



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

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Anabaptism at 499 Years

I was asked to preach at Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church, Rockingham County, Va., on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, January 21, 2024. I'm drawn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in which we learn of Christ's call to be a faithful church.

It's been 2000 years since Christ received his baptism and 499 years since George Blaurock received his second baptism in Zurich, Switzerland. We are coming up on the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Anabaptist Movement on January 21, 2025.

In this issue, we learn of a heritage tour to Switzerland, a centennial for the Peake Mennonite Church, and Virginia's musical influence on the broader Mennonite Church. I feel privileged to work in historical research at this time in the church's life. Blessings to each reader as we ponder the meaning of our own baptism.

Elwood Yoder, Editor

Peake Mennonite Church, Hinton, Va., pictured above, celebrated its centennial on October 22, 2023.

Photo by Gary Smucker



Jean Smucker Fisher (front row middle, blue shirt), joined a tour to Switzerland in 2023. In this photo, Yoder descendants on the tour pose at the house at Jodershubel, built in the 1300s. Jean traveled with her two siblings and she writes about the trip in this issue.

Photo from Jean Smucker Fisher

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A Heritage Tour to Switzerland

By Jean Smucker Fisher

A heritage tour to visit the places immigrant ancestors lived has become a popular thing among Mennonites who trace their family back to Switzerland, France, Germany or other European countries. In recent years, I've spent a lot of hours filling out an ancestry fan chart, so when one of my cousins suggested a Yoder tour, I was eager to sign up, knowing that a Yoder tour would be in the area where not only Yoders but Smuckers and many of my other ancestors had lived. I had no idea then how much I would learn in the two-week tour in Sept., 2023.

The first days in Switzerland were spent in and around Zurich. Our local guide for that time was Reformed Church Pastor Jeurg Wildermuth, who gave us a lot of information regarding the Reformation. Jeurg Wildermuth grew up in Canton, Bern, where Mennonites and Amish were persecuted, but he knew nothing of that history until he was an adult living in Zurich. He participated in the reconciliation between Mennonites and Amish and the Swiss Reformed Church in 2004.

Along with other sites in the city, we saw the Limmat River and the plaque that marks the place where Felix Manz (1527) and others



Inside *Taufershöhle* cave where Anabaptists worshipped.
Photo from Jean Smucker Fisher

were drowned for their beliefs, the house where Felix Manz lived, and also the home of Zwingli. We traveled to the *Taufershöhle* cave where Anabaptists met in secret to worship together.

While we enjoyed the “tourist” sites we visited, one unique part of our trip was visiting Swiss homes and experiencing their friendly hospitality.

--Lydia Flachsmann-Baumgartner was our first hostess. She served us lunch and showed us the many Nativities of all descriptions and sizes that she displays to the community and visitors at Christmas time.

--Peter and Esther Fischer and their three children gave us lunch at their home near the sawmill they own. They had an impressive array of beautiful homemade desserts, and the children made each of us a made-to-order coffee with their espresso machine.

--At *Jodershubel* (Yoders Hill) Bernard and Barbara Schluchter provided snacks and drinks at their house, built in the 1300s by Uli and Elsie (Zaugg) Joder and decorated on the upper balcony with twenty-four cowbells which had been won by the prize cows on their beautiful farm. After a father-daughter concert with singing and several sizes of concertinas, twenty-six Yoder descendants lined up for a picture in front of the house (see cover of this issue for the photo).

--Simon and Regula Fankhauser live on a farm that has been in his family since 1608. It was the site of a unique hiding place in the barn that is attached to the house where many Anabaptists hid over the years. When Regula married into the family, she became interested in the history of the farm and the Anabaptist story. She learned that one Fankhauser hid here on his own farm for twenty years. Through her study of these stories she saw what the

Anabaptists were willing to do to remain faithful to God and she became a follower of Jesus herself.

--Theiry Huckel's grandmother was a Graber. He and his family live near Montbieliard, France in the Graber homestead built in 1751 by John Graber. He has a large exhibit of Graber items, including documents giving the family permission to learn weaving, spinning wheels, and samples of beautiful cloth made from hemp.

