



# Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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## Research about the Past to Inform and Inspire the Present

In this issue, find a well-researched article about the former Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church in Augusta County, Virginia. This past winter, I met Clint W. Coakley in the Menno Simons Historical Library, Harrisonburg, where he and I were doing our own research. I'm happy to receive and print the results of his work, with new details in his article.

Also, find an article from Stuart Showalter, who writes about the Rhodes family heritage in the Shenandoah Valley.

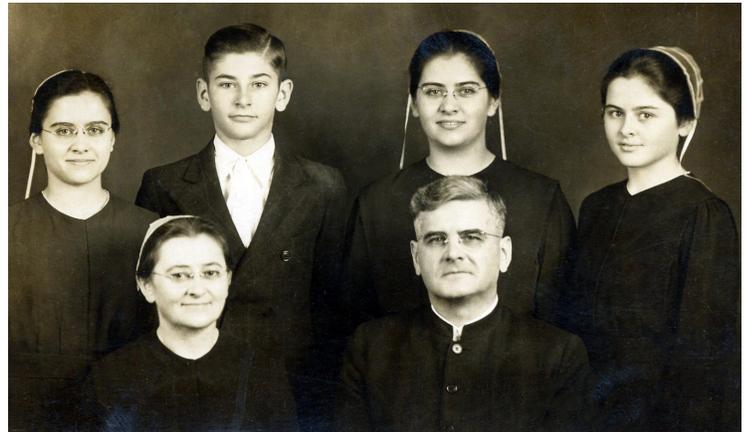
The last story in this issue, about John F. and Katie (Brunk) Shank, surprised me in my winter research. Not until recently did I stop and notice John and Katie Shank's gravestone in the Zion Mennonite Church cemetery, Broadway, Va., where my wife and I have attended for over thirty years. I hope you enjoy reading their story.

The ninth-century hymn lyrics to "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" inspired me on Palm Sunday. May we give glory and honor to our Redeemer and King.

*Elwood Yoder, Editor*

**Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church, Augusta County, Virginia, established 1870 (above).**

Photo by Clint W. Coakley in December 2022



Myra and Chester K. Lehman family, 1940s. Back row from left, Miriam, Robert, Esther, and Dorothy Lehman.

Photo from James Rush collection

James Rush is our *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* Secretary who handles subscription records. Contact him by phone, e-mail, or letter about your subscription, with contact information on the back of this issue. Thank you!

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## Brunk Family Apology

News Item

Submitted by Kathleen Weaver Kurtz

On December 15, 2022, the five children of George R. Brunk II family—Gerald R. Brunk, George R. Brunk III, Paul W. Brunk, Conrad G. Brunk, and Barbara Brunk Gascho (who are also grandchildren of George R. Brunk I)—wrote an official letter of apology to the family of Chester K. and Myra K. Lehman and to “All Persons Similarly Affected by the Banning of Musical Instruments in Virginia Mennonite Conference.”

The apology refers to the Virginia Mennonite Conference piano ban from the late 1920s to 1947, primarily at the insistence of both George R. Brunk I and II. The children of George R. Brunk II offered their “sincere apology for the actions of [their] forefathers in this sad history and expressed “deepest sorrow and regret” for the harm caused by the banning of musical instruments within the homes of ministers in the Virginia Mennonite Conference, as well as faculty members at Eastern Mennonite College [now University].

Brunk family members stated their wish for their letter of apology to be a public expression of their sentiments. It was sent to Kathleen Weaver Kurtz, Carol Ann Weaver, Dorothy Jean Weaver (the three daughters of the late Miriam L. Weaver, eldest in the Lehman family) and to Dorothy Lehman Yoder, youngest and only living daughter of Chester K. and Myra Lehman.

