



Jim/Dorothy Lehman Family at Highland Retreat Mealtime, June 2008

# Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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## HIGHLAND RETREAT CAMP – CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR 50<sup>TH</sup> !

The year 2008 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> year since Virginia Mennonites purchased land that has developed into Highland Retreat Camp, Mt. Everett Campgrounds, Mountain View Retreat Center and Red Oak Lodge. The weekend of June 20-22 marks the first of the anniversary events.

This issue highlights events that led up to the purchase of the land, its early use, eventual development of its significance, and a brief summary of the first anniversary weekend. Before you proceed, see the next column regarding this volume of history.

### NOTE THIS:

**To get the full story of events that led up to the beginnings and development of Highland, (overlap and repetition is minimal) you need the new book to read alongside this issue.**

### This issue has the following components:

- P.2 Northern District Ministers Reach Out to Highlands-Many Preaching Points
- Pp. 3-5 Highlands Tent Meetings History, by James L. Rush and James O. Lehman
- P. 6 – June 20-21 Celebration, and Future Events

On the back cover we also have some upcoming events you won't want to miss, like Annual Meeting; Charlottesville Mennonite Church 50<sup>th</sup>)

### NEW HIGHLAND PICTURE BOOK

Be sure to obtain the new very attractive picture-filled history of Highland Retreat, entitled **Highland Retreat: A Place Set Apart for the Holy: 50 Years of God's Presence, 1958-2008**

Just off the press and available for \$6.00 from Highland. Address: 4783 Upper Highland Drive Bergton, VA 22811.

For email contact, the address is [info@highlandretreat.org](mailto:info@highlandretreat.org)

Done by Gloria Y. Diener and James L. Rush, it is a wonderful compilation of the development of Highland. Illustrated with 145 pictures (count them—many in color!) and a great layout, with significant text to catch the brief history, it is a model of how to do a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklet! (Where else can you get that many photos, many in color, for \$6.00?)

With its important facts that include a timeline on the inside of the back cover, one can absorb the importance of Highland Retreat to Virginia Mennonites in a lovely picture book for your coffee table.

## List of Known Places in Northern District That Were Preaching Points at Times

Based almost altogether on the work of Bishop Timothy Showalter, who served as an unofficial historian of Northern District. Compiled from several files, lists, and essays on the history of Northern District; found in Virginia Conference Archives, I-MS-6, Box 6, Timothy Showalter Papers. He began his list with the June 1885 listing by Abraham Blosser in *The Watchful Pilgrim*.

The following list is not alphabetical but likely very much in the order they came to Showalter's mind. They are numbered much as he did. He reached a total of about 70. We have added a few that he listed as "Winchester" and a few mentioned in his historical essay, as well as a few that began after Showalter's time. The numbering has no relation to chronology or time period. A few were vague in Showalter's mind because of a question mark or a line drawn through them. For a few like Gap and Fairview school houses he was uncertain whether they were in Northern District. He included in the list a few private homes where services were held. And there were other homes that were not listed.

Here is the phenomenal list where Virginia Mennonites of Northern District held services for a while. Of course, only some locations became long-lasting congregations.

1. St. Johns (later a Lutheran Church)
2. Brenneman
3. Brocks Creek School House
4. Old Baptist Church
5. Trissels
6. Lindale
7. Forest Grove
8. Zion
9. Newdale
10. Plains Academy
11. Liberty (Holmans Creek School House)
12. Page ("White House" & "Mauck Church")
13. Powder Springs
14. Supin Lick
15. Crossroads
16. Morning View
17. Lindanood School House
18. Woodland Tabernacle
19. Woodland
20. Barbs School House
21. Old Mt. Pleasant
22. Fawley School
23. Mt. Carmel
24. Shoemakers School House
25. Hebron
26. Dull Hunt School House
27. Turner School House on Mt.
28. Mt. Home School House  
(Old Mt. Home & New Mt. Home)
29. Shaver School House
30. Bennets Run School House
31. Caplingers Chapel
32. Valley View
33. Mt. Top School House
34. Old Criders Mt. Church
35. Criders School House
36. Topsy School House
37. Wm. Tusings
38. Buckhorn School House and Church
39. Sulphur Spring School House
40. Capon Run School House
41. Moyers Run School House
42. Halterman School House
43. Hawkeson Gap School House
44. Whitmer School House (Upper Cove)
45. Lower Cove
46. Basores School House
47. Hinegardners School House & Church
48. Lost City (Lower Cove Run Baptist Church)
49. Bachmans Church
50. Bachmans (Baughmans) School House
51. Mt. Hermon
52. Job School
53. Mine Spring
54. Salem
55. Bean Settlement
56. Vaughans School House
57. Holly Hill Brethren Church
58. Trout Run
59. Crest Hill
60. Crest Hill Presbyterian Church, Wardensville
61. Old Tannery (Tanyard in another list)
62. Dale School House
63. Pleasant Grove
64. Valley School House
65. Winespring School House
66. Hinkle School House
67. Peru School House
68. Hamman School House
69. Mt. Jackson
70. Strawdermans School House
71. Riverside
72. Millers P. D.
73. Chas. Millers Home
74. Holdmans, Holmans Creek School House
75. Gap School House
76. Fairview School House
77. Old Church at R. Mays
78. Extract School House
79. Brocks Creek School House
80. Mt. Pleasant School House
81. Kernstown (near Winchester)
82. Kauffmans School House (near Winchester)
83. Macedonia (near Winchester)
84. Stephen City
85. Big Spring (Luray)

