



The three Unionists held their position until war began and the total turnaround in feelings occurred.<sup>4</sup> Other candidates not chosen, wrote long letters in the *Spectator* on January 22. They also claimed to be "steadfast Union men." Eloquently it was pleaded,

Should war follow the dissolution [of the Union], the consequences must be of the most frightful character. Brother would be arrayed against brother, and the whole land would be drenched with blood. The border country would be ravaged and laid wast[e] with fire and sword. Firesides and fields would be desolated by invading armies and the wail of the widow and the orphan would be heard in all our valleys!

When the Convention began meeting in mid-February Unionists held a solid majority. Secessionists, led by former governor, Henry A. Wise, remained quite vocal, however. Compromises were discussed, but mostly they waited to see what Lincoln would say in March in his inaugural address.

Everyone was disappointed with Lincoln's remarks, but some Unionists still had hope. Augusta County's own John B. Baldwin even had a special meeting with Abraham Lincoln on April 4 to try to work out a compromise and avoid civil war. He found Lincoln unwilling to bend from his position of saying that the Union must be saved at all costs. When Baldwin left Lincoln's office he warned him that if shots were fired in Charleston harbor "from whichever side, Virginia herself will be out in forty eight hours. If there is a gun fired at Sumter, this thing is gone."<sup>5</sup>

After Lincoln's inaugural address the "states-rights Democrat" *Staunton Vindicator* had turned about face and

swung to the secessionist position. But the *Spectator*, as late as April 9, three days before Fort Sumter was fired upon, happily reported that the Convention had voted against secession the previous Thursday by a vote of 89 to 45.

Then came the firing upon Fort Sumter on April 12. War had begun. The *Spectator*, now wavering, announced it on April 16, two days before Bishop Hildebrand noted the beginning of war in his diary. Local militia were beginning to form, noted the newspaper. By April 23 the *Spectator* had completed its total turnaround also. Sadly the editor noted how hard he had tried to urge peace and compromise in order to avoid war, but now Lincoln has taken the country to war. This would now be "more than folly and madness--it would be in the HIGHEST DEGREE CRIMINAL." Our country is doomed. We must rebel "against usurpation, tyranny and military despotism." We have no choice but "to fight for our State, homes and firesides."<sup>6</sup>

Lincoln's call for 75,000 troops on April 15 was the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back" for Virginians. By April 17 Virginia was as good as out of the Union when the Virginia Convention voted to secede. However, the general population still needed to vote on the issue. That vote was scheduled for May 23. Now the pressure was on for Virginia to join the Confederacy and go to war.

Why include all this discussion on the politics and background to the May 23 vote on secession. It points up the stressful times, the very fast turn-around in feelings, and the ironies. Virginia Mennonites, like other American Mennonites, had long been taught to pray for government leaders and obey them. Now they were suddenly faced with making a major decision which government was going to be theirs. And what about the slavery issue?

Virginia Mennonites never had slaves, so far as we know. In fact, Augusta County was known to have few slaves, but it had one of the largest populations in Virginia of free blacks.<sup>7</sup>

As noted in Part I, Virginia Mennonite Conference met April 27-28 and the minutes show no discussion on secession. It is easy to imagine, however, that in many private conversations a good bit of discussion occurred about it. Mennonites were in a real quandary over this vote. One wishes there was a record what Bishop Hildebrand discussed with minister Peter Shumaker when he paid him a visit on the evening of May 21, two days before the vote on secession took place!

The vote in Augusta County on May 23 was overwhelming, so much so that it raises questions! The vote for secession was 3,130 to ten! The ten votes were scattered, with one or two votes against secession in Mt. Sidney, Spring Hill, Parnassus, Greenville, Midway, Deerfield, Craigsville, and Churchville--none of them being areas having strong numbers of Mennonites.<sup>8</sup> Either the Mennonites of Augusta County stayed home that day or they voted in favor of secession. It seems most likely that they followed the example of their bishop and voted for secession.