When the ban came into effect, Chester K. Lehman was both a minister and a professor at EMC. This meant that his family’s piano

had to be removed, an event that deeply impacted Miriam Lehman Weaver, who was just learning to play, and the event that became the first memory of her youngest sister, Dorothy Lehman Yoder. To learn more about the impact of this ban, go to <https://emu.edu/news/2018/02/lehman-family-piano-shared-love-music-transcended-rules/> Also, you can read a summary article about the impact of the musical instrument restriction in the Virginia Mennonite Conference and the Brunk’s apology at Anabaptist World, <https://anabaptistworld.org/one-generations-discord-anothers-harmony/>

The apology was gratefully received and accepted by members of the Chester K. and Myra K. Lehman family.



## The Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church, Augusta County, Va.

By Clint W. Coakley, Hyde Park, Vermont

### *Lesser-known church gives evidence of former Mennonite activity in northern Augusta County*

The Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church was a church in the Upper District of the Virginia Mennonite Conference in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The meetinghouse, which is still standing, though in a state of severe neglect, was constructed in 1870 on land donated by Jacob W. and Elizabeth Harshbarger.<sup>1</sup> After the Hildebrand Church (built in 1825), Mount Pleasant was the second church house constructed by Mennonites in the Upper District (later Southern

1. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia: 1727-1900*, vol. 1 (Harrisonburg, Virginia: H.A. Brunk, 1959), 394.

District).<sup>2</sup> It is the oldest church house in Virginia that was constructed as a (non-union) Mennonite church and is still standing.<sup>3</sup>

The Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church in Augusta County is not to be confused with two other churches with the same name. A Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church was established in Fentress, Virginia, (now part of the city of Chesapeake) in the early twentieth century. The Weaverland Conference established a Rockingham County church named Mt. Pleasant in the mid-twentieth century. The remainder of this article deals only with the Mount Pleasant church in Augusta County.

The Mount Pleasant meetinghouse can be seen at 854 Salem Church Road, Mt. Sidney Va., 24467. This is approximately 0.5 mile south of the intersection of Roman Road and Salem Church Road in the North River magisterial district of Augusta County. Two large and stately trees stand between the church and the road. They are large enough that they may have been there when the church was built in 1870.

### *Building Features*

The Mount Pleasant meetinghouse has some features which, when considered together, help to identify it as a Mennonite meetinghouse of the period. Most obviously, from the outside, the building has two doors. This was typical of nineteenth century Mennonite meetinghouses because the Mennonites practiced segregated seating.<sup>4</sup> Inside the building, there

are no rooms for Sunday school classes, because in 1870, Sunday school had not become established in the Mennonite churches.<sup>5</sup> The Virginia Mennonites were slower than their neighboring church groups in this respect. The interior of the Mount Pleasant meetinghouse has no provisions for lighting, whether by electricity or by candles. This is consistent with the Mennonite practice of not holding evening services in the 1870s.

The building was obviously a simple structure without ornamentation even at the time of its construction. There was no steeple or church bell, no cross at the front of the sanctuary, and no stained glass in the windows. However, the 36" high wooden wainscot along the walls, while not elaborate, suggests that the builders had an interest in making the interior both functional and attractive.

Inside, there were two small wooden bars affixed to the walls, one at the front of the building on the left side and one at the back of the building on the right side. They were obviously intended to be a hat rack for the men and a bonnet rack for the women. The bar on the left still has plain nails, rather than decorative hooks, protruding from it. The bar at the front is on the left side of the building, strongly suggesting that the men sat on the left side of the room and the women sat on the right side, where their bonnet rack was located just inside the door on the right side. The fact that this hat rack was on the front wall and only had enough nails for about six hats suggests that it may have been only the ordained

2. The Springdale meetinghouse was not constructed until 1885 or 1886. In 1870, the Springdale congregation was meeting in Kendig's Chapel, which had been renovated from a schoolhouse in the 1830s (Brunk, 1959, pp. 147, 401).

3. The Hamburg Church (earlier known as the Mill Creek Church and Mauck Meetinghouse) in Page County was constructed sometime before 1800 and is still standing, but it was a union church built jointly by Mennonites, Primitive Baptists, and perhaps other church groups. The older Virginia Mennonite church houses at Trissels (1822), Pike (1825), Hildebrand (1825), Brennemans (1826), Weavers (1827), and Bank (1849) were all replaced by newer buildings at least once at each location since 1870.

