



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Historians Launch Project to Build Center

The project to build a heritage center in Harrisonburg is finally underway. The Shenandoah Valley will no longer be the only major Mennonite community in North America without a place to present our beliefs and heritage and to preserve our history.

More than 100 members of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians gathered on Nov. 14, 1998 to hear the latest plans for the center and to offer their suggestions. The breakfast event at historic Weavers Mennonite Church west of Harrisonburg was the annual meeting of the organization. The proposed center was the main agenda item.

Historic Houses. Adding excitement to the meeting was the discovery a few days earlier that an historic Mennonite house might be available for relocation to the site of the heritage center. The large 1819 log house (now covered with siding) sits on land near Weavers Church that has been purchased for a new county school.

James O. Lehman, who found out about the need to remove the house, said its owners would like to see the house preserved. Mennonite families have occupied it for seven generations. Participants in the meeting unanimously encouraged the historians group to obtain the house.

Another log house that has been available for some time as a structure in Shenandoah County that is being donated by Ross Baughman. Plans are being made to dismantle the house and move it to the site of the new center.

Donated Property. The new center will be located on donated property at the intersection of Mt. Clinton Pike and Acorn Drive east of Park View. Wallace Hatcher of Lantz-Eby Enterprises spoke at the meeting about his group's desire to give a five-acre tract to the Shenandoah Valley Historians for the heritage center.

The land donation, valued at \$300,000, is accompanied by a plan to build a hotel and restaurant on 10 acres next to the historical center. Hatcher is working with Calvin Redekop of the historians' group to finalize plans for the hotel/restaurant with a Mennonite firm in Pennsylvania. Hatcher also obtained rezoning approval from the city for the restaurant, hotel and "cultural center." Construction could begin on at least one of these as early as mid-1999.

In the course of the historians' annual meeting and in subsequent meetings of the new steering committee for the project, the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians agreed to expand the focus of the center to include the Church of the Brethren. With their Brethren neighbors they share a German heritage, early migration to the Valley and—as Southerners, especially—opposition to slavery and the Civil War.

So a new name emerged for the project: Shenandoah Valley Anabaptist Cultural Center.

Shenandoah Valley Historians vice president Calvin Redekop, who is chairing the steering committee

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reviewed the planning for the center project which began in 1996. Architect Randy Seitz of The Troyer Group presented a preliminary artist's conception of the center.

Other Business. In other business at the annual meeting, the participants heard that dues-paying members now number 226. They reelected Calvin Redekop as vice president, Elroy Kauffman as treasurer and Michael Shenk as secretary. Continuing members on the executive committee are Steve Shenk (president), Harold Lehman (newsletter editor), Lois Bowman and Jim Rush.

Al Keim reported that "The Mirror of the Martyrs" exhibit is coming to our area again (the last time was 1991). Featuring prints from the historic *Martyrs' Mirror* book, the exhibit tells the story of the early Anabaptists. The exhibit will be set up this spring at the Folklore and Heritage Museum in Dayton.

-Steve Shenk, president,
Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians

The Life of L.J. Heatwole

On December 4, 1852, Lewis James Heatwole, who was to become a minister in the Middle District of the Virginia conference was born to David A. and Catherine Driver Heatwole in a small log house near Dale Enterprise, Virginia.

His early life was greatly influenced by his mother who spent many hours telling him of the wonders of the earth and sky. She even climbed with him to the top of an apple tree to convince him that he could not touch the clouds. From his father, Lewis learned the pleasures to be found in books.

The first day of school was an exciting event for Lewis. That evening he rushed home and informed his parents that he would need pen and ink for the next day's exercises. The second day was a bit of a disappointment, however, when he discovered that one did not automatically know how to write. But Lewis was determined to learn, and by the end of the first six-month term he had advanced to the fourth reader.

