



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

Volume 31, No. 1
Winter, 2023

Published by the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians
Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

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

Our Common Anabaptist Faith

I often refer to articles from our previous *Historian* Editors: Randall Shank (1994-1997), Harold and Ruth Lehman (1998-2001), and James O. Lehman (2002-2013). As I begin my tenth year as *Historian* Editor, I'm glad for the work of previous editors.

You'll notice I wrote the articles for this issue, our thirty-first volume. Please send me your articles or ideas for what to print in this journal. Find my e-mail on the back of the issue.

An older generation of Mennonite leaders has been passing on to their reward: Glendon Blosser, Virginia Grove Weaver, A. Donald Augsburger, Emma Jane Burkholder, and Lewis G. Martin. I wrote a reflective essay about my experience at brother Martin's recent funeral. Find it at the end of this issue.

James Rush is our Secretary who handles subscription records. Contact him by phone or letter, with information on the back of this issue. Thanks for keeping your subscription current. We welcome Gary Smucker as an officer of the Historians.

Elwood Yoder, Editor

Mt. Jackson Mennonite Church in the 1950s (above).
Photo by James Lowell Wenger, VMC Archives



Franklin Showalter Jr. (left) talks with David and Leann Augsburger (right) at the Trissels Mennonite Church bicentennial celebration, October 21, 2022. David Augsburger served as pastor at Trissels from 1963-1971.

Photo by Wayne Showalter

The articles about Pike and Mt. Jackson churches in this issue are excerpts from a forthcoming chapter on the 1950s in *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, a new book sponsored by the Virginia Mennonite Conference Historical Committee and the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians. The hoped-for release is late 2025 with coauthors Steven Nolt and Elwood Yoder.

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Beginnings of Mt. Jackson Mennonite Church, Shenandoah County, Virginia

By Elwood E. Yoder

Mt. Jackson Mennonite Church started with street evangelism efforts from students who attended Eastern Mennonite College. Young adults from the YPCA (Young People's Christian Association) drove twenty-five miles northeast of the Harrisonburg school to Mt. Jackson, Virginia. They handed out tracts, made home visits, witnessed to interested persons, and created a Sunday school program in a small brick building downtown. Students and locals first met for a worship service on Sunday evening, October 16, 1955.¹

Mennonites during the 1950s emphasized



College students from the EMC YPCA prepare to visit a mission station in the mid 1950s.

Photo from EMU Archives

verbal witness in mission with tent revivals, tract distribution, and street evangelism in small towns and large cities. Students from Harrisonburg spurred evangelistic efforts in Kentucky, city churches in Virginia, and small towns like Mt. Jackson, Virginia. Occasionally students traveled to cities like New York for evangelism efforts. Neither the Virginia Conference nor its mission board had started the work in Mt. Jackson. Still, once students had a cluster of interested persons, Northern District leaders supplied the first bi-vocational pastor at Mt. Jackson Mennonite, with Minister Herman Reitz, who served 1955-57. Herman moved to Richmond, Virginia, for graduate studies, and Linden M. Wenger followed as pastor in Mt. Jackson, 1957-59.²

In 1959 EMC President John R. Mumaw explained that eighty percent of 430 undergraduate students had participated in evangelism, outreach, and service activities through the YPCA.³ Isaac M. Glick, the 1955 President of the student service organization, wrote that students had distributed 25,000 tracts in 1954-55. They prepared and presented three large evangelistic billboards along highways. Glick wrote that the work in Mt. Jackson was “indigenous from the start and is meeting its own operating costs,” meaning that students had launched the church and paid expenses from contributions from students on campus. Glick acknowledged that the work would be assumed by the Northern District of Virginia Conference “once it grows too big for the YPCA.”⁴

Anna Mary Yoder wrote of the exhilarat-

1. John B. Shenk, “Annual Report of the Young People's Christian Association of Eastern Mennonite College, 1955-56,” *EMC Bulletin* 35, no. 7 (July 1956), 5.

2. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia: 1900-1960*, vol. 2 (Verona, Va.: McClure Printing, 1972), 74.

