



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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FEATURING TIMOTHY SHOWALTER, LONG-TIME VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE NORTHERN DISTRICT DEACON, MINISTER, BISHOP, HISTORIAN (1887-1957)

Showalter was ordained as a deacon on April 4, 1915 at age 27, then on June 10, 1932, at the Zion Mennonite Church he was ordained by lot as a minister. Finally on November 3, 1943, he was ordained bishop. By that time he was 55 years old, a seasoned churchman, secretary of Northern District executive committee, and experienced preacher in both "home base" churches (Lindale, Trissels, Zion) and a great deal of experience in preaching in mountain churches and schoolhouses.

His first sermon was preached at the Lindamood schoolhouse about three miles northeast of Orkney Springs. From 1937 till he died in 1957 he kept a diary. Here's how he described his experience in being chosen bishop:

Tues. Nov. 2, 1943 – "The main interests of the day were prayer and meditation because of the approaching ordination.

At 7:30 p.m. the church met at Zion to cast votes for a Bishop to assist Bro. Stauffer [J. L. Stauffer].

In solemn meeting in charge of Bro. S. H. Rhodes assisted by J. R. Driver and Truman H. Brunk and J. L. Stauffer, votes were received. The results were three nominees, Perry E. Shank, J. Ward Shank (son of Perry) and myself."

Wed. Nov. 3, 1943 – "Today was as could be expected a time of real heart searching. At 10:00 a.m. for examination of we three Brethren and our wives.

The ordination took place this eve at 7:30 p.m., when the lot fell upon me openly but what the Lord had led me to believe almost 14 years ago.

May God's grace sustain me. Bro. S. H. Rhodes again had charge of the service."

Bishop Timothy Showalter's Reminiscences of Many Preaching Points and Churches in Northern District

[Showalter enjoyed history as did his daughter Grace Showalter, long in charge of the EMC historical library. He has been great help in identifying preaching points and churches many of which have faded into oblivion. Here, with a bit of help from Harry Brunk's history, is largely what Showalter wrote in May 1956 in longhand. It is found in the Timothy Showalter Collection in the Archives. (Also see Showalter's list of 85 preaching points in the Summer 2008 issue of SMH, p. 2.)]

The early Plains and Newdale churches were close together and they may have alternated. In my memory Newdale was a 5th Sunday appointment.

Plains was originally built as an academy in 1826—a combination church and school house with a swinging partition which could be raised if needed to enlarge the church. It was on the river road on the south side of the road and river about halfway between Timberville and New Market.

Newdale Church was located three miles northeast of Timberville for Mennonites in that area and possibly scattered members who still lived in Shenandoah County.¹ It was a log building built in 1871 by the Mennonites and Brethren. We had a one-third interest. Our use of it was discontinued about 1910.

Harry Brunk called it a “weatherboarded log church, the logs being visible on the inside with the cracks being plastered. It was a typical Mennonite meetinghouse, but one thing about it suggested Brethren influence. It had a provision for lights. The candle holders were formed by a piece of tin with a block nailed on one end. Each block had a

¹Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, Vol. 1, 250.

hole in it in which the candle was placed. These pieces of tin were hung on nails placed along the side of the church. It is not known that Mennonites ever held evening meetings. Reportedly, Northern District bishop John Geil was opposed to them (Brunk, Vol. I, 251.).

Fairview Schoolhouse may have been south of New Market, near where the Fairview Brethren Church stands in the vicinity of Endless Caverns.

Mt. Carmel was built in 1881 west/southwest of Fulks Run in connection with the United Brethren Church. Mennonites did not use it so many years and our interests were sold in 1903 and funds used to build the Pleasant Grove Church in the Sweedlin Valley in West Virginia.

Later, after we had ceased to use Mt. Carmel we held regular services at the Fawley schoolhouse, one mile west. This is also now known as the Mt. Pleasant schoolhouse. At this same time there were regular appointments at the Shoemaker schoolhouse one mile south of the Hebron Church. When the Hebron Church was built in 1915, both of these schoolhouses were abandoned.

Holmans Creek schoolhouse was first built for school and church use in 1849. About 1890 it was rebuilt as a union church. Mennonites discontinued early in the 1900's but later some services were held around 1940. We are still considered as having a part interest there (in 1956).

Lost River was no doubt a general term, as a diary note by John S. Coffman in October 1886 noted that he with Samuel Shank held services in four places over a weekend—(1) at a point east of Mathias (Basores) in a schoolhouse, (2) at the Lower Cove Run Baptist Church at Lost City, (3) at the Job School, which was later called Mine Spring schoolhouse near what is now Salem Church, and (4) Bachmans Schoolhouse.