# TENT MEETINGS SPAWN HIGHLAND RETREAT CAMPGROUNDS

By James L. Rush and James O. Lehman

Virginia Mennonite ministers, at great sacrifice to time and energy, reached out to the Highlands in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ as they understood it.

When weather was favorable many rotating ministers of Northern District “home base churches” (Trissels, Zion, Brennemans and Lindale) included in their preaching rotations a visit to Highland locations in northwestern Rockingham County and neighboring West Virginia counties.

In the 1930s and 40s they added two weeks of summer Bible school, thus harnessing many young people as teachers. By 1950 there were between 15 and 20 scattered meeting places and three-fourths of the membership of Northern District lived in the Highlands.

Church leaders observed a lack of ways to bring these isolated groups of believers together. When pastors Linden Wenger, John F. Shank and others discussed this, several ideas emerged: (One), hold conjoint fifth Sunday evening Fellowship meetings, and (two), hold an annual two-week conjoint revival meetings with a tent. Tent evangelism had become popular in the U. S.

So, an annual conjoint tent meeting emerged. What was needed? An empty field large enough for a tent and parking cars. Each year take fences down, get portable toilets, bring in electricity from roadway lines and obtain a tent.

So two-week tent revival meetings emerged, beginning and ending on Sunday nights. On the middle Sunday they held an all-day fellowship. Highland churches canceled their services that day and joined together for a morning Sunday school and worship service, followed by a noon carry-in meal and an afternoon program. During weekdays various ministers would take the evangelist to visit community homes.

For the first five years, 1951 to 1955, a field on the Robert See farm two miles south of Mathias was used for this purpose. Robert was a member of the Mt. Hermon church. Enthusiastically, this plan worked. Here, in brief, is an overview of the five years:

1951 – under the Virginia Mennonite Mission Board tent from Aug. 14 through Aug. 26, Andrew Hartzler from Denbigh, VA, ranged widely on the 15 topics he used. They included one on “Hell and one on “Holiness.” One diarist noted that he was hard on tobacco use. Valley View Church began the pattern of joining its Summer Bible School program with the tent meetings. On the middle Sunday the all-day Christian Life Conference had John R. Mumaw, Silas Brydger and Harold H. Lehman as speakers. A special feature that day was to have elderly minister Perry Shank reminisce how in his younger days he traveled for many years from his Broadway area home to various Highland schoolhouses to preach. 500 people attended that middle Sunday conference.

Imagine you were Ray or Emma Emswiler—pastor family of Valley View. Hold Summer Bible School in the morning, feed and house some teachers, attend nightly revival meetings, take the evangelist around to various homes in the afternoon, and attend afternoon or evening pre-service prayer meetings. During these busy days what time was left for farming, homemaking or quiet time?

1952 – August 10-24, with Elam Hollinger as evangelist. On the middle Sunday the Highland churches met conjointly for three services. Ministers from Highland churches took turns visiting homes with the evangelist. That included Ray Emswiler of Valley View, Linden Wenger of

Mt. Hermon, John F. Shank of Buckhorn and Sam Shank from Salem..