3. John R. Mumaw, “Annual Report of the President,” *EMC* 39, no. 9 (Sept. 1960), 23.

4. Isaac M. Glick, “Annual Report of Young People's Christian Association of Eastern Mennonite College, 1954-1955,” *EMC Bulletin* 34, no. 7 (July 1955), 2-8.

ing work at Mt. Jackson in 1959. She explained that it allowed students to practice what they learned on campus in real life. In early March 1959, she celebrated that 102 had been in attendance at Mt. Jackson the previous Sunday morning. Anna wrote that the work in Mt. Jackson “is an exhilarating experience for the Christian life.”⁵ Willard Swartley, an officer of the YPCA in 1957, exclaimed that “the work at Mt. Jackson is a thrill!” Further, Swartley wrote that “mission outreach represents the prayer burdens of many EMC students.”⁶

Kenneth Seitz Jr. sang with student quartets on the Mt. Jackson radio station, producing a fifteen-minute Sunday morning program before services began. Kenneth served as Sunday School superintendent at Mt. Jackson during his last two years of college, graduating in 1960.⁷ Kenneth had also served as street meeting committee chairman with the YPCA. The annual election of officers for the Christian service organization was significant on the EMC campus, with regular articles about mission and service in student newspapers and the school yearbook.

By the end of the '50s, Mt. Jackson Men-



Fellowship after a service at Mt. Jackson Mennonite Church, late 1950s, with students and local attendees.

Photo from EMU Archives

nonite Church became a Northern District Church in the Virginia Conference, though students continued to attend and support the church. Pastor Linden M. Wenger produced the first church bulletin on December 7, 1958, with announcements regarding Sunday morning and evening services, Wednesday evening Bible study and prayer meeting, and a Saturday evening youth meeting in the local fire hall. Wenger, an ordained minister and Assistant Professor of Missions and World Religions at EMC and a faculty advisor of the robust YPCA, typed a bold header text in Mt. Jackson’s first bulletin from the Great Commission that captured the origins of the Shenandoah County mission church, using the King James Version, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”⁸

5. Anna Mary Yoder, “Mt. Jackson Provides Opportunity for Witness,” *The Weather Vane*, March 6, 1959, 3.

6. Willard Swartley, “Y.P.C.A. Feature: Mt. Jackson,” *The Weather Vane*, Nov. 22, 1957, 3.

7. Ray C. Gingerich, *Re-Envisioning Service: The Geography of Our Faith: Brethren and Mennonite Stories Integrating Faith, Life, and the World of Thought*, vol. 3 (Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House, 2016), 281.

8. Mt. Jackson Mennonite Church, which began in 1955, became Windhaven Church in 2000. In 2003, Windhaven Church left the Virginia Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Church USA.

Four Bicentennial Events in the Shenandoah Valley in 2022

Essays by Elwood Yoder except for Silver Lake, written by Philip J. Yoder. All photos on pages 4-5 taken by Elwood Yoder.

In October 2022, Trissels Mennonite Church, Broadway, Virginia, celebrated two hundred years since its beginnings in 1822. The church hosted three days of celebration events in October. At the end of the three days, congregational members planted an oak tree, with confidence in God's leading into the third century of the church. Trissels has numerous large oak trees, but one which dated to the Revolutionary War recently needed to be taken down. Perhaps the newly planted oak (photo below) will last for another century or two.

You can purchase a copy of the new Trissels History book from the church at <https://trisselsmc.org/history/book>



On November 18 & 19, 2022, Silver Lake Mill, Dayton, Virginia, hosted a dinner theater program as part of its bicentennial celebration. A three-course meal was served to fifty guests each evening, with skits performed following each course. The play told the true story of how Daniel & Sallie Bowman responded in faith as German Baptist Brethren to the burning of their barn despite having received a letter from Union General Sheridan saying he would spare the mill because Daniel was a "union man." For context, the Union burned hundreds of barns in the Shenandoah Valley during the campaign of 1864. In the end, while many of their family and friends left the valley as refugees, the Bowmans chose to stay behind and rebuild. Afterward, there was both Q&A and discussion. Marjorie Rohrer Shank gave leadership to the meal. Paul Roth wrote the play; Sam Funkhouser directed it. For more info: silverlakestories.org.