Later the Bachmans church was built there in 1890.

The Bean settlement was north of the road that leads from Wardensville to Moorefield, WV, about seven miles north of the Salem church. Services were held in this area at least as early as shortly after the close of the Civil War, and may have been earlier. I know of no mention of any services being held in the Bean Settlement later than 1886.

One of Joseph Funk's sons moved some miles northeast of that location in the 1840's and he is said to have been always a Mennonite.² John S. Coffman visited in that vicinity for a few days on the trip noted above but he made no mention of having held any services in that area.

We return to Mathias, WV. East of Mathias is a Cove where work was already established before 1876, as noted from Coffman's diary. There are some reasons to believe this was an outgrowth from Powder Springs as it is just over the mountain and there were family connections. Services were held at the foot of the mountain where the road crosses from the Woodland Church to Mathias. This was called Basores. The original school has long since disappeared. Later another was built.

Two miles farther south was another schoolhouse in the "Upper Cove" near Whitmers where services were also held. This house is also gone and another was built one-half mile farther south. This is still standing and is now (1956) the property of the church and is known as the "Cove Church."

This Cove Church which met in the Whitmer schoolhouse was recently given to the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center. They cut it into three pieces, and hauled it by truck all the way to the Heritage Center near Harrisonburg where it was re-assembled. Today the Whitmer School/Cove Church with a bell tower is appreciated by the public.

It's time to mention Powder Springs. This place of worship and school house was first built in 1858, about one mile northeast of Orkney Springs in partnership with the Brethren and Lutherans. Later a church was built. Because of a shift of membership we finally ceased to have services there in the early 1940's. My last appointment there was in 1942.

Because of the gradual shift of people geographically, services were begun at the Lindamood schoolhouse, about three miles further northeast.

It was at this schoolhouse that I preached my first sermon after my ordination June 10, 1932.

When we could no longer hold services there a small building was built nearby on the land of Paul Markley and was called Woodland Tabernacle. This was used until the present Woodland Church was built at the crossroads nearby where the roads from Mathias WV to Mt. Jackson, VA via Hudson Cross Roads, and the road from Orkney Springs to Jerome, VA intersect.

Services were held for some time south of Orkney, one mile on the Runion Creek road in the Barb schoolhouse. Services were discontinued before 1932 as I never preached there.

I was told by Minister Christian Brunk (1823-1906) that the ministers preached in a community in the Orkney direction at a place called Supin Lick. The Supin Lick Ridge is the eastern boundary of the Stony Creek which drains the Orkney and the Powder Springs community. I have made some inquiry but have been unable to locate the place called Supin Lick.

Christian Brunk spoke of it being a strongly German people and they appreciated a German sermon, which my great-grandfather Daniel Showalter (1802-1889) preached.

Churches west of Brocks Gap were up the river about two miles southwest of Valley View. First

²This is of interest because it has often been assumed that none of Joseph Funk's children stayed with the Mennonites.

there were services in the home of Jacob May and on the mountain where the Criders Camp Run road crosses the top.

By 1900 there were also services held in the Caplingers Chapel, an E. U. B. church near the Criders post office. The old school house on the mountain was near the road where it crosses the top. Later another was built a few hundred yards south of the old one, one half in Virginia and the other half in West Virginia! This became known as the Mt. Home school. Meetings were held here until in the last few years (remember Showalter is writing in 1956).

Most of the folks moved from the mountain, and those who remain mostly have the means to come to Valley View. In 1922 the Valley View Church was built and now all services are held here.

North of Valley View, up on the branch of the river known as Bennets Run is a school house where services were held for a number of years. This also is no longer used.

There is another schoolhouse on the mountain about five miles south of Mt. Home near Cow Knob, which was known as the Turner school. There are no permanent residents in that area now.

Before going too far I will mention the Dull Hunt school which is on the Dry River Road about four or five miles west of Fulks Run where some services were held. Hebron is accessible to these folks now.

An outgrowth from the Criders and Mt. Home work is that in Pendleton, Grant County field. First meetings were held in an old Tannery a few hundred yards south of the Pleasant Grove Church. Some faint traces of the place can still be seen.

Later the services were held in the Dale Hill schoolhouse about one-fourth mile east of where the Pleasant Grove church is located. In 1903 the church house was built and since then the services have been held there. Services were also held down the Valley about three miles at the Valley schoolhouse.

Services also began to be held on the Hinkle Mountain schoolhouse in the edge of Grant County and the Mine Spring schoolhouse which is on the Ft. Seybert—Moorefield Road about one mile north of the Pendleton—Hardy line. Since the members moved from the Hinkle Mt. (and the Wine Spring schoolhouse was sold to private parties), services are held at the Peru schoolhouse a few miles farther north.