4. Segregated seating, the practice of men and women sitting on separate sides of the sanctuary or auditorium, is still observed by many Old Order and conservative Mennonite groups.

5. A few Sunday schools were held at the Bank, Weavers, and Brennemans churches in 1870 and 1871, but they were discontinued due to opposition and were not resumed until 1882 or later.

men who used it. The routed grooves in the top and bottom edges of these hat and bonnet racks are perhaps the most impressive details of the carpentry in the building.

The pulpit, a narrow short wall measuring 10' long, 8" wide, and 55" higher than the floor, is still standing at the front of the meeting room.<sup>6</sup> From behind this pulpit, the ministers would stand on a raised platform to address the congregation. This platform was about 20" higher than the main floor and was accessed by three steps (still present) on either side of it. Raised platforms were common in the Virginia Mennonite church buildings, even though they were not accepted in the Pennsylvania Mennonite churches.<sup>7</sup> Without doubt this pulpit also served as a place where the speaker could read from the Bible or set a hymn book, since Mennonite churches of that era had no speaker's stand nor podium. On the side toward the worshippers, the pulpit is covered by wide tongue-and-groove boards of varying widths (approximately 14" wide), placed vertically and nailed onto the pulpit. On the side toward the preachers, the pulpit is covered by tongue-and-groove boards of varying widths (approximately 12" wide), placed horizontally and nailed to the pulpit. A four-foot space separates the pulpit from the front wall of the church. It is possible that a short bench was kept on the platform where the ordained men who were to have part in the service could sit during the meeting. If so, the preacher would not have had much room to move around while addressing the worshippers. This would have been manageable, because preachers in the (Old) Mennonite

Church generally were not known to be fiery emotional preachers.

With a twelve-foot-high ceiling, plaster on the walls, and a small room size,<sup>8</sup> the acoustics for the building must have been excellent for the traditional Mennonite a capella singing of that era.

One item that is noticeably absent from the building is a chimney. There are also no holes in the walls where a stove pipe would have been placed. In summary, there is no evidence of any method of heating the room. Perhaps there was a non-vented stove that was used to heat the building. Brunk refers to "the old heating stove" being seen in the building as late as 1960.<sup>9</sup>

Another part of most early Mennonite church buildings that is missing at Mount Pleasant is a small room where the ministers could meet prior to the service to assign the various roles in the worship service. The ministers may have met outside the church house to plan the meetings or they may not have had a formal meeting prior to the service. Since Mount Pleasant was not located in an area with a high concentration of Mennonites, it is likely that only a few (perhaps two) ordained men were present at a time and so it would have been known in advance who was responsible for the various parts of the service.

### *History of Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church*

According to L. J. Heatwole, the first Mennonite families to settle in the area where the Mount Pleasant church was built were the

6. At the present time, it appears that a cap board is missing from the pulpit. When present, the cap would add approximately 1" to the height measurement.

7. Many Old Order Mennonite churches in Pennsylvania, as well as the Weaverland Conference churches in Virginia, still have no raised platform for the speaker.

8. The inside dimensions of the room are 32' x 35½'.

9. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia: 1900-1960*, vol. 2 (Verona, Va.: McClure Printing, 1972), 231-232.

Landises, Showalters, Harshbargers, and Sanplays.<sup>10</sup> The latter name does not seem to occur frequently in Mennonite church history. However, Harry A. Brunk lists the following names of Mennonite families who were populating the northern part of Augusta County by the end of the Civil War: Landes, Harshbarger, Grove, Moore, Wenger, Fultz, Money maker, Showalter, and Saufley.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps Sanpley and Saufley are two different spellings of the same name; another possibility is that one of them was misread from a handwritten document.

The Mount Pleasant church house was constructed in 1870 and was dedicated on Sunday, October 16, 1870. The dedication service was conducted by John Evers (Middle District preacher) and Jacob Hildebrand (Upper District bishop).<sup>12</sup> Early leaders in the Mount Pleasant congregation included Deacon Jacob Landis (ordained in 1863) and Preacher Joseph S. Harshbarger (ordained in 1887), both of whom lived near the church house.