Garber's Church of the Brethren, Harrisonburg, Virginia, built in 1822, is now the oldest continuously used meetinghouse of the Brethren in Virginia. Brethren Elder John Kline was known to have preached at Garber's Church of the Brethren. The congregation celebrated their bicentennial on November 13, 2022. Kathy Puffenbarger is the current pastor.



"The Grove" house was built in 1822. Located along Mt. Clinton Pike west of Harrisonburg, the owners opened their doors for visitors to tour the two-century house on December 10, 2022. The first log house at the site was built in 1742, with the brick house erected in 1822. A large cannonball indentation can easily be seen on an outside wall, caused by a direct hit by artillery during the Civil War. Loren Hostetter and Glenda Siegrist are the current owners of the bicentennial house. Photo below shows Glenda Siegrist, Andrea Early, and Evan K. Knappenberger, hosts for the tour.



Pike Mennonite Church in the 1950s

By Elwood E. Yoder

Pike Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia, joined thirty-three churches in the Middle District of the Virginia Conference during the 1950s.¹ Located four miles south of the Harrisonburg Court Square, Mennonites in the Pike church region built a log meetinghouse in 1825. It was the first meetinghouse constructed in the Middle District, the second after the 1822 log meetinghouse built at Trissels in the Northern District. In 1878 Pike tore down the log building and erected a wood frame building, renovated it in the mid-twentieth century, and constructed a new brick meetinghouse in 1980.

Like most established Mennonite congregations during the 1950s, Pike developed a unique identity as a historic home base congregation of the Virginia Conference. Home base was a term from the mid-twentieth



Pike Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., 1953.

Harry A. Brunk collection, Virginia Conference Archives

century that described established churches with resources that sent mission workers to rural and city stations to carry out evangelism or teaching ministries. Middle District home



Pike Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., 1953.

Harry A. Brunk collection, Virginia Conference Archives

base churches in the '50s included Weavers, Bank, Pike, Mount Clinton, and Chicago Avenue.

For decades, Pike supported the Home Mission Board of the Middle District. Pike had a strong mission impulse during the '50s, sending workers to West Virginia to teach, like Anna Brubaker.² Pike supported mission workers along the Blue Ridge Mountains. Since the Pike church building was visible along the main road north and south through Harrisonburg, Route 11, tourists occasionally stopped in unannounced to visit and experience a Mennonite worship service. The congregation welcomed these drop-in tourists as a part of their outreach.

When Middle District congregations got pastors assigned to them in 1948 and began holding

1. Middle District Churches in the 1950s were Bank, Chicago Avenue, Mt. Clinton, Pike, Weavers, Beldor, Belington, Bethany, Bethel (W.Va.), Brushy Run, Elkins, Elkton, Gladwin, Gospel Hill, Horton, Hunting Ground, Lambert, Laneville, Mt. Hermon (Va.), Mt. Vernon, North Fork, Osceola, Peake, Pike, Rawley Springs, Riverside, Roaring Run, Sandy Bottom, Simoda, Smoke Hole, Spruce Mountain, Temple Hill, and Zion Hill.

2. Anna Brubaker, "Pike," *Missionary Light* 16, no. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1956), 10.



Pike Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., about 1956.

Photo from Linden M. Wenger collection, VMC Archives

weekly Sunday morning services, Aldine Brenneman (1894-1985) was placed at Pike Mennonite Church. Born in Ohio and raised in the Warwick Mennonite Colony, Brenneman was a conscientious objector during WWI, an event that helped shape his pastoral identity. After moving to Harrisonburg in 1922 with his wife, Sallie Hartman Brenneman, Aldine went through the ministerial lot at Weavers church in 1932 and drew a Bible with a slip of paper that made him a minister. Aldine preached at the Gay Street Mission in Harrisonburg during the early 1940s, and Roberta Webb remembered the generosity of the Brenneman family at the interracial ministry.³

After a decade serving at Weavers in the 1940s, Aldine began a significant pastoral term in the '50s helping to shape the identity and enhance the missions' culture at Pike Mennonite Church. With weekly services on Sunday mornings, Aldine preached regularly. In 1953, Aldine preached at Pike twenty-two times.