In the first part of my ministry in the early thirties, I held several services in the Dumpling Run Brethren Church a few miles farther north.

Services are held in two school houses in northwest Rockingham on what we call the Crider Mountain. At first meetings were held in an old log church, which was a community building. This was about 1908 on the land that belonged to Riley May.

Some time later May's house burned and the meeting place was moved about one-half mile west into Hardy County, WV, in the Crider schoolhouse, which is still being used.

By about 1930 there were some members where the road crosses from Bergton to Peru, WV, and meetings were held in the Mt. Top schoolhouse. At present there is some interest in building a church between the two points to unite this field.

There was or is another schoolhouse up on the road from Mathias to Moorefield which was used for a number of years. It was called the Topsy schoolhouse. Since there are only a few members here, meetings are presently being held in the home of William Tusing, about one mile south of the Helmick Rocks. South and east of this mountain are the Whetzel and Dove hollows.

For a few years we had services in the Whetzel Hollow at the Sulphur Springs schoolhouse. I had the first service that was held there. That was on April 9, 1933. Services were only continued here a few years and the house is now gone.

For a longer period of time services have been held in Dove Hollow, at the Buckhorn schoolhouse.

I do not know the exact date but it was before 1932. A church has now been built about one mile nearer the Lost River State Park and has the same name as the old schoolhouse, which school is also gone into history.

We return to the Cove area. Ministers went from the Upper Cove to the Lower Cove area, then on to Hinegardner's schoolhouse a few miles east of Lost City, WV. It may have been in connection with this field that they had services at the Old Baptist Church at Lost City in J. S. Coffman's time.

Ministers continued from that point to Kinseys Run and the Bachmans settlement, already noted before. In connection with Mine Spring, now Salem, appointments were held at the Vaughan's schoolhouse a few miles west of Lost River, WV. After the Progressive Brethren built a church nearby we had our services there until they were discontinued a few years before 1956. After most of the members moved from the Bachman vicinity to north of Wardensville, meetings were finally discontinued and the church is now (1956) for sale.

Services were held three miles north of Wardensville in the Crest Hill Presbyterian Church, which was bought in 1924. There were also appointments held in Wardensville in a church called the Mission Church. According to my records it seems that in the year 1932 all the services were held there.

Coming back towards the "home field," for some years we had services at the Strawderman schoolhouse west of Mathias near the State Park. These folks are now part of the Buckhorn Church.³ About one mile north of the WV line there was the Moyer school; later another one was built nearby called the Halterman school. Some of the earlier services were held here in the late 1890's or about 1900; still later at the Capon Run schoolhouse just south of the state line was also used.

In 1937 the Mt. Hermon Church was built to serve this community. About 1900 General Roller

owned a large tract of land two miles north of Fulks Run and built a factory to extract tanning fluid from oak wood and bark. A schoolhouse was built in which we held services.

Later the Riverside Community Church was built; [this may be the one along Rt. 259 that was washed down the river and into Harley Good's fields in the tremendous flood of the mid-1980's]. We also held services there, as well as in one of the member's homes.

Services were held for about five years at the Hamman schoolhouse on the road from Mt. Jackson to Orkney Springs about six miles west of Mt. Jackson. Recently the workers from EMC began using an old church in Mt. Jackson for services. This is as yet not fully tied into the Northern District work.

[Not in 1956, but in time that became the Mt. Jackson Mennonite Church, later renamed Windhaven and a member of Virginia Mennonite Conference. A few years ago it left VMC and joined the Ashland Brethren Church. ed.]

A few miles north of Singers Glen is a community known as Brocks Creek. Here around 1920 work was begun in the schoolhouse of that name and by 1928 the Morning View Mennonite Church was built.

Just inside the mouth of Brocks Gap a road leads north up the Tunis or Runions Creek. About four miles upstream work was started around 1912 in an old store building. In 1956 a new meetinghouse (now Crossroads Mennonite Church). was built.

For some 25 years we used a Community Church north of Broadway. In 1956 we are the sole users. We also made an effort in 1940-41 to open a place of work east of Melrose in the Forest Grove schoolhouse but it did not meet with much encouragement, so it was abandoned.

This leaves two "home churches" Zion and Lindale, which are not included in this review.

Timothy Showalter

³Remember that this was in the days before Mathias Mennonite Church formed and picked up some remnants.