During the late nineteenth century, the Mount Pleasant church was generally used for services on the second Sunday of each month. It was supported by preachers from both the Middle District and the Upper District,<sup>13</sup> likely due to its proximity to the Middle District churches (11 to 19 miles away from Pike, Weavers, Bank, and Mt. Clinton) and its distance from the other Upper District churches (Hildebrand, 14 miles away, and Kendig's/Springdale, about 25 miles away). Another Upper District church house, Union Chapel, built near Weyers Cave in 1883, was only eight miles from the Mount Pleasant church building. It was shared with the United

Brethren.

At least two sessions of the Virginia Mennonite Conference were held at Mount Pleasant. The minutes of the Virginia Mennonite Conference record only one conference at Mount Pleasant (September 1874).<sup>14</sup> However, three small handwritten papers from the papers of Lower District Deacon Jacob Geil in the Virginia Mennonite Conference archives<sup>15</sup> show that the conference in the fall of 1871 was also held at Mount Pleasant. This conference was held on Friday and Saturday, September 29-30, 1871, just one year after the building was completed.

By 1875, the "Church at Winchester" (i.e. Kernstown) had a deacon (Daniel Mellinger) and a "house of worship."<sup>16</sup> Apparently, there had been a recent conflict in the times for communion held by the three bishops (John Geil, Samuel Coffman, and Jacob Hildebrand). This was discussed at the 1871 conference at Mount Pleasant and the bishops were encouraged to communicate their plans for communion services so as not to conflict with one another.

Mount Pleasant was likely chosen as the location for this 1871 conference because it was a new building in the Upper District whose turn it was to host the conference. It seemed to be a common practice among the Virginia Mennonites to have a church with a new building host the conference soon after the building was completed. The Pike congregation built a new meetinghouse in 1878 and hosted the Virginia Conference in 1882. It is quite possible that the conference in the fall of 1879 was also held at the Pike

10. Heatwole, L. J. (1905), "The Virginia Conference," in Hartzler, J.S. and Kauffman, Daniel, *Mennonite Church History*, Scottdale PA: Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 223.

11. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia 1727-1900*, vol. 1 (Harrisonburg, Virginia: H.A. Brunk, 1959), 394.

12. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia 1727-1900*, vol. 1 (Harrisonburg, Virginia: H.A. Brunk, 1959), 396.

13. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, vol. 1, 396-397.

14. Brunk also states that one conference was held at Mount Pleasant, vol. 1, 184.

15. The Virginia Mennonite Conference archives associated with the Menno Simons Historical Library, Harrisonburg Va..

16. Brunk (1959), 433-434. Also Heatwole (1905), 223.

church, when the new building there was only one year old.<sup>17</sup> That would have fit the pattern of other conferences around that time, since it was the normal time for the Middle District to host the conference and Weavers had hosted it in the spring of 1878. From the 1870s through the 1890s, Weavers hosted the spring conference every three years except for 1881 when Weavers was in the process of constructing a new building. The new church wasn't ready in time for the spring 1881 conference, so the Bank church hosted that one.<sup>18</sup> The Springdale meetinghouse, built in 1885 or 1886, was the site of the Virginia Conference in 1886. The Zion congregation was established with a new building in 1885 and hosted the Virginia Mennonite Conference for the Lower District in 1887.

The Virginia Mennonite Conference was also held at Mount Pleasant on Friday and Saturday, September 25-26, 1874.<sup>19</sup> This was probably the only other time that the Virginia Mennonite conference was held there. This conference warned members against participation in worldly activities such as circus shows, reaffirmed the Mennonite Church position of close communion (reserved for members in good standing), gave ministers the privilege to vote at church councils and to officiate at weddings and communions when the bishop could not be present, and made "the usual devotional exercises" of conference a public affair. The last decision was reversed at the spring conference in 1875.

Attendance at the two conferences held at Mount Pleasant was typical for the early 1870s. Twenty-three ordained men attended the 1871 conference (more than any prior

conference except the April 1871 conference at Brennemens, which had twenty-four attendees) while twenty were present in 1874.