Aldine's name was on the rotating Middle District preaching calendar, though his name appeared on that calendar for Pike about half the Sundays a year during the '50s. In the early 1950s, Brenneman worked at Pike with minister Warren Kratz and in the late 1950s with John E. Kurtz, who also preached 20-22 times a year at Pike.⁴

Pike was a traditional, rural, and agriculturally-based Mennonite church community in the 1950s. A chronicler of Pike's history noted that some lamented the loss of the German language in the pre-civil War years.⁵ Pike had established a small school before the Civil War to teach and preserve German with their children. Two copies of Pike's German hymn books (published in 1804 and 1808) can be found in the rare book collection of the Menno Simons Historical Library. These hymn books, identified as from Pike, show a connection to the Lancaster Mennonite Conference, from which many Valley Mennonites came, and to the German heritage of their European



Pike Mennonite Church interior, undated photo.

Wade Bowman collection, Virginia Conference archives

3. Roberta Webb, "Our Fellowship in the Gospel," *Missionary Light* 22, no. 3 (May-June, 1962), 42.

4. Middle District Preaching Calendars, VMC Archives, Harrisonburg, Va., Box 6.

5. David L. Burkholder, "One Hundred Seventy-Five Years at the Pike," *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 2.

ancestors.⁶

Further, Pike had minimal contact with Eastern Mennonite School, which started in 1917. During the decades when EMS and EMC students visited many area churches, Pike's history does not reveal a student connection. However, many carloads of Young People's Christian Association (YPCA) students drove past Pike on the Lee Highway of Virginia to attend other churches further south.



Pike Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., 1980.
Wade Bowman collection, Virginia Conference archives

The traditional outlook of the congregation emerges in the writing of Minister Warren A. Kratz and Bishop Daniel W. Lehman. Kratz served Pike in the early 1950s. In a 1951 Middle District *Pastoral Letter*, Kratz warned of inconsistencies such as gossip, swearing, smoking, extortion, attending lawn parties and movies, painting lips and fingernails, dressing like the world, reading comics, card playing,

ballgames, bowling alleys, roller-skating rinks, expensive cars, gold bands on wrist watches, and speeding. Kratz wrote, “we believe that plain clothes along with a consistent life can be a great power for good.” On the other hand, Kratz warned, “an inconsistent life back of plain clothes is as ‘rotteness to the bones.’ The devil and his cohorts,” Kratz concluded, “are working furiously and subtly to get all the followers they can in the short time they have left.”⁷

Pike's bishop Daniel W. Lehman warned women against the “diminishing covering and bonnet.” In 1952, Lehman asked women in the district, “why the socks, cut hair, lipstick, and skirt and waist apparel?” Lehman asked if the women hid the fact that they were Mennonite when they went to the city. “By a ready submission, we not only will receive a flood of joy ourselves, but it will bring gladness to our shepherds.”⁸

Pike supported the Virginia Conference until the church departed Conference with a large group of Middle District congregations in 1972. Aldine Brenneman, Warren A. Kratz, and John E. Kurtz, ministers in the '50s, consistently attended Conference meetings, including the session at EMC in 1959. Aldine Brenneman served as chair of the Peace and Industrial Relations Committee of the Virginia Conference, which studied labor unions and advised Mennonite workers on whether to

6. The hymn books are *Unpartheyisches Gesang-Buch*, a German language collection of songs, published in Lancaster, Pa., 1804 and 1808, and are in the rare book room of the Menno Simons Historical Library, Harrisonburg, Va.

7. Warren A. Kratz, “Is My Name Written There,” Middle District *Pastoral Letter*, April 1951, Middle District collection, VMC Archives, Box 5.

8. Daniel W. Lehman, “Doing it with Joy,” Middle District *Pastoral Letter*, January 1952, Middle District collection, VMC Archives, Box 5.