Abraham Shank (1829-1901)

[Timothy Showalter, as a historian gives us considerable insight into the life and work of Abraham Shank, who was ordained in the Northern District about 1861-62 as a minister and as a bishop to succeed John Geil in 1875. Very few records from the hand of Shank survive apparently. The archives has less than a handful. Hence, this account by Showalter, of which we only give selected portions, is significant.]

Abraham (sometimes known as Abram) Shank was born October 16, 1829, and died unexpectedly on June 22, 1901. He and his brother Samuel Shank were ministers and sons of Bishop Samuel Shank whose ministry was revoked in 1859 (he quarreled with a neighbor over a spring, ed.)

Their mother was a Funk, daughter of Christian Funk, whose father was pioneer Henry Funk who came to the Valley around 1785. Abraham's grandparents were Henry (ordained minister 1784 and bishop about 1810) and Maria Reiff Shank. Henry is buried at Lindale. His stone says that for 52 years he was "a diligent minister of the Gospel."

Abraham was married to Sallie Showalter, daughter of Daniel Showalter. Her father was a son of Joseph Showalter and grandson of David Showalter, a native of Chester County, PA. David's wife was a daughter of Heinrich Roth (Henry Rhodes) who bought his land in the Valley in 1784.

Abram Shank was a man of more than ordinary talent and a well-read man, despite limited educational opportunities. He was also a fluent speaker. I can still remember of him as a speaker that I liked to hear. He was a man of ready wit. I remember his reaction one Sunday when standing on the front porch of our house. Some boys fastened a fence post to a cow's tail and Shank enjoyed a hearty laugh at watching the cow's distress. Actually, my father thought he was given to a bit more levity than was good for a bishop!

Abram Shank was ordained in September 1875 to assist Bishop John Geil, who at that time was 76. However, Geil lived to the ripe old age of

90 and died in 1889. Thus Shank had the counsel of his senior bishop for about 14 years.

Another interesting thing I recall as a child was to hear Bro. Shank interline hymns on occasions of large gatherings when there were not enough books to reach around. He would stand in the pulpit and read two lines of the verse and pause while the congregation sang them, then they would pause while he read two more lines. This they did till the hymn was finished.

Bro. Shank entered the ministerial and bishop work with a whole heart. He did much riding to preach the Word in the Northern District, both at home and in the mountains of VA and WV. Even now, 55 years later after he was gone, old people frequently refer to Abe Shank and his work. He was called upon to preach funerals among members and non-members. A great-granddaughter a few years ago found a box of obituaries which he saved—a little over a hundred in number from 1874-1801.¹ One day he preached two in one day, one on the way to Criders, the other at his destination. Perhaps he had a good horse or a short funeral service!

Shank filled preaching appointments at several places in Shenandoah County, Page County and Fauquier County. He held funerals from Page County to the east and Pendleton County, WV to the west and Augusta County to the south and Washington County, MD to the north. He was called to do a little bishop work in the last-named county to the north.

In physique Abram Shank was a well-built muscular man of perhaps 165 or 170 pounds and was not known to be sick much. I was told he would carry a grain cradle, whistling as he went.

He died two months after his minister brother Samuel died. Abe had already chosen his own funeral text—Colossians 3:4, "When Christ who is our life shall appear then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Abe and Sallie had two daughters, Mandy, the wife of Reuben Rhodes and Margaret, wife of Amos Martin, mother of Lewis Martin and grandmother of minister Richard Martin.

(continued on back cover)

¹The writer, Timothy Showalter, thinks Shank preached many more funerals in the early years of his ministry before 1874.

BOOK REVIEWS

(with some shortening and editing)

Amish Soul on Ice. By John Keim. Baltimore: Publish America. 2007. Pp. 64. \$12.95.

Author Keim describes growing up as “I always thought of myself as being on ice, sliding ... away from what I had accepted as fact as a youngster.” Much of his sliding away from his past was fueled by his father “moving away from *his roots*” (Old Order Amish).

Older brothers’ sliding further fueled changes for John. Eight of the nine Keim children left the Old Order or the Beachy Amish church after adulthood. John was so excited when brother Albert N. Keim got a car. The first time he sat in it he thought he was in “car heaven.”

When John was eight the family moved to the Valley of Virginia to a farm in Augusta County. Keim describes his feeling as “absolute joy” as the family now related to the Beachy Amish and had cars, electricity and phones. Predictably, with proximity to Eastern Mennonite College and the larger Mennonite community, the move had major implications for John and siblings.

His “slide” accelerated as he went to school, and eventually on to EMC. That was a thorn to his father and the church, as EMC was considered “a hotbed of heresy.” Life kept changing as he watched older siblings sliding farther away.