--Peter and Karin Schowalter gave us refreshments at their lovely farm where immigrant Nicholas Stoltzfus worked for a time and met his wife.

We visited churches of many kinds, Fraumunster Cathedral, Grossmunster Cathedral, and Wasserkirche, with its huge statue of Zwingli, in Zurich. Hirzel Reformed Church was built with money from the sale of land confiscated from Anabaptists, including that of Hans Landis, the last Anabaptist to be executed for his beliefs in Switzerland. St. Joder Chapel, high on a mountain, and Steffisburg Reformed Church are associated with the Joder (Yoder) name. Erlenbach Reformed Church was where Jakob Ammann was baptized as an



St. Joder Chapel, Switzerland. Photo from Jean Smucker Fisher

infant in 1671. We visited churches in other towns and usually these included graveyards with surnames that were familiar to us.

The Mennonite Churches we visited seem to be thriving. The church in Langnau houses the oldest continuously meeting Mennonite congregation in the world, starting in 1527. In Montbeliard, France, both my Smucker and Yoder ancestors, along with many others, passed through, staying for various lengths of time during the 1700s. Some families stayed on, and today, the Mennonite Church is vibrant and growing. They recently added a 500-seat sanctuary. The Church also houses the French Association of Anabaptist Mennonite History Archives (AFHAM), which include massive record books beginning in 1750.

During the time our ancestors were fleeing Switzerland, there was no centralized Swiss national government. Each canton had its own government, in which church and state were one, whether Reformed or Catholic, so life for Anabaptists was affected by the policies of the canton in which they lived. Hiding in another canton might keep one safer for a time. In 1571 the death penalty was banned in Canton Bern because too many people were sympathetic. But in the 1600s, as the number of Anabaptists increased, the persecution of imprisonment, confiscation of land, and deportation began again.

One of the ways many people left to come to America was on the Rhine River. We also took a Rhine River Tour but ours was quite enjoyable. The castles we found so photo-worthy were each places where our ancestors had to stop and pay a fee. My Smucker history says they stopped thirty-six times to make payment.

We visited castles, notably Thun Castle and Trachselwald Castle. Both were used in the 1700s to imprison Anabaptists, and both have interesting displays telling the history of the Castle, including information about Anabaptists. I was particularly interested in the Trachselwald Castle because I know that my immigrant ancestor, Christian Schmucker, was imprisoned there in 1745. I climbed the stairs to the large room where the government meetings were held and then looked at the stairs going up into the towers. A lot of narrow, steep, spiral stairs with no handrails intimidated me, and I stood there for a few minutes to convince myself I could do it. I went up those stairs to the rooms with one tiny slit for a window where prisoners were kept, then on past them to the top of the tower. I stood there looking out over the peaceful and stunningly beautiful countryside and thought about those courageous and dedicated people in my past.

When I came down and out into the courtyard, my sister Karen was waiting for me and said, "Come, you need to see this!" Karen led me to the history display, not letting me stop to read it but going to the end panel. I scanned the panel containing information about Mennonites in the more recent past. Near the bottom, I gasped when I saw a picture of our father! It was a picture I had seen before, taken in 1945. Lewis Martin built the first mobile canner for MCC at Shenandoah Manufacturing in Harrisonburg and asked my father to run it, taking it from one community to the next to can donated meat to send to Europe. In the picture, Daniel Smucker, Lewis Martin, and Wayne Henard from MCC are in front of the canner.

We didn't miss the beauty of Switzerland! I had been to Zurich and Basel many years ago, but I was unprepared for the majesty of the Alps! The sides of the mountains are steeper than I imagined, and the people live and farm on slopes that look too steep to walk on. At the village of Schmocken, high above Lake Thun, where the Schmuckers lived after moving from Grindelwald, I thought about what it must have meant for people who had to leave this place. In addition to the breathtaking beauty of the scenery, every Swiss house and many businesses have window boxes overflowing with huge mounds of flowers! The wooden



Trachselwald Castle in Switzerland. Photo from Donald Siegrist

covered bridges in the cities also had flowers at every opening along the sides.

