



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

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History in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia

Folks in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia care deeply about their history. With regular Harmonia Sacra singings, churches that write their history, and support for this *Historian*, Mennonites and Brethren are profoundly interested in the past and how that informs the present.

Two days before a lecture about Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole, June 9, 2022, Joyce Blosser Showalter called the Editor. Joyce, a *Historian* subscriber, wondered if I had a copy of *Key to the Almanac and Sidereal Heavens* by L. J. Heatwole. No, I did not have a copy and had never read the bishop's 1908 book, published by Mennonite Publishing House. Joyce gave me her book, which appears to be from the first edition. Joyce thinks the book was passed down from her parents, Michael and Fannie Blosser, from the Middle District in Virginia Conference. Thanks, Joyce!

Please mark Saturday, November 19, 6:00 p.m., and come to the Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, to hear Dr. John Roth speak about Anabaptism at 500 years. This lecture is sponsored by the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians.



Trissels Mennonite Church held a singing school reenactment at their meetinghouse in Broadway, Va., on May 1, 2022. Andrea Early led members of the Harmonia Sacra Society in demonstrating a nineteenth-century singing school to a full sanctuary. From left, Philip J. Yoder, Dr. Nancy Heisey, Dr. Carmen Rexrode, Evan Knappenberger, Dr. Samuel G. Showalter, and Jeremy Nafziger.

Photo by the Editor

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Ridgeway Mennonite Church (above left), Harrisonburg, Va., June 13, 2022.
Photo by Editor

A Mixed Legacy

by Elwood E. Yoder

In 1890, *Herald of Truth* associate editor John S. Coffman moderated a difference of opinion on race relations. A writer had criticized southern Christians for complicity in racial discrimination and violence. The writer drew from articles written by journalists from the south, published in newspapers.¹ A group of six men from the Virginia Conference responded and took issue with the anonymous writer for “abusing the religion of the people of the South just because some of them were slave owners a quarter of a century ago.”² The men responded that “the white people of the South freely and willingly appropriate their money to educate and elevate the colored race.” The Mennonites observed that not all of “the race troubles” were the fault of the whites and that some difficulties came from those in the North and West who “continue to incense the blacks against the whites.”

John S. Coffman communicated with the writer, seeking clarity about the charges. The writer backed off their claims, saying the truths of the writers of the articles that he had cited in *Herald* could not be substantiated. Coffman effectively checked the writer’s claims of white complicity in racial discrimination and violence, but he also challenged his Virginia friends by saying that though they knew the situation of race relations in Virginia, they “had little means of knowing his true condition in the Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana.” Evangelist Coffman concluded that if the “negro believes, follows Christ in the regeneration, and is saved, he is our brother.”

This account of six men’s responses to a critical article in *Herald of Truth* is the subject of a poster in a new display at the Brethren Mennonite Heritage Center, Harrisonburg. Five panels and four posters are located upstairs in the Weaver-Brunk log house at the Center. The panels narrate the story of how Brethren and Mennonites have related to people of color throughout their history in the Shenandoah Valley. Four posters highlight particular people and episodes, such as the 1890 response in *Herald* regarding race relations in the south.

The exhibit opened on May 22, 2022. You are encouraged to stop by the Heritage Center on Garbers Church Road, Harrisonburg, and visit the exhibit. It’s well worth your time to visit as this is an important historical marker for Brethren and Mennonites.



The 1829 Weaver-Brunk house, located at the Brethren Mennonite Heritage Center on Garbers Church Road, Harrisonburg, has a new display, upstairs, called “A Mixed Legacy: The Brethren and Mennonite Record of Racial Separation and Connection.”

Photo by the Editor, June 2022

1. “The Race Troubles,” *Herald of Truth*, November 15, 1889.

2. “The Race Troubles, A Reply,” *Herald of Truth*, March 1, 1890. Those who signed their name to the reply were David A. Heatwole, John Brunk Sr., Elias Brunk, Peter S. Hartman, William H. Rhodes, A. D. Weaver, and Samuel M. Burkholder.