Samuel Horst's careful research reveals that at least the following Virginia Mennonites (mostly from Rockingham County) voted for secession--John Brunk, David Driver, Daniel P. Good, Abraham D., Gabriel D., and Simeon Heatwole, David E., Frederick S., and Henry L. Rhodes, Jacob Shank, Jr., Emanuel Suter and Noah Wenger. Some who voted in favor said they were persuaded to do so, but several claimed to have received dire threats of being hung or shot.

Some in Rockingham County voted against secession. Jacob

Wenger claimed to be one of 11 who voted against it despite threats of hanging. Henry and Joseph Beery also voted against it. We should also note the individuals who failed to vote that day--Samuel Shank, Samuel Coffman, Daniel J. Good, Peter Blosser, David C. Brenneman and John Geil.<sup>9</sup>

We return once more to Bishop Jacob Hildebrand's diary of 1861. We noted in Part I that on June 13 he called for a church service on that Thursday because President Jefferson Davis had called for a day of prayer. Jacob says very little about the war. He does note that he heard the cannon on June 21, the day before he headed for Rockingham County for Saturday and Sunday meetings at Brenneman's church near Edom, upon which occasion Abraham Shank was ordained as a minister and Jacob Geil became a deacon.

June was a significant month for the Hildebrand congregation. On Sunday June 9, 1861, the bishop organized a Sunday school, an event well known to Harry A. Brunk, the Virginia historian. The Sunday school may have lasted only for a short time. The bishop mentions it in his diary only one more time--June 16--that he went to Sunday school.<sup>10</sup> Jacob R. Hildebrand, cousin of the bishop, in his 1862-65 diary never refers to a Sunday school.

On July 15, 1861, the bishop went to Staunton and noted 2,000 "soldiers" there. The following Sunday he baptized seven more persons (he had already taken in eight new ones in April) in his home congregation. These two occasions may have helped to initiate what Harry A. Brunk noted. "It has been reported that Bishop Hildebrand promised to keep some of these men out of the war if they would join his church."<sup>11</sup>

On July 24 the diary says, "got David off the muster roll." We are not told what "David." The bishop's son-in-law, David Kennedy, was a member at Hildebrands. However,

another source informs us that on October 3, 1862, David Kennedy enlisted in the 52nd Virginia Infantry but that he became absent without leave (AWOL) by November 22. Later his name was dropped from the roll as a deserter,<sup>12</sup> a very dangerous thing to do, because deserters were sometimes executed.

The bishop's diary was partly pre-occupied in July by the new "Patricks reaper" threshing machine he got and how he moved from place to place to thresh grain. Hildebrand became so busy that his diary suffered severely. Between August 1 and September 12 he only penned something on seven days. On August 5, he noted that he, "sent petition to govener Letcher." A copy of the petition has been obtained from the Library of Virginia (State Library).

Respectfully Hildebrand told the governor in the petition that he "is the owner of an 8 horse threshing machine," and that for years he has done threshing for the public. His "experienced and very competent" man who ran the machine, Joel Wheeler, had recently enlisted in Captain William Long's company. (Wheeler, incidentally, had been baptized and joined the Hildebrand church four months earlier). Would the governor now be so kind as to furlough Wheeler for 60 days so he could help thresh? He promised that Wheeler then "would report himself for duty." Obviously, Hildebrand respected his member's decision to enlist and respected the government's expectation that Wheeler would return to duty after a furlough.

Later in the war we find Bishop Hildebrand's own son Samuel holding a job deep in the mountains in Allegheny County near West Virginia at the Cowpasture River. Twice, in letters to his son the bishop pleads for him not to join the military and he "will reward him well" if he refrains from joining!<sup>13</sup> Samuel, apparently, heeded his father's advice.

