

SHENANDOAH MENNONITE HISTORIAN

Volume 2, Number 1

Winter 1995

Quarterly publication of the
Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians

Family Almanac a Favorite for 85 Years

For a period of eighty-five years, from 1871 to 1955, the *Family Almanac* was printed and sold first by John F. Funk and Brother (1871-1876) and then by the Mennonite Publishing House (1876-1955).

The *Family Almanac* was a publication after the style of the Farmer's Almanacs with some changes to more fully be of interest to its Mennonite readership. It was printed in 6"x9" pamphlet form and contained approximately sixty pages.

This almanac contained a page for each month giving daily astronomical calculations such as times for rising and setting of the sun and moon and aspects of the planets and moon phases. There was also a column for anniversary days with room for famous person's birth and death days, including those Mennonites of renown.

A page near the beginning gave facts which were of a yearly nature. Equinox dates were given as were dates for holidays such as Easter which are changeable from year to year. Global eclipses for both the sun and the moon were announced as well.

From 1888 until his death in 1932, L. J. Heatwole, a resident of Dale Enterprise and a bishop in Idle District, was the calculator of these pages. In fact, although he had died in December of 1932

at the age of eighty, his calculations for 1933 were included in that year's almanac.

Between these pages and continuing after them were pages containing inspirational poetry, reprints of tracts and devotional pieces, health tips, and information of all sorts. For instance, in one issue is a biography of Menno Simons. Included as well were recipes, household hints such as those found today in the Ask Heloise column, and trivial facts. Did you know, for instance, that in 1875 the world was using 250,000,000 pounds of tea a year.

As a source of information for our Mennonite History, the *Family Almanac* contains listings of church agencies and persons in leadership roles both in North America and throughout the rest of the world. Names and addresses of bishops, ministers and

deacons are also a part of this section.

Perhaps the most entertaining parts of the *Family Almanac*, however, are the advertisements. Everything from apple butter to men's suits, from buggies to fountain pens were available to the reader. Early editions advertised free land in the west along with free rail transportation for homesteaders. Later advertisements tried to show the importance of a Christian education at the Mennonite institutions. Always present were the listings of other publications that were for sale from Mennonite Publishing House.

For those wishing to see what these almanacs were like, they are now on microfilm. The Menno Simons Historical Library at Eastern Mennonite University has a set and will be glad to help any who wish to view them.

Advisory Group Meets for First Time

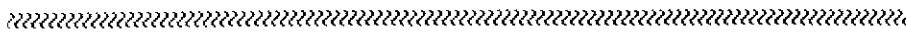
Feeling the need to have additional feedback from persons in the Mennonite community who are interested in the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, an advisory group was convened on February 18, 1995. Twelve persons were present along with the executive committee for a time of reporting past activities and then a period of open discussion concerning the future goals and focus of our Historian's group. Much of the discussion concerned the need to have as much involvement as possible from the different Mennonite groups that are present in the Shenandoah Valley. The hope is that our common past can bring us together for historical endeavors.

Digging Through Cemetery Records

As Spring approaches and the weather moderates, a Sunday afternoon trip to a local cemetery to study history may be in order. Especially if there is a need to fill in a branch in the family tree.

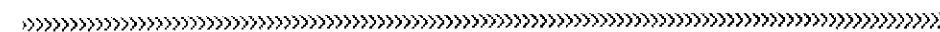
How does one know where to go to find that long lost ancestor? Perhaps the first source is the local library. Both the Rockingham Public Library and the Menno Simons Historical Library have a copy of an unpublished book by J. Robert Swank which lists most of the cemeteries and those that are buried within them. Most of the records are fairly accurate and can give a jumping off point for further research.

If the particular cemetery has been located, possibly the next step is to find the church or local family historian. Many churches have a list to help locate specific gravestones and family plots. Be prepared to learn something old about your family!