In the News

Tour the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives, Thursday, July 14, 2022. Meet at the EMU Hartzler Library circulation desk at 2:00 p.m., with Simone Horst and Elwood Yoder, tour guides.

Virginia Mennonite Missions celebration, at Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Va., July 14, 7:00 p.m. This is a part of the Virginia Conference sessions which are held at Zion. All are welcome to the missions celebration.

Celebration of Trissels Mennonite Church at 200 years. All are invited to a service under the oaks, July 15, 2022, 7:00 p.m., at Trissels Church, 11246 Hisers Ln., Broadway, Va. Bring a lawn chair along. Pastor Harold N. Miller will lead the service, with historic hymns led by members of the congregation. Elwood Yoder will speak on "The Holy Spirit Gives Gifts," telling stories of Trissels' contributions to the Virginia Conference during two hundred years. In case of inclement weather, the service will be held inside.

Local Trissels history tour, September 11, 2-4 p.m. Visit the Miller D. Rhodes house in Broadway, the Rhodes cemetery, Brunk homestead marker, Tide Spring, and other places. Call the Trissels church office to join.

Trissels book release and bicentennial celebration at Trissels church, October 21, 2022, 7:00 p.m. Hear David Augsburg and Elwood Yoder speak and purchase a copy of the new Trissels history book. All are welcome.

Immigrant Mennonite Stories: Daniel Kyuma and Ahadi Kiyana

By James L. Hershberger

I first met Daniel and Ahadi in 2016 when they came to Harrisonburg to resettle from a refugee camp in Tanzania (see photo on back page). I was the director of the Church World Refugee Immigration and Refugee Program office in Harrisonburg and was on hand to welcome them to the Shenandoah Valley. At the time, our focus was on providing the housing and other services that Refugee Resettlement offices provide to persons who are approved to come to this country with refugee immigration status.

But now, six years later, I wanted to learn more of their unique story as immigrants to this community who had come as refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC. They were members of the Mennonite church in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Tanzania, where they lived before settling in the U.S. in 2016. They join many other Mennonites who have immigrated to the Shenandoah Valley from Pennsylvania or Europe in the last several hundred years. Daniel and Ahadi fled their country of birth, the Democratic Republic of Congo, because of war in their land. This Great War of the Congo, as it is called, began in the early 1990s and was the result of disputes over access to the rich resources of precious metals in eastern DRC.

Daniel was born in southeast DRC in the town of Lubumbashi. His father left the family when Daniel was 4, so his mother, a school teacher, worked and kept Daniel and his two siblings together. They moved to several towns north of Lubumbashi in his childhood, his mother teaching in various elementary schools

to support the family. In 1997 when he was 14, the family fled the country during the Great War of the 1990s. They first went to the Lugufu Refugee camp but in 2004 moved to the Nyarugusu Camp in western Tanzania. This was a large refugee camp of about 150,000 refugees from Congo that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees opened and administered.

Daniel finished high school in the refugee camp with an elementary education degree and was hired to teach in the elementary school in the camp. When the university began offering courses in the camp, Daniel took advantage of this opportunity to further his education. He taught school in the camp until 2016, when they were resettled in Harrisonburg. His mother also taught and still teaches in the Nyarugusu Camp.

Ahadi was born in the South Kivu province of the DRC. She grew up there in the village of Uvira. Her family owned a farm and raised corn, rice, peanuts, and cattle. Her father, Matenga Balinde, was a pastor in a Pentecostal church in their village. And like many others in their area, her family suffered violence and destruction in the Great War. When she was 11, the fighting came to her village. Her parents fled to Tanzania on foot, carrying what they were able. They lost all their crops, livestock, and household items. They also found refuge in the Nyarugusu refugee camp in western Tanzania.

Daniel and Ahadi describe the war as part of larger forces in central and eastern Africa after the end of the Cold War. DRC government soldiers and soldiers from other countries fought local militia groups over land and access to minerals. The DRC is rich in cobalt, cop-

per, diamond, titanium, tin, gold, and other precious metals. These metals and minerals are used in producing electronic devices and other items used worldwide. The government was unable to maintain stability, so local groups and outside governments fought to control access to these precious metals. In 1996 Rwandan forces invaded eastern Congo to drive out militia forces that found refuge there. Ultimately nine countries were involved in the war, and at least five million people were killed. About two million people fled the country, and many more were internally displaced in various areas of the DRC.