We return to the August 5, 1861

petition. Thirty five additional names appeared, including that of Jacob Hildebrand, Sr., the bishop's father, who died a few months later. Some of the signatures were Mennonite neighbors. They include the minister, Peter Shumaker and the deacon, John Grove. A paragraph added to the petition by the neighbors certified their support of Hildebrand's request and also reminded the governor of the "dense population" in the area and that it was a "very productive neighborhood." That adds another interesting ingredient in a petition to a governor whose state had just gone to war and whose army would need lots of food supplies from the Shenandoah Valley! The petition throws significant light on the position of Augusta Mennonites on the war. We don't know if Governor Letcher granted Hildebrand's petition to furlough Wheeler, the manager of his threshing rig, but we do observe from the bishop's diary that he threshed very late into the fall--even into December.

November 6, 1861, was a windy and rainy election day that fall. Jacob Hildebrand simply says, "was at Waynesboro at lechion I votet for Davis & Coffman." Coffman refers to S. A. Coffman, who was running for the Confederate Congress, but who got very small support in Augusta County in this election.<sup>14</sup> Of course, we know that "Davis" refers to Confederate president, Jefferson Davis. On the 15th of November the bishop noted, "fast day proclaimed by Davis we had preaching at Church tex 24 chap of Mattew first clause."

Hence, it seems rather evident that in only a few short months Bishop Jacob Hildebrand's loyalties, obedience, and prayers for government had all been transferred to the Confederacy and its leaders. He must have been the only Mennonite bishop in Virginia to so clearly transfer his loyalties. As observed earlier, neither John Geil nor Samuel Coffman (who actually was not ordained bishop until

July 1861) voted on that fateful day, May 23, when Virginians voted for secession. Other sources indicate that the other two bishops, Geil and Coffman, were not comfortable observing days of prayer called for by the President and tended to have some sympathy for the view that the Confederacy represented rebellion against government.

"Generally speaking the Mennonites of the Shenandoah Valley thought of themselves as Unionists," says Harry A. Brunk. Perhaps so. He also says that "Hildebrand, however, was thought to have rebel leanings."<sup>15</sup> That comment about "rebel leanings" may reflect not only Hildebrand's views, but also historian Brunk's "leanings!"

James O. Lehman

6-27-95

<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> The author was able to scan the *Spectator* in the Staunton Public Library, so we emphasize what that paper was saying. However, an excellent analysis of both newspapers done by Michael David Lesperance in "Fighting For The Union: The Political Culture of Anti-Sectionalism in Augusta County, Virginia, 1850-1861," *Augusta Historical Bulletin*, 39(Fall 1994), 14-27, is very helpful.

<sup>3</sup> Church Record, kept by Bishop Jacob Hildebrand, in the Archives of Eastern Mennonite University. The Record contains names of members for several decades, the handwritten minutes of many Virginia Conference sessions, which often elaborate more than the printed record, comments about the building of the second meetinghouse in 1876, the names of persons in the lot for deacon in 1885, when Martin Brunk and Anthony P. Heatwole were chosen, and other miscellaneous items.

<sup>4</sup> Lesperance, "Fighting For The Union," 19.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall Moore Brice, "Augusta County During the Civil War," *Augusta Historical Bulletin*, Vol. 1, #2 [1964], 7.

<sup>6</sup> Lesperance, "Fighting For The Union," 23-25.

<sup>7</sup> *Staunton Spectator*, April 23, 1861.

The italics and upper case letters appear in the newspaper as indicated.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Donna Huffer, Staunton Public Library, May 15, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> *Staunton Spectator*, May 28, 1861.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, that does not prove how long the Sunday school lasted. However, on July 21, the bishop noted preaching services but mentions no Sunday school.

<sup>12</sup> Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia, 1727-1900*. Vol. I. (Harrisonburg: Pub. by author, 1959), 166. Brunk does say, however, that the report about Hildebrand may have arisen after the exemption bill was adopted by the government in October 1862.