Our guides, Lois Ann and Lemar Mast (Masthof.org), had led many heritage tours and knew which families lived in each area. Of the fifty-three surnames on my ancestry fan chart, we visited or passed through the area where thirty-two of them lived at some point in the past. I have a certain envy for families who have a variety of interesting places and cultures in their background. But I'm also grateful for these people in my past who made faithfulness to God a top priority in their lives.

Peake Mennonite Church--100th Anniversary

By Gary Smucker

Members and friends met at the Peake Mennonite Church building on a beautiful fall morning to celebrate one hundred years since the first church building was dedicated. On October 22, 2023, the history of the Church was celebrated by recounting events in the past and telling of the many dedicated people who helped build the congregation. John Goering told the history of the Church from the early days of meeting in the Peake Schoolhouse. James Helmuth, former deacon and building contractor for the current building, told the stories of many beloved leaders who helped build the congregation. Olin and Katherine McDorman, Franklin and Anna Lee Burkholder, Branson and Lettie Conley, and many others were mentioned in Helmuth's talk.

Dave Miller addressed the future of the Peake Church with a sermon titled "Goals for the Peake Church." Ephesians 5:25-26 was the text that set the tone for speaking about the future of the Peake Church, loved and sanctified by Christ.

The first Mennonite meetings were held in the Peake Schoolhouse in 1910. S. H. Rhodes and J. S. Martin held meetings, and there were eighteen responses to the messages. Twelve of those were received into church membership by baptism. Church services were held twice a month in the Peake schoolhouse, which was west of the current building. A number of people in the Mennonite Church felt the calling to minister to the people who lived in the Peake Community. A few of the families in the

area suffered from alcoholism and domestic abuse, and mission workers hoped they would save their souls and improve their lives by becoming Christians.

The Peake Mennonite Church is surrounded by farms and fields in the Shenandoah Valley at the edge of the Appalachian Mountains. The Peake community takes its name from Peake Mountain, just north of where the Peake Church is today. The Peake Mountain is at the south end of Little North Mountain, with a pointed mountain towering over the farming countryside on the west side of the Shenandoah Valley. The Peake Church is approximately nine miles northwest of Harrisonburg.

The population of the Peake community was mixed with black and white families living there. Family names of African Americans who lived in the Peake community are Spinard, Madison, and Harris. Black families had lived in the Peake area from the years before the Civil War when they were enslaved. In the 1920s, the State of Virginia had strict 'Jim Crow' laws, which were intended to segregate society and force blacks and whites to



Peake Mennonite Church, October 22, 2023.

Photo from Gary Smucker

live separately. The issue of segregation caused problems for the Peake Church. "This problem

is hard for us to understand today. The old way of dealing with the segregation problem was to instruct, baptize, and have communion separately” (Stonesifer 2001, 3). This policy did not suit some of the black people, and the nearby Pentecostal Church attracted many of them. Things have changed, and looking around the congregation in October of 2023, people of different ethnic backgrounds worship together in the church today.

The congregation continued to grow, and in 1922, the Middle District of the Virginia Mennonite Conference decided to build a church house. The white wood frame building was built on land purchased from the Rockingham County School Board for \$25.00. Much of the labor to construct the building was donated. On August 19, 1923, the new church house was dedicated. Bishop Lewis Shank of Broadway, Virginia, preached the dedication sermon. With a church house to worship in, the church decided to meet every Sunday.

The Peake Church membership was increased at various times by holding revival meetings in the church. One minister who brought spiritual renewal to the community several times was William Jennings. Brother Jennings was from Knoxville, Tennessee, and his easygoing, Southern manner attracted people in the Peake community. Jennings liked talking to the children, but he did not like to see them chewing gum while he taught them. The story is told: “Before conducting a children’s meeting, he would step down from the pulpit, take a Sunday school quarterly from the table, and say, ‘We’re not going to chew gum during the children’s meeting.’ Then he would say, ‘I’ll pass the quarterly around, and you put your gum on it. Then I will lay it on the table, and you can come and get it after church if

you can know which gum is yours.’ The quarterly was pretty well dotted with chewing gum. After the service, a number of children would go and get their chewing gum” (Stonesifer 2001, 3).