Daniel and Ahadi, along with the others in the refugee camp, experienced this armed conflict personally. They remember the fighting as sudden, fierce, and brutal. Soldiers came burning houses, chasing people, shooting. People fled as they were able. They were poor and had no cars or other means of transportation, so they grabbed their children and what else was possible and fled on foot. They left behind everything: crops, animals, and homes. Many people in their village were killed, some of their loved ones have disappeared, and they don't know if they are dead or alive.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sets up camps for people fleeing war. The government, in this case, the Tanzanian government, gives permission and some support. But the UNHCR and the Tanzanian government have only enough funds for basic food and infrastructure. For instance, they were given ten sheets of tin for a house and had to scrounge around for wood for posts to put up a rough shelter. They found ways to make and sell food or basic items for sale to earn a small amount of cash to buy other necessary items such as clothes and shoes.

Generally, the host country is slow to give refugees legal status for several reasons. And they decide whether refugees can travel out of the refugee camp, work, or go to school. Their freedoms are significantly curtailed. So, Daniel and Ahadi did not have legal papers in Tanzania. They were not able to work legally. Their children could not go to school or the hospital for medical care. They had to depend on what schools, medical clinics, and other infrastructure the UNHCR or other agencies had developed in the camp over time. The hope is that the war will end quickly, and the refugees can return to their country and village soon.

However, some wars go on and on for years. In these cases, various countries, such as the U.S., might agree to take some refugees for permanent settlement in another country, given the impossibility of refugees returning home. After some years, when the militia groups and various government forces continued to fight and people continued to flee the DRC, the U.S. government agreed to take a limited number of refugees for permanent resettlement.

Yet, in this refugee camp, amidst a grim situation, they found other believers and began meeting regularly to read the Scriptures and grow in their faith in God. They began attending a church that a Mennonite church planter from the city of Dar Es Salaam had planted. This church was a part of the Mennonite church of Tanzania, *Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania*. Ahadi's father, Matenga, was chosen as a pastor to preach and soon became involved in the church's leadership.

Churches such as this were important in the camp. The people worshiped together, grew in their Christian faith, and learned to sup-

port each other in this difficult situation. Since this church was made up of people from various villages where people had taken up arms against each other, they also faced the hard task of forgiving each other for the death and destruction they had experienced, sometimes at the hands of the other ethnic groups. Daniel and Ahadi experienced first-hand the difficult task of forgiving each other and laying their burdens down at the foot of the cross.

This church had intense prayer and fasting meetings pleading for God to bring healing to their people and land. It was in some of these prayer meetings that Daniel and Ahadi met in this church. Their relationship grew, and they decided to marry. They were married in the camp in the Mennonite church by Ahadi's father. They also had their first children in the camp. Their children were dedicated and baptized in the Mennonite church in the camp.

When the U.S. government agreed to resettle some of the refugees in the U.S. permanently, Daniel and Ahadi applied for resettlement. It took them many years to work through all the interviews, medical and security checks, and other paperwork to get to the point of actually coming to the U.S. for resettlement. Daniel described the complicated process of many interviews with the same questions, paperwork, forms to fill out, and documents to file; all this to document their claim for refugee status with the U.S. government. They describe how many people do not have the documentation to support their refugee status.

While they were relieved to resettle in the U.S., they were also surprised at the culture and lifestyle adjustment needed in their new country. They note that to earn money, one

must get a job in an organized workplace such as a factory or office. One cannot simply make things and try to sell them on the street or sidewalk. There are many regulations and laws about working, living, and traveling. And they had many practical adjustments. For instance, in the camp, they cooked in a clay pot set on three stones placed in an open fire. In the U.S., they must learn how to use an electric stove and figure out how to set the heat, what pots to use and how long to cook things in this new system. The climate in the refugee camp was similar year-round, with temperatures generally ranging from highs in the eighties to lows in the sixties °F. Here they have to get used to cold winters with snow and hot summers. They must adjust to heating their house, closing doors and windows when it is cold to save on heating bills.