The carefree years of boyhood were interrupted by the turmoil created by the Civil War. One indelible

impression is recorded in his diary October 6, 1884, on the 20th anniversary of Sheridan's raid in the Shenandoah Valley. He writes:

"Twenty years ago the barns of the community were set on fire by order of General Sheridan. Quite well do I remember the time when the smoke arose upon every hand from the roaring fires that raged in the neighborhood. This was, however, when the scourge of war swept through the land. Never may it be my lot to witness such a scene which I witnessed in this section 20 years ago tonight.

"I saw blaze and smoke about midway between Harrisonburg and Dayton when between the hours of 3 p.m. and night the torch had been applied to all the mills, barns, and a number of dwellings from Dayton westward to Coakleytown and northward as far as Dale Enterprise. Nearly all the families of this section spent the night of October 6th out in the open with great fires raging upon every side, and what little sleep was taken on sleeping couches stretched on the sod. The early morning hours of October 7 were marked by a dense blanket of smoke and fog that had sett' over the country.

"Well do I remember the groans and sighs, the tears and sleepless nights, the screams and cries of wife and children. Language fails me to describe the distress and horror that was brought upon us by the cruelties of war. Most gladly would I have given the last particle of earthly possession, except the clothes upon my back, if I with my family could have stepped over into a country where peace and quiet reigned. Though the country has recovered from so hard a fate, the marks of that raid are still felt in this community."

Lewis' thirst for knowledge increased with the years, and after completing the seventh grade he taught a summer term in the community school. This confirmed his decision to become a teacher.

Although Lewis was not yet of age and was needed on the family farm, his father supported him in his choice of a vocation, and Lewis enrolled in the Valley Normal Institute at Bridgewater, Virginia. Walking the two... miles round trip to the school was no hardship for Lewis. Here his interest in literature, biology, meteorology, and

astronomy developed. He also participated in practical studies by joining the class that surveyed the town of Bridgewater. At this time Lewis started using his initials all his writings and school work, and from then on, he was known as "L.J."

On completing his studies at the Valley Normal institute, L.J. was awarded the equivalent of a high school diploma. After obtaining a two-year teacher's certificate in the fall of 1874, he opened the community school at New Erection, two miles north of Dale Enterprise.

The first day thirty pupils were enrolled, but by the mid-term fifty-four were attending. The school was so crowded that at times some of the older boys had to stand all day at the shelf-like desk attached to the schoolroom wall.

In spite of the difficulties of teaching in those early days. L.J. was happy in his chosen profession. Because of his mild and easygoing manner, he was not the best disciplinarian in the schoolroom. On one occasion he feared he had spoken too harshly. But with patience and determination he helped his pupils to see the value of preparing for the future.

At the age of 19, L.J. was not a Christian. He had a desire to become a child of God but felt he was too young and lacked the courage to renounce the world and make a total commitment to God. He had a strong conviction that he was born for a purpose and that he should prepare for the special work God would call him to do.

As he pondered these feelings, he became more restless and disturbed. One day he rode out into the mountains in search of a quiet spot to meditate, and there he made a complete surrender to his Lord. He gave vent to his feelings in tears of repentance, then gave thanks for the peace that came to his soul.

Sitting down on a large rock in Black Run Hollow between Narrowback and Riven Rock Mountains, he wrote a letter to Mary Coffman, the girl to whom he was engaged. He wrote: "I want you to understand that I am not writing in this vein to make an impression on you, but it is the deep experience of my heart and I crave the earnest prayers of my brothers and sisters."

After L.J. and Mary Coffman's marriage, life settled into a routine pattern of teaching and writing articles for the local newspapers, church periodicals, and educational

magazines. He also did calculations for almanac publishers in English, German, Spanish, and Hebrew.

L.J. also became interested in the program of the Mennonite Church and served as a teacher in the Sunday school. However, he did not entertain the thought of becoming a leader. But there were those who saw L.J.'s worth and ability, and he was voted into the lot for minister in 1880. As it turned out, he was not elected, and he gave his blessing and support to the brother who was chosen.