### *The Cemetery at Mount Pleasant*

Behind the Mount Pleasant church building, there is a small cemetery (about 28' x 48') containing at least a dozen graves, mostly from the Harshbarger and Landes families. Some of the tombstones are readable, some are difficult or impossible to read, and some are nothing more than rough unmarked stones protruding about six inches above the ground. One of the graves is that of Joseph Harshbarger, who died November 27, 1867. This suggests that there was a family cemetery at this location before the church was built there. This cemetery is sometimes known as Seawright Spring Mennonite Cemetery.<sup>20</sup> There is also a Landes family cemetery near the intersection of Fadley Road and Coffman Road, less than two miles from the Mount Pleasant church.

### *The Decline of Mount Pleasant Church*

The Mount Pleasant church was "a prosperous congregation" in the 1880s and 1890s, but the "Middle District Trouble" affected the congregation in a negative way and initiated a period of decline that continued until the meetinghouse was abandoned by the Virginia Conference Mennonites.<sup>21</sup> Preacher Joseph S. Harshbarger (son of Jacob W. Harshbarger and grandson of the Joseph Harshbarger who died in 1867) "sympathized" with the Old Order group that formed in

17. The book, *Minutes of the Virginia Mennonite Conference*, states that there are no records for the September 1879 conference (p. 17).

18. Elwood E. Yoder, *How Firm a Foundation, A History of Weavers Mennonite Church*, 2015, 64-67.

19. *Minutes of the Virginia Mennonite Conference*, 1939, 14.

20. Jenny Snyder, "Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church," *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* 26, no. 1, (Winter 2018), 5-6.

21. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia 1727-1900*, vol. 1, 406.

1901 and this likely led to strife in the Mount Pleasant congregation.<sup>22</sup> Membership was reported as only five members in 1905<sup>23</sup> and three members in 1934.<sup>24</sup> According to Brunk, services were discontinued in the late 1940s.<sup>25</sup>

An interesting note about the last years of activity for Mount Pleasant involves the Old Order (horse-and-buggy) Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley. According to several members of the Beery family, the Old Order group held some services in the building at Mount Pleasant during the 1940s because of the presence of some Landes families who lived in the vicinity. The pattern they followed was to travel by horse and buggy from the Dayton area to Mount Pleasant (a journey of about 10 to 14 miles) for a worship service on Sunday morning, then go to Seawright Springs, about one mile southwest of the church, to eat a picnic lunch and give their horses water before returning to the Dayton area in the afternoon.<sup>26</sup>

The Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church is an example of a church that grew to meet the needs of a Mennonite settlement outside of the areas with highest concentrations of Mennonites. The church was an integral part of Virginia Mennonite life during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. As community dynamics changed and the Mennonite population in that area dwindled, the meetinghouse was eventually abandoned. The fact that the building is still standing despite its neglect is a testimony to the workmanship employed in its construction.

The features of the building that can still be observed give insight into the worship

practices of the Virginia Mennonite church in the last half of the nineteenth century. Is it possible that this building could yet be restored to its former condition? Although the Mennonite population in that part of northern Augusta declined, today there is once again a Mennonite church in that area. The Bridgewater Mennonite Church,<sup>27</sup> located in Augusta County at 2551 Fadley Road, Bridgewater Virginia, sits less than five miles from the old Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church.

### ***Mount Pleasant Statistics***<sup>28</sup>

*Lot size:* approximately 75' wide and 150' long

*Building dimensions:* outside: 34' wide x 38' long ("about 30 ft. wide and 40 ft. long" according to Brunk, 1959, p. 396).

*Building height at sides:* 12'6" wall height (not including the part of the foundation that is above grade, which ranges from 0" at the south corner to about 24" at the north corner).

*Building height at peak:* approximately 25'0"

*Meeting room dimensions (inside):* 32'0" wide; 35'6" long; 12'0" high from floor to ceiling.