1953 – this series went three weeks, from July 12 to Aug. 2. Andrew Jantzi from New York brought his tent, his family, various trailers, tent caretaker Elton Moshier and a special group of singers—the Gingerich sisters, Elizabeth, Myrna, Betty and Anna. Moshier led singing most evenings, but Ray Emswiler and Bill Souder also led. Again topics ranged widely, from “Devotional Covering,” “Eternity,” to “Will the United Nations stop Russia? No, God will!” Around 12 confessions and three consecrations occurred during the three weeks.

1954, July 25, with Silas Brydge from Augusta County as evangelist. This year the all-day Fellowship meeting was held on the last Sunday and the final sermon was on “The Second Coming of Christ.”

By February, 1955 a new idea began to simmer. Why not buy land and build a permanent tabernacle to hold Bible conferences, youth activities, family and church retreats and family outings? The Highland Bible Conference Committee and the Mission Properties Committee set to work to find a permanent site.

That year (1955), again at the Sees, from July 10-24, A. Don Augsburger was the featured speaker. On Saturday and Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> large crowds came to the church fellowship days. Again, John Mumaw spoke, as did Myron Augsburger, who was by now an accomplished evangelist. That year in June he had become the evangelist for the Christian Laymen’s Tent Evangelism board from Orrville, Ohio and was on the road all summer doing tent meetings.<sup>1</sup>

Then abruptly the Highland tent meetings stopped. The 1956 and ‘57 tent meetings never materialized. The reasons are not altogether clear but lack of equipment, a site, safety, weather and various factors probably became factors. By January 1958 at the Mt. Hermon church the

decision was made to buy the Jesse Moyer farm of 82 acres for \$6,000 from Dr. Charles Hertzler, who had recently purchased the farm just north of his Green Valley Clinic.

The location is nestled between Church Mountain and West Mountain along Rt. 259, fifteen miles west and north of Broadway. Tent meetings again re-emerged from 1958 to 60, this time held on Highland Retreat grounds. Once the tabernacle was built and dedicated on May 12, 1963, that became the focus of activities. The next page includes a litany of events that emerged with a permanent tabernacle.

The reader now also needs to refer to the new Highland Retreat history booklet, which picks up the story beautifully in the section “Tent to Tabernacle: a place set apart for God.”

Interest mushroomed in camping after a pilot camp was tried in 1961. Since then Highland Retreat Camp has developed into a significant and major ministry. More land was added along the way as well as more buildings. Today we see the fine campus at Highland.

Arnold W. Cressman from Scottdale, PA wrote an article in the July 1965 *Gospel Herald*, entitled “New Tent Meeting.” Someone had suggested to him that church camps were “the new tent meeting.” Times had changed. Church camps were now rapidly dotting the Mennonite landscape. One minister had already suggested that nearly all of a large class of converts had accepted Christ at camp. “Family camps might be just the place where God can ‘break through to people.’”<sup>2</sup>

And so it is—a place where God has indeed broken through to people, particularly young people. In time the whole enterprise was more than Northern District wanted to manage, so a Highland Retreat Camping Association developed under the umbrella of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

<sup>1</sup>James O. Lehman, *Mennonite Tent Revivals: Howard Hammer and Myron Augsburger, 1952-1962*, Chap. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Cited in previous note, *Mennonite Tent Revivals*, 294-95.

## TABERNACLE DEVELOPS AND FULFILLS EARLY DREAMS

1958, July 4: a special Parent-Youth Christian Fellowship program under a tent began at 2:00 p.m. and continued into the evening. Everett Suter remembers helping to erect the tent. On July 6-20 – Andrew Jantzi held two weeks of tent meetings. Apparently, many or all sessions were on the book of Revelations. Virginia Mennonites had two tent meetings that summer—the Highland ones and inter-district tent meetings on July 27-August 10 on the Mennonite Hour grounds at Harrisonburg.

1959, July 4-19 – tent meetings at Highland. A Youth Activities Conference was held on July 4 and 5. Several speakers, including Don Augsburg, John R. Mumaw and J. Ward Shank. The Springdale Mennonite Church chorus from Augusta County sang on opening night. Minutes of the Ministerial Council indicate good response to the Highland meetings. Committee members liked an emphasis on doctrine and called for annual meetings.

1960, July 3-17 – Sanford Shetler scheduled for tent meetings but he cancelled. So, each Highland congregation prepared a program centered around a doctrinal theme and local pastors preached. The sessions were helpful in creating broader acquaintance among persons attending the various churches. Now, they had a permanent site, restrooms; electricity and water but still no permanent shelter.