In 1883, L.J. was again in the lot, this time for deacon. His feelings on this occasion are recorded in his diary: "All expressed themselves willing to enter the lot, I with the rest; but everybody knows or ought to know that I do not at all wish to become a deacon." Again the lot fell on another brother.

In 1887, L.J. was again a candidate for the ministry. He felt he was not worthy of being a minister of the gospel and thought seriously of not accepting the responsibility to serve as a candidate. He tried to have himself excused because of his profession as a school teacher and almanac calculator, but the request was not granted. The committee assured him that he could continue his work if he was called to preach.

On June 25, 1887, the day of the ordination, L.J. left home for Weavers church with a heavy burden on his mind. He still could not reconcile himself to the thought of the possibility of being called to the ministry.

The church was crowded for the solemn service. Bishop Samuel Coffman, L.J.'s father-in-law, preached the sermon. Then it was time for the ordination of the new ministers by lot. Books were placed on the pulpit stand, one for each candidate. Two books contained a slip of paper on which was written "The Lord has chosen you."

To make certain that it was God's will for him to be minister, L.J. prayed that there would be only one book left when it was time for him to make his choice. And so it was, the last book contained a slip of paper that indicated that the Lord had chosen him.

L.J. was not a dramatic or fluent speaker, and the first year of preaching was difficult. At a Sunday morning service at the Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church he was asked to take the text, and he had to sit down after

- See L.J. Heatwole, p. 4

From L.J. Heatwole p. 3

speaking for only five minutes. Another time he felt that he had not made "full proof of his ministry" after a fifteen-minute sermon. However, over the years, people came to appreciate his well-organized outlines and carefully chosen words presented with deep conviction.

Soon after he was ordained, the Central District called for volunteers to go on a preaching mission to West Virginia. L.J. responded immediately and that was the beginning of his remaining lifetime concern for the people of the Mountain State.

One minister, who sometimes accompanied L.J., told of their stopping at a Shenandoah Mountain overlook where L.J., while viewing the grandeur of the scene, spoke with deep feeling of God's greatness and goodness. Then he knelt and prayed the most earnest prayer the minister ever heard for the work and the people in the West Virginian mission field.

In the 1880s a number of people in Virginia were moving to the Midwest. A cousin kept insisting that L.J. come to Missouri as there was a need for ministers there. This was also confirmed by L.J.'s brother-in-law, John S. Coffman. (to be continued)

-from the Mary E. Suter manuscript on
the life and work of L.J. Heatwole

The Entrepreneurs Who Tried

In the early years of Eastern Mennonite School (now University) several faculty leaders ventured into business operations hoping to provide part-time employment for students. A toy factory was established on the campus, as reported here by its founder Ernest G. Gehman. Another enterprise was a grape vineyard, described here from the boyhood memories of the Historian editor. Both accounts were published over twenty years ago in the View, the congregational paper of Park View Mennonite Church.

The Sharon Manufacturing Company by Ernest G. Gehman

After the 1929 stock market crash the diminishing student enrollment at Eastern Mennonite School gave our

administration and faculty considerable concern. What would we do? I suggested to President Wenger that we start a factory to give students spare time employment, possibly making kitchen-stool-stepladders, collapsed chicken coops, etc.

That summer (1931), while soliciting students and money, I mentioned the idea to Lancaster preacher Jacob E. Brubaker, designer of Hubley toys. He promptly suggested that we make cast-aluminum pull toys, that two of his brothers could be hired to help us get started in non-ferrous foundry operations, and that he would be glad to design our first toys if we would pay him something for his time in pattern-making and occasional trips to EMS.

We agreed to his proposals, organized the Sharon Manufacturing Company, with Bro. A.D. Wenger as president, myself as general manager, and, as third member, the father of E. Clayton Shank, beloved preacher and supporter of the school, Erasmus C. Shank of Waynesboro. Roy E. Heatwole was employed as our secretary.