### Acknowledgements

The author thanks Rachel S. Coakley and Gregory P. Lehman for assistance obtaining measurements and Elwood E. Yoder for encouragement and for pointing out Jenny Snyder's 2018 article about Mount Pleasant in the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*, and Simone Horst of the Menno Simons Historical Library for assistance in locating source materials for this article.

22. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, vol. 1, 419.

23. Jonas S. Hartzler and Daniel Kauffman, *Mennonite Church History* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 1905), 223.

24. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia: 1900-1960*, vol. 2 (Verona, Va.: McClure Printing, 1972), 259.

25. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, vol. 2, 259.

26. Personal communication from Joseph G. Beery, Neil Beery, and Dwight Beery to the author on December 31, 2022.

27. Bridgewater Mennonite Church is part of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church.

28. All figures were obtained by direct measurement by the author on 13 Dec. and 26 Dec. 2022.

## Rhodes Family Revisited

By Stuart Wesley Showalter

Recent church histories have detailed the lives of early leaders of the Virginia Mennonite congregations, frequently referencing the research of Grace Showalter, who in 1980 examined the Rhodes families who migrated from Pennsylvania to Virginia.<sup>1</sup> Bishop Henry Rhodes (Heinrich Roth) settled in Rockingham County in 1784, and four siblings followed, creating the roots for a broad Rhodes family tree. Showalter noted, “Few... are conscious of the interwoven tangle of family relationships that produced the large numbers of Rhodes descendants among the Valley Mennonites, whatever their present surnames.”<sup>2</sup>

Frederick Rhodes, Henry’s youngest brother, played an inadvertent role in an early Virginia Mennonite church controversy. His preaching style incorporated evangelical language, and his revivalist methods contributed to a growing division between conservative members who advocated remaining in homes for worship rather than building meetinghouses. Both Henry and Frederick Rhodes favored the construction of meetinghouses, and in 1822 the Trissels meetinghouse was the first one constructed in Virginia. Their view was deemed the more progressive one. By 1830 this schism was resolved by the intervention of church leaders from Pennsylvania who mediated an agreement to continue with the building of meetinghouses in Virginia.<sup>3</sup>

Almost a century later, members of the Rhodes family played a leading role in another

division within the Middle District of the Virginia Mennonite Conference. In this case, descendants of Frederick Rhodes (1769-1847) were considered conservatives, opposing, among other practices, the introduction of evangelistic meetings and Sunday schools. Frederick’s grandson Frederick Anthony Rhodes (1816-1900) and great-grandson Reuben Swope Rhodes (1858-1935) were leaders in a movement in the 1890s that led to the creation of the Old Order Mennonite Church southwest of Harrisonburg. The Pleasant View meetinghouse was built in 1902, and Oak Grove was built in 1923. Both Frederick Anthony Rhodes and his son Reuben were deacons in the church. Reuben’s primary responsibilities included visiting the sick and those with special needs.

Reuben had double ties to his Mennonite heritage because his grandmother, Elizabeth H. Showalter Rhodes (1800-1883), was a granddaughter to two pioneer settlers in the Shenandoah Valley, Daniel Showalter (1738-1822) and Henry Rhodes (1748-1827).<sup>4</sup> He was born May 26, 1858 just three years before the Civil War started. He was the youngest son of eight children. At the age of twenty, he married his second cousin once removed, Mary Magdalene “Maggie” Rhodes (1859-1919). She would give birth to her first child at age twenty. In the span of twenty-three years, they had twelve children.

- Raleigh DeWitt Rhodes, 1880 - 1964
- Emmer Frederick Rhodes, 1881 - 1966
- Lewis Johnson Rhodes, 1883 - 1960
- Elsie Viola Rhodes Hurst, 1885 – 1954
- Annie Magdalene Rhodes Lahman, 1888 – 1952

1. Grace Showalter, “The Virginia Mennonite Rhodes Families,” *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*, April 1980, 15-22.

2. Grace Showalter, “The Virginia Mennonite Rhodes Families,” *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*, April 1980, 15.