In the 1960s, the membership of the Peake Church declined. In 1964, the West Valley District Ministerial Council closed the Peake Church and encouraged the community to attend Rawley Springs Mennonite Church. In July of 1967, Olin McDorman reported to the Ministerial Council that many people in the Peake community were not attending the Rawley Springs Church and wanted the Peake Church to be reopened. Olin McDorman

had been appointed as the minister in the July meeting, and in September of that year, the Ministerial Council confirmed that the Peake Church would reopen. On October 15, 1967, Bishop Lloyd S. Horst preached the sermon to begin services in the Peake Mennonite Church again.

In 1970, Olin McDorman reported that the con-



A wooden pulpit in the current building made for the first Peake Mennonite Church building by Will Rhodes. Rhodes was the son of Margaret (Peggy) Heatwole Rhodes featured in the novel, *Peggy’s War*. The novel is based on true stories from the Civil War. The book was published in 2023 and the author is Karl Rhodes, the great-great-grandson of Peggy Rhodes.
Photo by Gary Smucker

gregation had grown and needed more room in the building. A fourteen-foot addition with a basement and a porch roof was added to the building, and restrooms were added in 1974.

In 1999, the congregation decided to build a new church building. The site was chosen next to the wooden building. The basement of the new building was built first, and the congregation worshiped there until the old building was demolished. The sanctuary and other rooms on the upper level were built, and bricks covered the exterior. The benches, mailboxes, and pulpit were moved from the old church. The porch roof from the old building was attached to the west side of the new building. The first Sunday morning service in the new building was on August 27, 2000. The first baptism in the new building was in March of 2001 when five young people were baptized and received into the church.

The current membership of Peake Mennonite Church is around ninety-six, and the usual Sunday attendance is around one hundred twenty-five. When the Peake Church was founded, it was part of the Middle District of the Virginia Mennonite Conference. When the Middle District was divided in 1963, the Church became part of the West Valley District. In 1972, Peake Church became a founding member of the Southeastern Mennonite Conference.

The current ministers are Jay Rohrer and Dave Miller. Clair Heatwole is the bishop and Sam Goering is the deacon. Elam Heatwole has

recently retired as a minister.

The congregational singing led by Sheldon Martin at Peake Church for the one-hundredth-year celebration was enthusiastic. At one point, a special singing group sang three songs. One of the songs, "Oh Come," is a special song for the Peake Congregation.

- How sweet on a bright Sabbath morning,
- To list to the clear singing swell.
- Its tones so sweetly are calling,
- Oh, come to the Peake in the hills.

After the meeting, the carry-in meal in the church basement with a great variety of delicious food allowed the fellowship to continue for the celebration of one hundred years of the Peake Mennonite Church.

References:

Stonesifer, Carl and Grace; Peake Mennonite Church, 1910 to 2000, 2001, "A Short History of the Peake Mennonite Church," Lloyd S. Horst.

Goering, John; telephone interviews, October 2023



Peake Mennonite Church, Rockingham County, Virginia, 2023.
Photo by Gary Smucker

Coors vs. the Concerned Citizens, 1979

By Elwood Yoder

Eugene Souder helped organize the Rockingham Concerned Citizens in 1979, a broad-based community group aimed at convincing five Rockingham County Supervisors not to rezone 2,000 acres of prime farmland for the Coors brewery company. Based in Colorado, Coors wanted to establish a second plant in the East and selected a large tract of land near the small town of Elkton. The proposed location had good roads, a railroad, plenty of water, and an ample workforce.

Eugene cochaired the Rockingham Concerned Citizens with Fred Smith, a Church of the Brethren farmer who owned land near the proposed Coors site. Eugene was opposed to rezoning good farmland for large industry. For most of those who spoke against Coors coming to Rockingham County, the land issue was their concern. Eugene, however, also raised the moral problem of a brewery coming to the area.

