educational vision and organizational skills in starting EMS. Recently, I was glad to read a Master of Arts in Religion Thesis, from Eastern Mennonite Seminary, that attempts to set the record straight on L. J. Heatwole's outstanding leadership in the establishment of EMS.

Master of Arts in Religion Seminary Thesis

In November 2018, Evan K. Knappenberger successfully defended his Eastern Mennonite Seminary thesis in front of a group of professors and administrators at EMU.¹ Knappenberger's 129-page manuscript attempts to challenge earlier narratives about

the origins of Eastern Mennonite and to provide evidence for a revisionist history of the school's beginnings. He disputes the claim that Eastern Mennonite was merely a conservative reaction to Goshen College, or that it was simply an attempt by traditionalist, uneducated, parochial farmers to establish a new school to control the lives of Mennonite youth.²

Knappenberger contends that earlier writers about the origins of EMS did not look closely enough at the actual leaders who formed the school. He asserts that those interpreters assumed a traditional, conservative, and controlling environment for the founding of the school. Knappenberger argues instead that some of the principal founders of the school, especially L. J. Heatwole, were progressive for the Mennonite world of their time.

Though Knappenberger attempts to establish a revisionist history about the origins of EMS, he deals gently with the new centennial history book about EMU that sociologist Donald Kraybill wrote.³ At times Knappenberger challenges the stereotypes and generalizations that Kraybill makes, but at other places, Knappenberger acknowledges the choices any writer of such a history book must make. Knappenberger feels that Kraybill has not looked closely enough at the unique Virginia environment of the late 19th and early 20th century to understand that the foundations of EMS began among local Virginia Mennonite leaders who were actually progressive in their thinking.

1. Evan K. Knappenberger, "To Shake the Whole World from Error's Chain: an Alternative History of the Founding of Eastern Mennonite" (thesis, Eastern Mennonite University, 2018).

2. Knappenberger, "To Shake the Whole World," 10.

3. Donald B. Kraybill, *Eastern Mennonite University: a Century of Countercultural Education* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

A New Look at Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole

Evan K. Knappenberger's chief contribution to Virginia Mennonite history is his study of Lewis J. Heatwole. In a burst of scholarly studies over the past several years, Knappenberger has read everything associated with L. J. Heatwole's career and contributions, he has unearthed primary source materials, read them, and he is conversant with them. To Knappenberger's credit, he has illuminated the principal founder of Eastern Mennonite in a way that few others have. Knappenberger traveled to denominational archives in Indiana, and he has pored over the voluminous holdings of L. J. Heatwole in the Eastern Mennonite University Library and Archives.

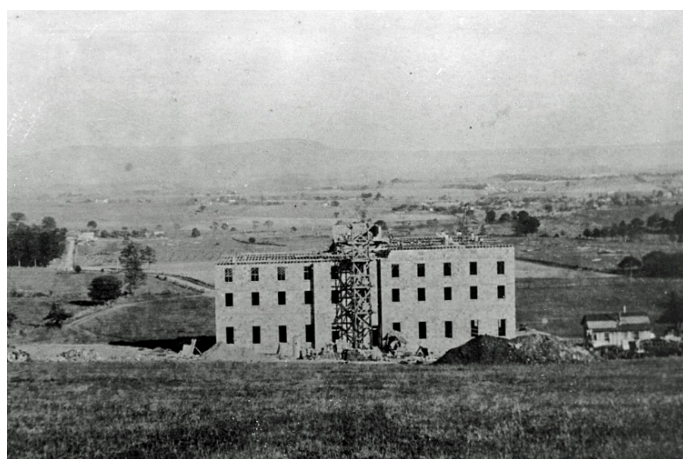
In the last thirty pages of the thesis, Knappenberger argues that it was L. J. Heatwole's skills, attention, time, effort, and vision which are most responsible for Eastern Mennonite's existence.⁴ Others helped to found the 1917 educational institution, such as Amos D. Wenger, Daniel O. Kauffman, and George R. Brunk I, but Lewis J. Heatwole was the local Harrisonburg leader who finally made it happen, after two aborted tries in distant locations.

Lewis J. Heatwole was the first President of Trustees for the school, he recruited talent and money, planned the curriculum, found supplies, and conducted legal business for Eastern Mennonite.⁵ Perhaps most importantly, Bishop Heatwole was able to secure a good location for the school in Assembly Park, Harrisonburg.

Lewis and his brother Cornelius had helped to found a new State Normal School for Women in Harrisonburg, later to become

James Madison University. L. J. took classes at the University of Virginia, and he attended the State Normal Institute at Bridgewater. All this to say that L. J. Heatwole was educated in the latest educational understandings for his time, which contributed to his progressive views. With the Virginia Mennonite Conference division of 1902 behind him, Heatwole moved on to other endeavors, and by 1917 he was the principal architect in founding Eastern Mennonite School.