3. Elwood E. Yoder, *Under the Oaks: A History of Trissels Mennonite Church*, 2022, 19-20.

4. Stuart Wesley Showalter, *Parents, Grandparents, and Great Grandparents of Stuart Wesley Showalter*, 2022, 54.

- Webster Clay Rhodes, 1890 – 1972
- Ida Bell Rhodes Landes, 1892 - 1964
- Paul Timothy Rhodes, 1894 – 1950
- Nettie Ellen Rhodes Wenger, 1897 – 1978
- Peter Reuben Rhodes, 1899 – 1958
- John H. Rhodes, 1901 - 1946
- Mary Frances Rhodes Wenger, 1903 – 1993



The twelve children of Reuben S. Rhodes and Mary “Maggie” Rhodes pose about 1906. Webster is standing in the back row, second boy from the right.

Photo from Stuart Wesley Showalter

Mary “Maggie” Rhodes Rhodes’ major legacy would also include seventy-one grandchildren. After his wife had died in 1919, Reuben traveled to Canada with John Dan Wenger in 1921. According to his daughter Mary Rhodes Wenger, he felt snubbed because he couldn’t read German and wasn’t allowed to read the scriptures before the sermon in English. Reuben married again in 1930 to Margaret Elizabeth Heatwole Heller (1863-1935), who was his first cousin. They both died in 1935, she in June and he on October

1. A double funeral was held at the Pleasant View Mennonite Church, which he had helped to found, for him and his indigent brother, William P. Rhodes of Hopewell, Va.; they died ten hours apart.

Reuben and Maggie Rhodes’ son, Webster Clay “Web” Rhodes (1890-1972), was a life-long member of the Old Order Mennonite Church. He and his wife Sarah Mabel

Showalter (1891-1969) grew up attending Pleasant View Mennonite. They were married by John Dan Wenger on February 24, 1914 and first lived together with Sarah Mabel’s parents, Daniel Pennybaker (1851-1938) and Hettie Esther Rohrer Showalter (1853-1944). Web registered for the WWI draft in June of 1917, but he was not called to service. After living in Ohio for several years, they returned to a farm on Harness Shop Road near Dayton, Virginia, which is still owned by a Rhodes

grandson today.

Webster Clay and Sarah Rhodes were parents to a large family, nine sons and four daughters. Two sons died before they were one year old. Sarah developed Bright’s Disease and it was passed to her son Frank through her breast milk when he was six months old. Daniel died from whooping cough and measles when he was ten months old.

- Mark Showalter Rhodes, Dec. 28, 1914

- May 18, 2008
- Harry Wayne Rhodes, June 6, 1916 – April 9, 2003
- Frank Webster Rhodes, March 21, 1918 – Sept. 17, 1918
- Eber Ancil Rhodes, July 18, 1919 – Nov. 30, 2009
- Edith Virginia Rhodes Showalter, Feb. 25, 1921 – Aug. 31, 2008
- Daniel Rohrer Showalter, July 28, 1923 – May 23, 1924
- Rueben Swope Rhodes, Dec. 11, 1924 – Oct. 20, 2016
- Luke Clement Rhodes, Oct. 11, 1926 – May 23, 2016
- Esther Magdalene Rhodes Rohrer, July 6, 1928 – June 22, 2020
- John Clay Rhodes, Aug. 30, 1930 –
- Ida Rosaline Rhodes Rohrer, March 29, 1932 – Dec. 2, 2015
- Cornelius Anthony Rhodes, Nov. 29, 1933 – March 6, 2013
- Norma Ruth Rhodes Koogler, April 11, 1937 –

His grandson, Stuart Wesley Showalter, writes that Webster was “friendly, non-judgmental, and an engaging conversationalist.” Quotes from Webster which follow were taken from *Pantry Gems II*, a family Rhodes recipe book. “I am fond of a pie-ous house.” Sometimes Webster would be overheard talking to himself. When asked to whom he was talking, he replied, “I like to talk to a smart man now and then.” Sarah Mabel, his wife, was called “a tireless worker.” She is remembered for sharing with others in need. She was quoted as saying, “Do all the good you can in all the ways you can to all the people you can just as long as you can.”