Daniel has two brothers, and his mother is still in the camp. Both of them have families and hope to be able to return to their homes in the DRC or relocate permanently to another place. Ahadi has a sister in a refugee camp in Uganda and another sister in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp. They have not seen them since 2016 but are able to communicate using WhatsApp or similar cell phone applications.

Ahadi works at the Georges Poultry processing plant, and Daniel works at the Marshal's Packaging plant. They are grateful for these jobs that do not require full fluency in English. But they look forward to the day when they can get other jobs that are not so repetitive and perhaps pay more. Their children attend public schools and are learning English quickly. Between work and school, the family is learning the culture and life in the Valley.

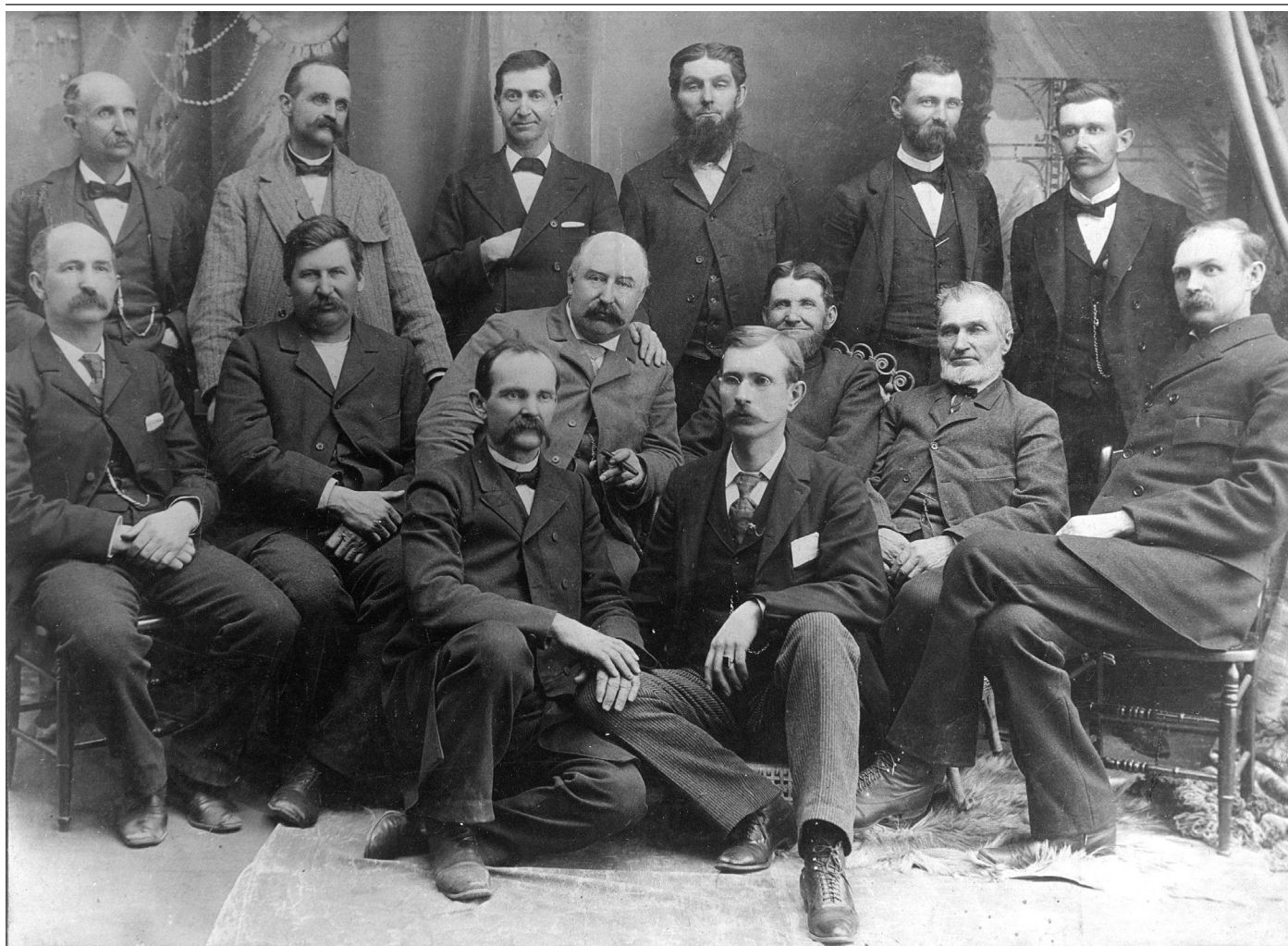
Daniel and Ahadi and several other Con-

golese families attend Ridgeway Mennonite Church. The children are in the church's Sunday School classes, and the parents have their own class for Sunday School. They attend the English-speaking worship service there. They would like to be able to hold their own worship services in Swahili, their native language.

They are grateful for the opportunity to leave the refugee camp and resettle in the Shenandoah Valley but face many challenges. Paying rent, other utilities, and keeping food on the table for a growing family stretches them. One of their long-term goals is to buy a house, but the cost is prohibitive. All the houses for sale that he looks at sell almost immediately. The process of borrowing money from banks is complicated, he says. Yet rents are high and going higher, so they are actively looking for a house to buy and hoping that a bank will give them a loan. Another goal is to find higher-paying jobs. They realize they need to go to a trade school to earn a certificate in one of the trades if this is to become a reality.

They live between three worlds: The world of the DRC before the war when they cultivated crops, raised cattle and goats, and worshiped God together in their village. The world of war and refugee camps, of losing land and livestock; a place to worship God together. And now, the Shenandoah Valley has many opportunities but challenges with a new language, culture, work, and school.

Just like many immigrants before them, they face daunting challenges. Like many immigrants, they sacrifice for their own and their children's futures. They are glad for a safe place where there is stability and opportunity yet are aware of the great losses of life and property their village suffered in the war.