Pike Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., 1980.
Wade Bowman collection, Virginia Conference archives

join them, spoke about peace issues during the Cold War, and encouraged young men to enter voluntary service units for their two years of I-W service. Pike hosted the ministers for one session of Virginia Conference in the nineteenth century. Pike was the location for a Middle District Bible Conference in the mid-'50s, with speakers John R. Mumaw, Menno J. Brunk, and Sanford G. Shetler. The women of Pike were participants in a network of Sewing Circle groups across the Virginia Conference.

Pike was a strong home base supporter of missions. In 1956, the John E. Kurtz family, based at Pike, had served and helped to raise up four mission churches of the Blue Ridge Mountain region for nineteen years, including Mount Hermon (Mutton Hollow), Sandy Bottom, Beldor, and Temple Hill. John E. Kurtz needed a change, so Minister Warren A. Kratz and his

family switched places with the Kurtzes and began working in the Blue Ridge mission field.⁹ Adults went and came in mission from the Pike church.

When Aldine Brenneman introduced Pike and its program in 1955, with a membership of 157, the sixth largest in the Virginia Conference,¹⁰ he noted their youth's busy schedule of activities.¹¹ Pike and nearby Bank Mennonite Church alternated Sunday evening programs, but increasingly Pike, with its wood frame building and beautifully finished wood interior and long preacher's bench of the early twentieth-century style, was a place where people came to worship God, sing a cappella hymns, serve others, and witness to the occasional unannounced tourist who stopped to attend while traveling along busy Route 11 south of Harrisonburg.



Pike Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., December 2022.
Photo by Elwood E. Yoder

9. Anna Brubaker, "Pike," *Missionary Light* 16, no. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1956), 10.

10. In 1956 Weavers had 303 members, Warwick 300, Springdale 225, Bank 210, Lindale 183, and Pike 157 (Source is 1957 *Mennonite Directory*).

11. Aldine Brenneman, "Pike," *Missionary Light* 15, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1955), 7.

Looking for a Common Anabaptist Faith

By Elwood E. Yoder

I attended the Old Order Mennonite funeral of Lewis G. Martin, a distinguished minister in the Riverdale Conference of Virginia. On a winter's day, December 27, 2022, I made a journey from my home in Virginia Mennonite Conference to an expression of Anabaptism very different from mine. At Pleasant View Old Order Mennonite Church, Dayton, Virginia, I found common faith in the singing, messages, and relationships I experienced.

We have over fifteen different Mennonite groups in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The cultural differences between my community in the Virginia Mennonite Conference and the Old Order groups in Rockingham County are about as far as the divide stretches. Two Virginia Conference pastors joined me in paying respects to brother Lewis G. Martin (1932-2022). We drove our car around buggies on the way to the funeral, and we slowed down because of the numerous black-clad Old Orders walking to the funeral on a bright mid-winter morning. Buggies with horses tied to hitching posts filled the church lot, line after line of them, so the automobiles parked across the road in a field.

I wanted to pay my respects to Old Order Minister Lewis G. Martin. The ninety-year-old leader in our community, ordained fifty years ago, was widely known and appreciated. I only met Lewis a couple of times, but he often provided information about the Old Order community to former editors of the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* and me. Lewis understood that someone needed to speak from within the Old Order community to Anabaptists beyond and offer details about the group's size and history. Many buses and van-loads from local educational and cultural groups heard Lewis when they toured the Old Order community. When requested, Lewis took time away from his harness and leather goods shop, his bivocational means of making a living, and answered questions about the Old Order communities.

Six years ago, a busload of Mennonites took a tour of the Old Order community in Rockingham County. When we stopped at the Pleasant View Old Order meetinghouse, Lewis G. Martin spoke to us. At eighty-four, Lewis ably interpreted the meaning of the 1902 division in our community from which the Old Orders came. He discussed the late nineteenth-century troubles in Virginia Conference that led to sixty-nine being removed and starting the Virginia Old Orders. Lewis freely shared details about the order of his services, patterns of worship, length of sermons, and singing. I still value the notes I took when our large group listened to Minister Lewis G. Martin share his Anabaptist faith. He patiently answered all our questions.