1961 – News that the Virginia Conference tent would be sold; no tent meetings that summer, nor the following year, 1962. However, plans were developing for a 40 x 80 tabernacle at Highland Retreat. Fund-raising proceeded, construction developed, and on May 12, 1963 it was dedicated.

The summer of 1963 saw varied activities in the new tabernacle—Jamaica missions slide show, a series of meetings with Sanford Shetler (July 7-14), and a youth retreat July 26-28.

In 1964, again various tabernacle events—a “Your Church and You” conference, stewardship meetings with speakers J. Ward Shank, Harold Eshleman and Moses Slabaugh, viewing a film with Rowland Shank leading a discussion thereafter, and Myron Augsburg doing a five-night series on “The Holy Life.”

The next year (1965) witnessed a big summer of youth activities each Saturday, a song fest and film and a June 18 barbecue. In August David Augsburg served as evangelist and Harley Good as song leader for a well-attended series. Late that month a Highland Fellowship Meeting featured three speakers on the topic, “Where Do We Go From Here?”

Series of meetings developed each year thereafter until 1970, but hints arose that with people listening to many radio programs, tabernacle meetings began to lag a bit. The early 70s saw a few more Bible conferences and yearly 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday picnic and evening song services were held at least up to 1985.

### *Sources*

- Diaries: Emma Emswiler, Esther Emswiler Kraybill, Elton Moshier, Timothy Showalter
- Interviews: Esther Emswiler Kraybill, Irene Emswiler Good, Elton Moshier, Rowland Shank, Anna Lehman
- Minutes, Highland Conference Grounds Procurement Committee
- Minutes, Northern District Business Meetings
- Minutes, Northern District Ministerial Council
- Papers from the Clayton Showalter Collection in the VA Conference Archives
- Publications: *Missionary Light*, Jan. – Feb., 1952; Linden M. Wenger, “Tent Meetings at Mathias, *Missionary Light*, Nov. – Dec. 1955; Ray Emswiler, “Highland High Lights.”
- Linden M. Wenger, *Fifty Years in the Northern District*.

## 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations at Highland Retreat, 2008

About 50 former staff and board members gathered Friday evening, June 20 to swap stories, sing, and reminisce. Much of the sharing centered on significant encounters people had with God on the trails, in a cabin, or at a fireside worship experience. Harvey Yoder, a camp director from the 60s, led with his autoharp. Craig & Jill Snider, directors in the 80s, led with spirit and enthusiasm on their guitars. Ben Tyson, Matt Tieszen and Rebecca Tucker, current staff, led contemporary songs projecting lyrics and images on a screen. Everyone then gathered around a campfire and enjoyed popcorn from the kettle.

On Saturday the group continued sharing at a morning brunch. Most stayed for the evening Annual Steak Barbecue. A short program at the beginning recognized those who have served at the camp in leadership, food service, board members, support staff, lifeguards, councilors, and volunteers. Many at the barbecue identified with one of these groups. A significant new booklet highlighting Highland's past with essays and photos was introduced and sold. Jim Rush and Gloria Diener collaborated to do the research and compile the booklet.

Additional ways of celebrating this anniversary milestone include the following:

- A special logo for use throughout the year
- Obe Hostetter producing a pictorial DVD to be available at the Annual Fall Banquet
- Large banners printed and displayed
- Highland ministry featured at a delegate session of Virginia Mennonite Conference

- Special 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of a polo shirt available at the T-shirt shop

The task force who planned celebrative activities included Sarah Schoenhals, chair, Michael Shenk II, Peg Martin, Jim Rush and Paul Beiler.

*Paul Beiler*

### Charlottesville Mennonite Church Celebrates 50 years

September 6-7, 2008

Saturday evening 5:30-8:00 p.m. supper and reminiscing.

Sunday: 9:30 am worship and lunch.

Check for information updates at  
[www.charlottesvillemennonite.org](http://www.charlottesvillemennonite.org)

All former pastors are coming. Former members are invited to return

*Roy and Maren Hange, Pastors*

### ANNUAL MEETING OF SVMH

Come to the annual meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians:

Saturday Sept. 13, 9 am – Lindale Mennonite Church Library

Program: Ken & Ruth Heatwole reminisce about beginnings and early days of the Charlottesville Mennonite Church

- Jim Rush talk: How Highland tent meetings resulted in Highland Retreat Camp

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