These men were involved in the consolidation of the Valley Telephone Company and Rockingham Mutual Companies, Rockingham County, Va., March 18, 1898. Standing, from left: Jacob B. D. Rhodes, John S. Funk, Christian H. Brunk, Peter Swope Thomas, Charles Hopkins Rolston, and Walter C. Switzer. Seated from left: William H. Sipe, Lilburn Long, John G. Yancey, David Bowman Showalter, Noah W. Beery, and Charles M. Strickler. Front row: John Newton Fries, and Thomas P. Yager. Christian H. Brunk was a Mennonite and David Bowman Showalter and Peter Swope Thomas were Brethren.

Photo courtesy of Rocktown History|HRHS, Dayton, Virginia

The Mennonite Archives of Virginia online repository and website launched ten years ago, in July 2012. The digital archive provides access, visibility, and description to photos about Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The location is mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net. The site includes files of all past issues of *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* and provides a link to a [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com) collection of over 1600 photos in forty-two albums. Many of the photos were contributed by friends, supporters, and former students of the Editor, who serves as web host. Photo donors have signed a Donor Gift Contract. Many church photos are used on gameo.org to show Mennonite churches in Virginia. The [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com) photos have over a half million views in the past ten years. The most frequently viewed photo shows the Eastern Mennonite School class of 1939 at its 65th-year reunion in 2004. The website is sponsored by the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians. To find past issues of *Historian*, go to mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net, and to see photos about Virginia Mennonites, click on the photo albums link.



Daniel Kyuma and Ahadi Kiyana came to the United States as refugees in 2016. From the Mennonite Church in Tanzania, Daniel and Ahadi attend Ridgeway Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg. Read their story in an article in this issue. Photo from James L. Hershberger

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

Officers of the Historians: Chair, James L. Hershberger; Treasurer, Norman Wenger; Secretary, James Rush; Lois Bowman Kreider; Gerald R. Brunk; and, Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians
780 Parkwood Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22802

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, and provides a way to subscribe to *Historian* online.

An annual individual membership fee for the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians is \$10.00 per year, which includes a subscription to *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.