Quick Quiz -Answers on last page

- 1) The original name of the Springdale Mennonite Church was
 - a) Kendig's
 - b) Stauffer's
 - c) Fauber's
 - d) Gochenour's
- 2) Who of the following was not a member of the committee that in 1847 compiled and arranged the first English hymn book published by the Mennonites in America, "Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs".
 - a) Joseph Wenger
 - b) Joseph Funk
 - c) Daniel Good
 - d) David Hartman
- 3) According to Harry A. Brunk, which two persons were the first to carry the Mennonite faith into West Virginia?
 - a) Samuel Coffman
 - b) Christian Good
 - c) Sem Weaver
 - d) Martin Burkholder



Valley Mennonite Churches

Pike Mennonite Church The Valley's Second Meetinghouse

The second church to be constructed by the Mennonites of Virginia was the Pike Church located just south of Harrisonburg.

It was constructed in 1825 on one and one half acres of land purchased from Joseph Wenger, John and Mary Landes, and Elizabeth and Susannah Wenger.

The deed was not recorded until 1829. Church leaders Abraham Nisewanger and Frederick Rhodes were listed as the purchasers as Trustees of the Mennonist Fraternity. The purpose of said purchase was the use of a meeting house and a school house. For some time it was called Moyers Church, probably because it bordered on the property of Peter Moyers.

The first small log church was built just west of the Valley Pike, Route 11, probably near the location of the present church building. Logs for the church were taken from the woods of S. M. Burkholder of near Dale Enterprise. Early ministers were Abraham Nisewanger, Frederick

Rhodes and Peter Burkholder. There probably were others as well since no one was assigned to specific congregations.

In 1878 it became necessary to rebuild and enlarge the original Pike Church. Martin Blosser was chosen to be in charge of work which produced a 40 by 50 foot weatherboarded meeting house. It had a slate roof until 1917 when that was replaced with a metal one. A long pulpit stood along the west end, flanked by "amen corners". Two tiers of benches were divided down the middle with a solid partition. The women sat on one side, the men on the other.

Sneak Preview of the Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians will convene on Oct. 7, 1995. Theme for this year will be the Mennonites in the Civil War.

Editor's Note

Through the first five issues of the Shenandoah Mennonite Historian, almost all of the articles have been written by myself and my wife, Janet. Starting with the next issue, I hope to include articles written by others. If you would like to have an article included in an upcoming issue, please let me know. Or perhaps you could recommend someone who has expertise on a specific subject of Valley Mennonite history.

---Randall E. Shank, Ed.

Jacob Geil (1746-1794)

Jacob Geil was born in Alsace Germany in 1746. He came to America in 1754 with his father J. Conrad Geil. They settled in what is now known as Montgomery County Pennsylvania. There are also several deeds in Pennsylvania that indicate Jacob lived in Chester and Bucks counties as well. After the revolutionary war he and his family moved to Rockingham County Virginia, where he purchased 500 acres from David Brenneman. The deed is dated May 23rd 1783. This farm was situated just south of Broadway on the Linville Creek near Bowman's Mill. Jacob Geil was a farmer and a weaver by trade. Jacob died in 1794 and is buried on the homestead, where in June 1913 a new tombstone was erected by his descendants that reads: "In Memory of Jacob Geil, Born in Germany in 1746, Died in 1794."

Jacob Geil married four times and had children by his first three wives. Not much is known about his wives. Anna Clymer, daughter of John Clymer, was married to Jacob around 1767 and they had seven children. A Miss Fly was his second wife and to her were born three children. His third wife's name is not known, but she had one daughter. Miss Trissel was his last wife. Jacob and his family were members of the Mennonite Church.

Jacob Geil's children were:

Abraham born in 1769 married Mary Garges in 1795. When Abraham was 26 years old they

moved to Bucks County PA. They had eight children.

Jacob born in 1771 married Elizabeth Beery and moved to Bremen in Fairfield County Ohio. He was a minister in the Mennonite Church. They had ten children.

Susan born in 1773 married Christian Funk. He was a farmer and maker of sickles. They lived in Rockingham County VA and had ten children. They are buried at Trissels Mennonite Church.