The media soon caught on to the tense conflict. A *Washington Post* writer called it the Shenandoah Valley's "greatest controversy since the Civil War Battle of Cross Keys." The writer summarized the debate as pitting anti-beer Mennonites against pro-growth merchants, wage-hungry laborers, and industrial developers.¹

While journalists for the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *The Washington Post* sensationalized the conflict as Mennonites versus development, it was not that simple. *Gospel Herald* Editor Daniel Hertzler watched a national CBS evening television news debate between Eugene and a representative of Coors. Hertzler was disappointed by the few comments CBS allowed Souder, but he agreed with Eugene's concerns.²

The issue that the Concerned Citizens group had was the changing agricultural region. People had different visions about the direction of Rockingham County. Mennonite Attorney Welby Showalter, hired by the Concerned Citizens, wrote an opinion to the Supervisors, explaining that their decision on land use represented a crucial turning point in the County's history. Showalter wrote that for two hundred years, farmers had worked the soil, tended flocks and herds, and made Rockingham County a leading agricultural region for the United States. The Concerned Citizens, Showalter wrote, did not want this decision about Coors made "without careful planning and judicious choices."³

At the public Supervisor's meeting on May 14, 1979, 1,200 citizens crowded into chairs on the lawn outside the Courthouse in Harrisonburg. Wearing a coat and tie, with folks glaring at him who wore supportive Coors stickers on their shirts and jackets, Eugene spoke to the Supervisors, with hundreds listening. Eugene struck at the moral issue of producing alcohol: "In our permissive society, it is a popular pastime to look down our noses at moral reasons. Many have argued that the brewery will produce jobs," Souder said, but "not jobs at any price." He called for an impact study and urged the Commissioners to follow the old adage, "When in doubt, don't."⁴

1. Ken Ringle, "'Invasion' by Coors...Splits Valley Again," *The Washington Post*, Sunday, March 25, 1979, B1.

2. Daniel Hertzler, "What Heroes," *Gospel Herald* 72, no. 28 (July 10, 1979): 560.

3. "Impact Study Requested by Attorney Showalter," *Daily News-Record*, April 21, 1979, 7.

4. "Synopsis of Coors Rezoning Testimony," *Daily News-Record*, May 16, 1979, 24-25.

Other Mennonites spoke at the large Courthouse gathering, opposed to the proposed Coors expansion near Elkton. Samuel Weaver, EMHS Principal, explained that land development in Warwick County, Virginia, where he grew up, had gobbled up farmland and led to rising taxes. Weaver urged an impact study before a decision was made. Harrisonburg Mennonite Church Pastor Samuel Janzen spoke about how alcohol destroys many lives, and Samuel G. Showalter stated that “more industry is not necessarily progress.”⁵ From Lindale Mennonite Church, James O. Lehman and James Fairfield supported the Concerned Citizens group against unfettered industrial development on prime farmland.

Eugene explained he had difficulty “separating my faith from local involvement in the political process. I don’t see a conflict.”⁶ Eugene said Christians are to be salt and light and “should not be ashamed of introducing the moral issue in this debate.”⁷ Eugene had been a cofounder of the 1963 Rockingham Council on Human Rights, established to improve civil rights in the region.

In July 1979, the Rockingham County Supervisors voted 4-1 to rezone farmland near Elkton for industrial use, allowing Coors to build their brewery. When the Concerned Citizens sued for an impact study, Eugene ended his leadership in the opposition group.

Eugene moved to Rockingham County from Pennsylvania, and his wife Alice Byler came from Michigan. Eugene was a part-time pastor at Mount Vernon Mennonite Church in Grottoes, Rockingham County, Virginia. In 1985, Eugene was the founding Editor of *Together*, a successful eight-page Mennonite Publishing House print periodical intended for congregational outreach; within four years, 200,000 homes received *Together* in fourteen states and two provinces.



Eugene and Alice Souder, 2004.
Photo from Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives

Mount Vernon Mennonite Church entered the globalization era when Vietnamese refugee families arrived at the church in 1979 in need of assistance. Four years earlier, a Filipino couple, members of the Mount Vernon Church, were killed in an automobile accident, hit head-on by a driver who was drinking alcohol. The couple’s two young sons survived the crash. Eugene and Alice Souder then traveled to the Philippines twice, ministering to the couple’s families and conducting Bible studies. On those 1976 and 1982 trips, Eugene learned about world poverty and warned against the selfish exploitation of resources.⁸ Eugene spoke to the 1979 summer Virginia Conference Assembly, urging the ministers and delegates to oppose the brewery coming to Rockingham County.