John writes a series of stories about his life and not surprisingly they don’t all fit neatly chronologically. Well, that’s the way stories are. And he uses good humor as he penned this “somewhat irreverent look at my past.” You will laugh at the story of the outdoor privy at one of his homes, or the time he and his brothers found a bottle of whiskey and fed it to a rooster and dog!

Keim’s stories are both hilarious and sobering, and probably relevant to slides many of us experienced in our own lives, as we have undergone major changes in lifestyle and outlook on life.

Jim Good

We Kept the Angels Busy. By Mahlon M. Horst. Pub. by author, 2007. Pp. 390. Photos. \$13.50.

Mahlon’s book was released when Virginia Mennonite Missions commemorated mission work in Eastern Kentucky. Among those honored were Mahlon and Leah Shank Horst and Direl and Bertha Fannin Fyffe.

At some point two women were heard chatting. One said, “If you want a compilation of stirring stories, get in touch with Mahlon and Leah Horst.” That comment set in motion the production of this volume. Autobiographically, Mahlon’s story describes formative years on a farm near Hagerstown, MD, and continues to their retirement in the Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community.

After Bible study at Eastern Mennonite College and marriage to Leah from Chambersburg, PA, they were appointed to church planting at Relief, KY by the Virginia Mission Board in 1946. From that point onward, they labored in Kentucky for eight years, then forty more years in Page County, VA, where they established the Lucas Hollow Church, near the town of Stanley.

Working mostly with mountain people and cultures provided numerous occasions for Mahlon to give credit to the angels. He conducted at least 230 funerals in his years at Lucas Hollow.

Over half of the book deals with the eight Kentucky years as they experienced disappointments, failures, and highlights of God’s leading and blessing. Contention and conflict between church leaders led them to cut short their stay in Kentucky. Warwick River Church people will read with interest about the young people who came as a gospel team in the early 1950’s.

The book is written as Mahlon would tell his stories. It has a tendency to move from one thought to another without good bridging. Better editing and proofing of grammar and simple typographical errors would have helped the volume.

But content is most important. Says Mahlon, “I wrote these pages with the conviction that God takes ordinary people, fills them with His Spirit and makes them useful and fruitful in his service.” It testifies to a couple who lived “dangerously” for God.

Jim Good

His father, Samuel Sr., served in all three offices, deacon, minister and bishop. Later minister and bishop Lewis Shank was a nephew. At the present time (1956) two great-nephews J. Ward Shank and the writer (Timothy Showalter) serve as minister and bishop. Bishop Abraham Shank and his wife were buried in the Zion cemetery.

It is interesting that during Shank's life seven church houses were built, three of them as union churches with the Brethren—Newdale, 1871, Mt. Carmel, 1881, and Liberty Union at Quicksburg, VA in 1890. Four other meetinghouses built in Shank's time were Bachman's, 1890, in Hardy County, WV, the local Zion church in 1885, Lindale, 1898, and Trissels in 1900. In his day the first Sunday schools were held.

Timothy Showalter

[Editor's Note: Abraham Shenk strikes one as a complex combination—mostly conservative, even strikingly so, but progressive in being involved in union churches with the Brethren and in preaching at many places. He was adamantly critical of the John S. Coffman series of revival meetings held at Weavers Church in December 1888, when 44 people committed to the Lord and were baptized at Weavers.

When these converts were ready, Bishop Samuel Coffman requested Shank to come and help with the large number of baptisms, Shank forthrightly refused. At the next meeting of VA Conference the question was discussed and the controversy became so heatedly sharp that L. J. Heatwole listened for two hours then went home greatly disheartened, and the next day did not attend Conference. He says Shank declared

that the revival meetings had resulted in a great deal more harm than good.

The tradition had long been in vogue that a minister could not hold meetings more than three days or nights in succession at the same place. That rule stayed in place until in 1900 George R. Brunk I came from Kansas and broke the tradition and got away with it at Weavers and Lindale. Thereafter, it became common to have revival meetings extending varying lengths.

Of interest is the fact that Abram and brother Samuel Shank both cautiously stayed out of the Middle District trouble that culminated at the turn of the century in the formation of the Old Order Mennonite group.]

NEWS ITEMS:

- 2009 is coming shortly; don't forget to send in your \$6.00 membership for 2009 to Jim Rush. See name and address on back cover of this issue of *SMH*.
- Reportedly a major new Showalter book is out, but we have not yet seen a copy.
- Elwood Yoder is working on a history of the Zion Mennonite Church.
- The first meeting of the committee charged with discussing the feasibility of a major development of a new and larger magazine, and issues related to the merging of SVMH and the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Center, met for the first time on Oct. 7.

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