<sup>13</sup> Robert J. Driver, Jr., *52nd Virginia Infantry*. (Lynchburg: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1986), 125.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Hildebrand to Samuel Hildebrand, March 19, 1863 and Sept. 22, 1863, in I-MS-3, in Virginia Mennonite Conference Collection, Eastern Mennonite University Archives, Harrisonburg, VA.

<sup>15</sup> *Staunton Spectator*, Nov. 12, 1861.

<sup>16</sup> Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, I, 165-67.

## Va. Conference Happenings 100 Years Ago

With Michael Shank as Moderator, and twenty-two bishops, deacons and ministers in attendance, the October 1895 session of Va. Mennonite Conference met at Springdale Church.

Discussions were held as to the advisability of having conference minutes printed and distributed to members of the church. Also discussed was the feeling of the conference with regard to holding service at the house of mourning before going to church or burying ground.

### Quick Quiz - Answers on last page

- 1) The first bishop to be ordained in Southern District in Augusta Co. was  
 a) Michael Stauffer b) Martin Kendig c) Jacob Gochenour d) Abram Wenger
- 2) The burning of barns (and homes) in the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War was carried out under orders of General  
 a) Sherman b) Grant c) Sheridan d) Burnside
- 3) Which Confederate General stated of the Mennonites "There lives a people in the Valley of Virginia that are not hard to bring to the army. While there they are obedient to their officers. Nor is it difficult to have them take aim, but it is impossible to get them to take correct aim."  
 a) R. E. Lee b) Turner Ashby c) Edward Johnson d) Stonewall Jackson

# Shenandoah Valley Mennonites and the Civil War

## Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians will convene on Friday September 22 at 7:00 PM at Weaver's Mennonite Church. The church is located just west of Harrisonburg on Rt. 33. The program will include several special speakers and a short business meeting.

Opening: "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"  
-Michael Shenk

Vignettes: "Stories I've Heard of Civil War Times"  
-Mary Deputy Brubaker  
-Mary Emma Eby

Keynote Speech: "The Call to War and the Call to Peace:  
Three Men and Their Women in the Civil War Era"  
-Samuel L. Horst

Business Meeting -Laban Peachey

Financial Report -Jim Rush

Election of Officers

Vote to Ratify the Constitution

Adjournment

Time for Informal Discussion

## Valley Mennonite Churches

### Plains Academy Church

Not much is known about the Plains Academy Church. It was built in 1826 by the community along the Shenandoah River north-east of Timberville as a place of worship and probably

also as a schoolhouse. North Rockingham Mennonites and perhaps some from southern Shenandoah County had a part in the building and use of this church. Services were held here

## Fall Bus Tour

A bus tour featuring Rockingham Mennonite experiences in the Civil War is planned for Saturday, September 23, 1995. This will be a chance to hear about Mennonite experiences in the Edom, Broadway, West Rockingham, and Weaver's Church areas. Speakers include the local noted Civil War historian John Heatwole III, Linden Wenger, and Samuel S. Shank. Richard Early will also dramatize the John Kline story at the site of that Brethren leader's assassination. Tour participants will also hear about Potter John Heatwole's pottery shop and his escape, the burning of the Valley, and survival during the War years.

Cost of the tour, including lunch at Evers Restaurant, is \$14 for Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historian members and \$16 for non-members. The tour group will leave Eastern Mennonite High School at 8 am. and return around 3:30 pm. Send reservations to Jim Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Va. 22801. (434-0792)

on fifth Sundays.

Sometime before 1910, this church was no longer being used by the area Mennonites. Perhaps most of those Mennonites who lived in this community had moved on to other areas of the county.

## Notes & Queries

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)d

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.

**Correction** Weaver's Mennonite Church was incorrectly given credit as being the first to hold Sunday School classes in the Virginia Conference in the Spring 1995 issue of this newsletter. The first Sunday School was organized and ran successfully at the Bank Mennonite Church in 1870. It was discontinued after only two years due to heavy opposition. Eleven years passed before it was once again started at Bank. We want to thank Lloyd S. Horst for this information.

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