Webster and Sarah Mabel were married for almost 55 years. She died in 1969 from congestive heart failure; Webster would die three years later following a stroke. Their descendants included seventy-three grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren as of 1969. Webster and Sarah Rhodes are buried in the Pleasant View cemetery as are his parents, Reuben and Mary Maggie” Rhodes Rhodes.<sup>5</sup> The branches of the Rhodes family tree have spread throughout the Mennonite community in numbers that would not surprise Grace Showalter these thirty-three years since her death.

Genealogy of Stuart Wesley Showalter  
 Anthony Roth- 1729-1785  
 Frederick Rhodes- 1769-1847  
 Anthony Rhodes- 1795-1863  
 Frederick Anthony Rhodes- 1819-1900  
 Reuben Swope Rhodes- 1858-1935  
 Webster Clay Rhodes- 1890-1972  
 Edith Virginia Rhodes- 1921-2008  
 Stuart Wesley Showalter- 1948-



Pleasant View Old Order Mennonite Church,  
 Dayton, Va.

Photo from Eunice Showalter

5. Stuart Wesley Showalter, *Parents, Grandparents, and Great Grandparents of Stuart Wesley Showalter*, 2022, 46-53.

## John F. and Katie (Brunk) Shank

By Elwood E. Yoder

In 1959, Katie Brunk Shank and her husband, John F. Shank, moved to Kingston, Jamaica. They served in the Red Hills region as Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions missionaries for a dozen years. Katie, a biological sister to Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus and George R. Brunk II, graduated from Eastern Mennonite College in 1953, and then she and John worked in PAX service for a year in Germany. Katie and John Shank served as a pastoral couple for eight years at Buckhorn Mennonite Church, Hardy County, West Virginia, twenty-eight miles north of their farm in Broadway, Virginia. John was a son of Perry E. and Katie Shank.

The Shanks were active in mission, visiting Sicily with Katie's biological brother, Bishop Truman H. Brunk Sr., and Lewis S. Martin. During their 1955 visit to Palermo, Truman baptized fourteen into the Italian Mennonite Church. John F. Shank served for several years in the fifties as VMBM Vice-President. In Jamaica, Katie helped lead Peggy Memorial Home for Girls, while Katie and John administered *Way to Life* correspondence courses.<sup>1</sup> In 1960, Katie and John, members at Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Virginia, completed their Master's degrees from Madison College in Harrisonburg. Katie wrote a thesis for her M.A. in Education about the many religious groups in Jamaica.<sup>2</sup> John wrote a thesis about ecological conditions in Jamaica for his M.A. in Education.<sup>3</sup> The Shanks are buried in the Zion Church cemetery.



**John F. Shank (1911-1985) and Katie Brunk Shank (1913-2005) served in mission during the 1960s and '70s at the Peggy Memorial Home for Girls, Jamaica (photo on right).** Photos from Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives

1. Gail L. Emerson, "Katie Florence (Brunk) Shank," *The Sword and Trumpet*, September 2005, 1. "Way to Life" was the international English version of "The Mennonite Hour."
2. Shank, Katie Florence. *A Comparison of Religious Groupings and Other Social Phenomena in Kingston, Jamaica, the West Indies*. Harrisonburg, Va.: Madison College, 1960.
3. Shank, John F. *An Ecological Study of the City of Kingston, Jamaica, the West Indies*. Harrisonburg, Va.: Madison College, 1960.



The North Fork Mennonite Church, Petersburg, West Virginia, in Grant County, is located about 71 miles northwest of Harrisonburg, Va. North Fork Mennonite Church began in a nearby schoolhouse in 1932, with a meetinghouse built in 1948, a part of the Middle District of Virginia Conference. In 1972, North Fork Church joined the Southeastern Mennonite Conference. The ministerial team includes Bishops Ken Martin and Fred W. Miller, Minister David W. Miller, and Deacon Laurel L. Eby. Membership in 2021 was 26. On a trip to North Fork in March 2022, a friendly man at Sheetz in Petersburg overheard the Editor ask for directions to the church, and immediately led the lost Harrisonburg visitor to the building. Photo by Editor

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