Nancy born in 1775 married Jacob Beery. They moved to Ohio where they were farmers. They also had a family of ten children.

John born in 1778 married Elizabeth Fretz. He was a minister in the Mennonite Church. They settled in Bucks County PA and had nine children.

Catherine married Christian Kratz. They lived in Pennsylvania and had no children.

Mary born around 1780 married Samuel Godshall. They had five children and lived at Doylestown in Bucks County PA.

Phillip married Elizabeth Garges. They lived near Philadelphia PA. They had three children.

Rebecca married John Schrauger. All we know of them is that they lived at Doylestown like her sister Mary.

Bettie married David Allebaugh.

Barbara born in 1783 married Samuel Swartz. They settled in Shenandoah County VA. He was a weaver by trade, and their farm was known as the "Meems". Barbara and Samuel had eight children.

After their father's death in 1794, all of the children moved on except Susan and Barbara. Abraham's son, John Geil, was born in Pennsylvania in 1799 and moved to the Valley in 1820. He lived and worked with his uncle Christian Funk in sickle making till 1827. In 1822 John married Mary Driver, the daughter of Lewis and Barbara Driver. In 1827 they bought a farm at the Marsh near New Market. He was ordained in 1840 as a minister in the Mennonite Church and served as Bishop from 1859 till his death in 1889. John and Mary had thirteen children, one of whom was also named John Geil. He served the Virginia Mennonite Conference as a minister.

Jacob Geil lived in the Shenandoah Valley for a short eleven years, but his descendants in the valley are numerous.

Some of the family names of Jacob Geil's descendants in the Valley are, Geil, Wenger, Heatwole, VanPelt, Beery, Good, Holsinger, Burkholder, Snell, Rhodes, Niswander, Shank, Brenneman, Showalter, Blosser, Driver, Wampler, Cook, Painter, Simmons, Nelson, Wilfong and Fulk.

Sources:

Geil History, by Joseph H. Wenger
History of Bucks County Pennsylvania, by William W.H. Davis. Volume III
History of Mennonites in Virginia 1727-1900, by Harry Anthony Brunk

Wanted: Information on where to find copies or clippings of Harrisonburg newspaper from Aug. 20-29, 1919 concerning news of the Mennonite General Assembly which met in Assembly Park, Harrisonburg. Jim Rush, 780 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Lehman: Would like information on David Lehman, born Oct. 5, 1835 and his wife, Mary Anne Wenger, born Jan. 20, 1861, both

Notes & Queries

of Rockingham County. Joanne Blakley, 6493 Tahawash, Cochiti Lake, NM 87083

Wanted: Information on parents, grand-parents, and great grand-parents of Christian Bixler, born Oct. 3, 1789 in Rockingham County, VA. Married Elizabeth Hiestand, 1815 in Rockingham County. Harold K. Johnson, 2858

Thornton Ln., Indianapolis, IN 46268-1272

Shenk: Looking for information regarding Jacob Shenk (1835-1860) married Mary Ann Mason (1837-1924). Jacob was born and lived in Rockingham County. Had children John B., Catherine, Mary Elizabeth, and Benjamin. Mary Ann married (2) Peter Burkholder and they moved to Iowa. Laurie Shawver, 13231 S. Rangeline Rd., Ashland Mo. 65010

To become a member of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and to receive future copies of this newsletter, send name and address and 1995 dues (\$10 per couple, \$6 for single) to:
Jim Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive,
Harrisonburg, VA. 22801.

The "Notes & Queries" section of this newsletter is meant to be a forum whereby the reader can obtain information about Shenandoah Mennonite families and happenings. If you have a need for such information, send us a letter with your inquiry. We also will consider short notes which may be of interest to others. Be sure to send your name and address so that others can reply to you. We will attempt to print as many queries as space on this page allows. Send to Randall Shank, P.O. Box 870, Broadway, Va. 22815

Quick Quiz Answers: 1)a 2)c 3)a & d

Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians
780 Parkwood Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Edward Yoder