L. J. Heatwole had been reluctantly ordained by lot in 1887, though throughout his ministry career, he seemed to be at heart



In the spring of 1919 the EMS Board bought a farm in Park View in order to construct a building. By the fall of 1919, with L. J. Heatwole serving as Board chair, the building was going up, as seen above. Photo taken by an unknown photographer a hundred years ago.

James Rush collection

an educator and student of the world. He had been a leader in the development of the Rockingham Teachers' Association, he was involved in the local temperance society, and he campaigned for a State Normal School in Harrisonburg. As Knappenberger writes, Heatwole championed education, homiletics, rhetoric, organization, good literature, and most of the early written materials of

4. Knappenberger, "To Shake the Whole World," 88.

5. Knappenberger, 89.

Eastern Mennonite bore his imprint and influence.⁶ The League of Nations in Europe almost adopted Heatwole's revised calendar. Knappenberger asserts that "most of the early work of founding the school seems to have been carried on by Bishop Heatwole and several of his trusted friends including Peter Hartman and J. J. Wenger."⁷

In the final section of Knappenberger's thesis, he develops the moral and educational viewpoints in L. J. Heatwole's oft-overlooked master's thesis.⁸ Written for the faculty of Oskaloosa College, Iowa, Heatwole advanced his progressive ideology, moral and religious philosophy, and innovative ideas on education. Heatwole's thesis, Knappenberger notes, was not referenced or cited by three earlier historians of Eastern's history, including



Evan K. Knappenberger (right), and Philip J. Yoder, researchers, scholars, and friends, at the Editor's house along Sharon Lane, Harrisonburg, Va., December 2018.

Hubert Pellman, Harry A. Brunk, and Donald Kraybill. Themes of forbearance, toleration, and exhortation emerge from Heatwole's thesis. Knappenberger assesses Heatwole's

thesis as an extension of the educational theories of colonial schoolmaster Christopher Dock.⁹

It is challenging to include details here, but Knappenberger has shown that Heatwole was progressive for his day, he was drawn to education so as to invite Mennonite youth to embrace their faith without coercing them, and he hoped to build an institution of learning in the mold of the schools he had attended and helped to establish. Heatwole wanted to impart a noble moral philosophy in the Mennonite mode. Heatwole worked to awaken the forces of goodness, moral persuasion, truth, knowledge, and beauty. Knappenberger has ably defended his thesis, stating that earlier historians mostly overlooked L. J. Heatwole's seminal vision for the school.

Need for a New Biography

Through my research on Heatwole, and upon studying Knappenberger's thesis, I believe it's time for a new biography about Bishop L. J. Heatwole. A new biography, bolstered by thorough and scholarly research, as Knappenberger has conducted, would help set the record straight as to the primary importance of Lewis J. Heatwole in the founding of Eastern Mennonite School.

Read a Copy

Print copies of Evan Knappenberger's thesis are available at the Brethren and Mennonite Heritage Center, Harrisonburg, Va, and in many libraries. You can read Knappenberger's thesis online through the EMU library website, by navigating to <https://emu.edu/library/>, then search for "To Shake the Whole World," and click on the "online" link.

6. Knappenberger, 90.

7. Knappenberger, 95.

8. L. J. Heatwole, *Moral Training in the Public Schools: a Treatise Designed for Teachers, School Officials and All Patrons and Pupils of the Public Schools* (Scottsdale, PA: Published by Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 1908).

9. Knappenberger, "To Shake the Whole World," 104.

Fire at Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church

by Elwood Yoder

Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church caught fire and burned to the ground in the early morning hours of Friday, April 14, 1989. It was likely an electrical problem near the water heater or the furnace that caused the fire. Soon after the fire began, neighbors spotted the fire at approximately 1:00 AM. The fire company arrived shortly, but they were unable to save the building.

In an era before cell phones, it took some hours for news to circulate to church members. Norman Shank, chair of the Trustees, learned of the fire and called Pastor Paul Kratz. Both men hurried to the scene of the fire, about five miles west of Harrisonburg, Va.

When Math Professor Wilmer Lehman got a call at 5:45 AM on April 14, 1989, he heard the news that the church had burned. He and his wife, Mary Louise, quickly ate breakfast and went to see. Wilmer took a few photos but then had to leave to teach classes at Eastern Mennonite College. Earlier, Wilmer had served as pastor at Mt. Clinton Mennonite, and the fire took away a place that helped point him toward God. Through faith, Wilmer began, like many other members of the church, to seek another pointer.¹

The building that burned had been the first brick Mennonite meetinghouse in the Shenandoah Valley, constructed in 1916. It had Sunday school rooms and an indoor balcony. Mt. Clinton had been established in 1874,

as a part of the Middle District of Virginia Conference.

Two days after the fire, the congregation met for worship in lawn and folding chairs on the grounds beside the burned out shell. While Pastor Paul Kratz spoke, the north gable collapsed. Though they had many invitations as to where there could meet while they rebuilt, the congregation gathered for the next year at the Mt. Clinton Elementary School. The cost to rebuild was approximately \$500,000, with many donations from individuals, churches, and agencies. The first service in the new meetinghouse took place about a year after the fire, April 1990.



Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church building, 1916-1989. A fire destroyed the structure April 14, 1989. Photos of the church today are on the front and back of this issue.

VMC Archives photo below; Wilmer Lehman photo above



1. Paul L Kratz, "God Was There: The Story of the Mount Clinton Mennonite Church Fire and Rebuilding." A notebook of articles, clippings, and information (Harrisonburg: Virginia, 2018).

Brethren Mill Owner Bought And Freed Slaves

by Harvey Yoder

Myron Augsburger recently told me about an ancestor of his, Daniel L. Bowman, who was reputed to have purchased African-American slaves prior to the Civil War in order to free them.

My frequent attempts to verify this from written sources were unsuccessful until yesterday, when a retired pastor friend, Paul Roth, sent me a link to a Church of the Brethren history site that included the following statement:

“Family traditions tell that Daniel Bowman, prior to the Civil War, would purchase slaves and free them. Once freed, the slaves would work in his mill and on his farm. At the present, evidence seems to support the tradition. There were free blacks living near the Mill in pre-Civil War censuses.”

I’m not sure how unusual it was to have a respected citizen of a slave holding state like Virginia dare do this, but I’m sure it must have been considered scandalous by many of his neighbors. And like most Valley Brethren and Mennonites, Bowman was also adamantly opposed to war and to all forms of sedition or violence, an equally unpopular position as the clamor for secession grew to a fever pitch.

For example:

“Daniel Bowman absolutely refused to give any aid or support to the cause of the Rebellion or to contribute anything to the Southern cause unless compelled to by military force, except when a lone soldier would call at his door for something to eat; he gave alike to the northern or southern soldier.”

Bowman is an example of someone who was clearly ahead of his time, and who dared live out his convictions in spite of the cost.



Editor’s Note: Harvey Yoder published this essay in February 2019, at his blog, <https://harvyoder.blogspot.com/2019/02/brethren-mill-owner-bought-and-freed.html>

Harvey’s photo caption at his blog reads: “Bowman and business partner Frederick Miller were the third owners of what became known as Bowman’s Mill, rebuilt after the Civil War as the Silver Lake Mill near Dayton.”

Silver Lake Mill, Dayton, Va., photo above, by the Editor, 2016.

Rhodes Family Cemetery

by Elwood Yoder

On a foggy and snowy Saturday morning in March 2019, Robbie Rhodes arranged for a visit to the Rhodes Family Cemetery, Broadway, Va. On the Shank farm at the intersection of Harpine Highway (Route 42) and Trissels Church Road, Rhodes took the Editor and two others through a field to visit the early 19th-century cemetery.

Robbie Rhodes is a fifth-generation descendant of Bishop Henry and Elizabeth Rhodes. Some years ago, Robbie and others worked to restore the old cemetery, and they built a wrought iron fence to keep farm animals out.

The Editor asked Robbie Rhodes to plan for the cemetery visit. In working on a history book about Trissels Mennonite Church, the Editor has come to appreciate the lives of Bishop Henry and Elizabeth Rhodes and wanted to pay respects at their tombstones. Lord willing, you will read details about Bishop Henry and Elizabeth Rhodes and their family, in a forthcoming bicentennial history book about Trissels Church.

There are seventeen grave markers in the Rhodes Cemetery, the first from 1808. Not all the stones are legible. Most are from the Rhodes family, though there are three other family names: Brenneman, Acker, and Funk. The Funk stone is for Elizabeth Rhodes Funk (1784-1814), daughter of Bishop Henry and Elizabeth Rhodes, and first wife to musician Joseph Funk. Joseph and Elizabeth Funk had five children together before she passed away at age twenty-nine.

The Rhodes Family Cemetery dates to the early 1800s, about the same time as the formation of the nearby Trissels Church

cemetery. The Rhodes cemetery is perched high on a hill above the Linville Creek, about two miles from the Trissels Mennonite Church, where the Rhodes family attended in the early 19th century.

Andrea Early, a descendant of Henry and Elizabeth Rhodes, and Evan K. Knappenberger, a researcher of Virginia Mennonite history, went along for the visit. Many thanks to Robbie Rhodes for showing us the cemetery!



Robbie Rhodes (left) showed the Editor and Evan K. Knappenberger (right) the Rhodes Family Cemetery, Broadway, Va., March 9, 2019. The men are standing by the grave markers of Bishop Henry and Elizabeth Rhodes. Below, with a “Rhodes Cemetery” sign on the fence, Andrea Early, stands between Rhodes and

Knappenberger.

Photos by Editor





Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church, in rural Rockingham County, Virginia, about five miles west of Harrisonburg. When the Editor took this photo on March 15, 2019, he met several local people who had witnessed the former Mt. Clinton meetinghouse burn thirty years ago, in the early morning hours of Friday, April 14, 1989. The first service in this building took place a year after the fire, April, 1990. Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church is a member of the Virginia Mennonite Conference.

The *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* is published quarterly by the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, established in 1993.

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

Shenandoah Mennonite Historian issues from 2004-2018 can be found at mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net. This site includes a link to over 1,340 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.