This essay about Coors and Concerned Citizens will appear in chapter ten of a forthcoming twelve chapter history book, Lord willing, entitled *A History of Mennonites in Virginia*, Herald Press, 2025, by Steve Nolt and Elwood Yoder.

5. “Synopsis,” *Daily News-Record*, May 16, 1979, 26.

6. Bruce Leichty, “Brewery Plans Meet Opposition in Virginia,” *Mennonite Weekly Review*, April 5, 1979, 12.

7. Bruce Leichty, “Brewery Struggle Not Over in Virginia,” *Mennonite Weekly Review*, June 28, 1979, 3.

8. Eugene Souder, “Who Owns My Land?” *Missionary Light* 39, no. 4 (July-Aug., 1978): 5; and, *Minutes of the Virginia Mennonite Conference*, vol. 3, 1983, 1979 Minutes, 10.

Virginia's Musical Influence on the Mennonite Church

By Elwood Yoder

"The Virginians already knew it," Mary Oyer quipped when asked about the enthusiasm generated by a unique choral hymn that she and colleagues included in *The Mennonite Hymnal*, 1969. Indeed, as Goshen College Music Professor Oyer stated, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" was known in Virginia since the hymn was included in the 1876 fifteenth edition of *Harmonia Sacra*.¹ Virginians knew the choral classic and had sung it long before it appeared in a denominational hymnal. Mary Oyer and her musical editors for *The Mennonite Hymnal* were surprised and pleased at how "Praise God" became a favorite of many. Oyer paid tribute to Joseph Funk and acknowledged his "profound influence on Mennonite singing for the following four or five generations."² Dr. Oyer attended the annual *Harmonia Sacra* singing on January 1, 1964, at Weavers Mennonite Church and was astonished at the crowd's ability to sing anything from the book.³

Paul Erb, *Gospel Herald* Editor, recognized the considerable influence that Virginia Mennonites had on developing a robust four-part a cappella singing practice that was conveyed to the broader church. After visiting Weavers Mennonite Church and experiencing uplifting singing, Erb wrote about how a late nineteenth-century singing school movement in Virginia "taught our people to read music and move into four-part harmony from the melody singing of our grandfathers."⁴ Erb credited the musical heritage in Virginia and described the trajectory of the hymnody that flowed to the broader

Mennonite denomination.

Three musical practices reveal why the Virginia Conference significantly impacted the singing heritage of the twentieth and twenty-first Mennonites. First, Virginians trained to read music in singing schools; second, hymnals produced in the Shenandoah Valley included great songs of the church and carried rudimentary instruction on singing; and third, enthusiastic hymn sings in Virginia homes and churches fostered a love and appreciation for the gift of music.

Singing schools thrived among Virginia Mennonites during the last four decades of the nineteenth century. Sometimes held during Christmas vacation with only a few sessions or over several months during the winter, singing schools became fun social events for youth to gather, socialize, meet others, and learn to sing.

In 1876, twenty-eight-year-old John S. Coffman traveled from his home near Harrisonburg to the Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church in Augusta County, Virginia, to conduct a singing school. The parents of children at the church engaged Coffman for extended weekly training sessions with their youth. From Coffman's diary, we learn details of a Mennonite singing school. The church families paid Coffman to teach their youth for three months, with training at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday mornings at the meetinghouse.⁵ Singing school leaders included Timothy Funk, Christian H. Brunk, Henry Good, Henry B. Keener, Samuel M. Burkholder, and John D. Brunk.

The availability of English-language hymnals was a second reason music flowed out of

1. Bradley Kauffman, "Make the chorus swell," *Anabaptist World*, Nov. 23, 2020.

2. Joseph Funk, *The Harmonia Sacra: A Compilation of Genuine Church Music: Comprising a Great Variety of Meters, Harmonized for Four Voices: Together with a Copious Explication of the Principles of Vocal Music*, 25th ed. (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 1993), Introduction.