As I make acquaintances and new friends across Mennonite groups in the Shenandoah Valley, I keep looking for our common Anabaptist faith. At Lewis' funeral, I found Anabaptist faith in the lyrics and four-part harmonies of songs from a nineteenth-century hymn book placed in a wooden pew rack. Only the words appeared in the little book, but I soon joined the approximately 450 people inside the meetinghouse who were lifting their voices in song to God. Men around me sang the bass part, and I quickly caught on and entered the hymns. The singing was slow, mournful, and reflective of the community's genuine heartfelt loss of a respected senior minister. The harmonies and theology about eternity gave me time to think about my own frailties and brief time on this planet.

Lewis G. Martin told our tour group that the Virginia Old Orders have fellowship with groups in other states. So among the four sermons preached during the two-hour funeral service were visiting ministers from Berks County, Pennsylvania, and another minister from an Old Order community in Canada. Both visiting ministers had a Pennsylvania German accent, though they spoke in English at Lewis' funeral because Virginia Old Order Mennonites speak English. The Riverdale Conference has a group of families who moved to a new settlement in Greenfield, Ohio.

Sitting next to me on the hard wooden slatted bench was a man who held a young son in his lap and another six or seven-year-old son who sat at the end of the bench. Both boys sat quietly, did not have toys to play with, and did not go out during the two-hour service. More importantly, this generous man answered my whispered questions about the Old Orders. There was no program to look at, and no one announced the names of the ministers who spoke, but my new friend helped me as I scribbled notes. Twice we knelt for long prayers with deep meaning of faith embedded in the minister's words.

When the service began, I noticed the windows were opened from the outside, allowing a winter's day breeze to keep the large audience comfortable. Attendees filled every bench. But the windows were opened so the dozens of boys and young men who had no seats and stood outside could listen to the sermons through the windows. With no microphone, it was hard for me to hear inside, and I suspect the fellows outside heard very little. The Pleasant View Order Mennonite meetinghouse has an electric line attached, but it is only used to power the forced-air furnace in the basement. There are no electric lights in the building.

Three years ago, I wrote Lewis G. Martin a letter, asking him about which side of the auditorium the women sit on in the Old Order community. He cordially replied with a handwritten note. Facing the audience from the pulpit, he explained that the women sit on the right, similar to the other Mennonite churches in the Valley during the nineteenth century. Men at the funeral wore plain black coats and black hats. Hooks on the wall all around the interior provided a place to hang them during the service. Looking from the long nineteenth-century style wooden minister's pulpit, with about ten ordained men seated behind on a raised platform, women and girls sat on the right side of the three-foot wall in the center of the room. They wore funeral black, including their tightly-tied bonnets.

My Anabaptist heritage is Amish-Mennonite, going back eleven generations to the seventeenth-century Amish division in Europe when Yost Yoder chose the Amish side of that split. My parents left the Amish and joined the Conservative Mennonite Conference in 1950, and I joined the Mennonite Church in 1981. I have hundreds of relatives among plain Anabaptist groups in Central America and the United States. So, when I went to Lewis' funeral, I wanted to pay my respects since I'm on a journey to find common Anabaptist faith among friends and neighbors in the Shenandoah Valley. Lewis generously provided information for my research, writing, and editorial work.

In two years, we will remember and notice the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Anabaptist movement in Zurich, Switzerland. May we, in our Anabaptist communities, regardless of our chosen practices, find common faith in God, Jesus Christ our Savior, and the illimitable love and charity of the Holy Spirit, which can join us together in Christian unity.



Pleasant View Old Order Mennonite Church, Dayton, Virginia.

Photos by the Editor



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; Gary Smucker; Gerald R. Brunk; and, Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

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Past issues of *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*, from 1994-2022, can be found at mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net. This site includes a link to over 1,600 photos related to Mennonites in Virginia, and a link 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 jamesrush@comcast.net, phone 540-421-7890, or U.S. mail to James Rush, 5736 Brookside Cir., Lowville, NY 13367.