3. Mary Oyer, *Exploring the Mennonite Hymnal, Essays* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1980), 91.

4. Paul Erb, "The Harmonia Sacra Singing," *Gospel Herald* 55, no. 3 (Jan. 15, 1952): 51.

5. John S. Coffman papers, Mennonite Church USA Archives. Coffman's diary of spring 1876 was transcribed by Andrea Early and Evan K. Knappenberger and shared with coauthor Yoder in November 2021.



Samuel G. Showalter led a hymn at the January 1, 2024 Harmonia Sacra singing at Weavers Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, with 309 in attendance. Photo by Elwood Yoder

Virginia to other regions of the Mennonite Church. Joseph Funk's 1832 *Genuine Church Music*, later called *Harmonia Sacra*, produced in many editions, provided hymns and tunes printed in most Mennonite hymnals. Additionally, Mennonites across the U.S. used *A Selection of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*, an 1847 English hymnal produced by Rockingham County Mennonites Joseph Wenger, David Hartman, and Joseph Funk.⁶

In 1883, the Mennonite Publishing Company, Elkhart, Indiana, published Christian H. Brunk's *Bible School Hymns and Sacred Songs*. From Weavers Mennonite Church, Brunk used *Bible School Hymns* in his singing schools, though the book never gained wide circulation or use. In 1890, a hand-sized *Hymns and Tunes* songbook appeared, produced by Virginians Samuel Shank Jr., Emanuel Suter, Christian H. Brunk, John S. Coffman from Indiana, and Henry S. Rupp from Pennsylvania.⁷ A century

later, Virginia Mennonites kept the small songbook in their home and church libraries, handed down from previous generations.

On a team of seventeen leaders who worked on the popular *Church and Sunday School Hymnal*, 1902, produced by Mennonite Publishing House, seven attended the Weavers Mennonite Church.⁸ One of the seven, the musically gifted John D. Brunk, moved to Indiana to teach music at Goshen College. J. D. Brunk served as the musical editor of the 1927 *Church Hymnal*, a standard hymnal found in the benches of most mid-twentieth-century Mennonite churches across the United States. *The Church Hymnal* included many hymns from *Harmonia Sacra*.

A third reason for the dissemination of music across the Mennonite church was the enthusiastic hymn sings held in Virginia homes and churches. Hymn sings fostered a love and appreciation for the gift of music. Annual singing events using the *Harmonia Sacra* began in 1902 and then moved to Weavers Mennonite Church on January 1, 1903, and in most years since has been a time of rousing hymn singing. Visitors from many places came to the annual event, as when *Gospel Herald* Editor Daniel Kauffman visited the singing in 1912. On the tenth anniversary of the New Year's Day singings, Kauffman wrote that a thousand people had attended the all-day musical event, concluding that the music was "soul-inspiring."⁹

This essay will appear in a forthcoming history book, Lord willing, entitled *A History of Mennonites in Virginia*, Herald Press, 2025, by Steve Nolt and Elwood Yoder.

6. Joseph Funk, Joseph Wenger, and David Hartman, *A Selection of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: From the Most Approved Authors; Suited to the Various Occasions of Public Worship and Private Devotion, of the Church of Christ* (Harrisonburg, Va.: J.H. Wartmann, Prs., 1847).

7. Samuel Shank et al., *Hymns and Tunes for Public and Private Worship, and Sunday Schools* (Elkhart, Indiana: Mennonite Publishing Company, 1890).

8. Find all seventeen *Church and Sunday School* editors in the 1902 edition Preface. Those from the Virginia Conference included Christian H. Brunk, John D. Brunk, Samuel Brunk, Eli Brunk, Noah Blosser, F. B. Showalter, and Martin A. Layman.

9. Daniel Kauffman, "Annual Singing," *Gospel Herald* 4, no. 42 (Jan. 18, 1912): 668.



A group of Mennonite historians from Pa. and Va. met in the Menno Simons Historical Library, Harrisonburg, December 13, 2023. From right, Mary Sprunger, Elam Stoltzfus, Lloyd Weiler, Edsel Burdge (seated), Simone Horst, and Elwood Yoder. Photo by E. K. Knappenberger

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

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

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

Past issues of *Historian*, from 1994-2023, can be found at mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net. This site includes a link to over 1,640 photos related to Mennonites in Virginia.

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 540-434-7890, or U.S. mail to James Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.

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