That school year we tore down the old barn (where the seminary building now stands) and reused both the structure and many of the materials for a one-story foundry building about 26x40 ft. Also, school-friend Dan Hartman agreed to let us use rent-free a large two-story poultry house as our factory for the painting, assembling, and packing operations. The August-September 1932 EMS Bulletin announced that the toy factory was offering part-time work to prospective students; many applied and worked through that school year. The following summer 12 or 13 full-time workers (mainly students) were employed. During the '33-'34 school year from 40 to 45 students came to work whenever they had at least two consecutive free hours on their scheduling.

Lack of space prevents my describing in detail the many interesting processes in the foundry, with Homer Mumaw as foreman: how the pieces of scrap aluminum (mostly old crankcases) were melted in our two coke-fired pit furnaces, how the sizzling metallic liquid was poured from the crucibles into 40 or 50 sand molds made by boys using our highly efficient matchplate patterns on the three molding machines.

After that, the resulting castings, cooled, inspected, and with the rough places ground smooth, were carried 15 or 20 yards westward to the factory, where John R. Wenger

was foreman. Here 12 to 30 similar castings were strung on 30-inch rods, dipped in non-toxic enamels of carefully chosen colors, dripped, dried, and baked in steam-heated ovens.

Then, in our largest room, girls and boys assembled the 12 parts of each of our two-color, streamlined sedans and racers, starting with white rubber tires from Akron, OH, stretched on maple wheels or hubs from Vermont, mounting them on long rivets functioning as axles and all these on our cast-aluminum chassis with driver, steering wheel, and tail lights; then this assemblage was inserted into the body of the vehicle, and the chattering little riveting machines locked all the parts together.

In this room also packing was done: twelve small sedans or racers, or six large sedans, separated from each other by a strip of paper, fitted nicely into one thin cardboard box, and twelve boxes into one carton. I visited the toy buyers of the five-and-ten chains in New York, and the orders began rolling in. Woolworth's stores were our best customers; Kresge's came second. In the several years of our operation we sold over 200,000 toys—the only cast-aluminum pulltoys made in America we were told. While no member of the company got a salary, we were doing a little better than breaking even, so we hoped eventually get back our initial investment of something like \$3,000 each. Indeed, we had dreams of becoming a permanent industry that would benefit the school and community for the indefinite future!

Why not? Our product had quality, was unique, and the customers liked it. Best of all, our student workers were happy for the opportunity to be earning while learning. Some came to school who could not have otherwise, and some were able to continue with their studies who could not have done so without the toy factory.

Then suddenly we found ourselves in trouble! It seems that in the eyes of the National Recovery Administration our 10-cent toys should have been retailing for 15 cents, and our 20-cent sedan for 25 or 30 cents. We were unfair to our competitors. We were giving too much toy for the money! But to Woolworth's our biggest customer by far, 15-cent items were unpopular—did not sell well. Woolworth's suggested that we reduce the size of our toys to keep to the 10-cent price as well as to meet NRA objection. But that would have required an entirely new set of matchplate patterns—an impossible additional expense. We appealed to NRA for reconsideration. In reply, Sharon Manufacturing Company was black-listed

with other non-cooperative companies. Our orders suddenly ceased coming. We simply had to fold up!

Sic transit gloria mundi.

Wenger-Weaver Vineyard

By Harold D. Lehman

Sometime in the latter 1920's two enterprising Park View residents joined in an unusual agri-business venture. They were A.D. Wenger and H.D. Weaver respectively president and business manager of Eastern Mennonite School. Together they purchased some 30 acres of mountain land just over the crest on the west side of the Blue Ridge Mountains south of Interstate 64.

The idea, undoubtedly Wenger's, was to plant a vineyard on the mountain slopes. Wenger had experience with grape culture on his farm at Fentress, Va. He also traveled around the world in 1898, likely observing the German vineyards on the steep slopes along the Rhine. (His travels are recorded in a book, Six Months in Bible Lands and Thirteen Months Around the World.) A major reason behind the venture was to give students work. Grapes are a labor-intensive crop.

The vineyard got a good start. In several years it was producing excellent grapes. Numerous students were employed to trim the vines and in early fall to harvest the grapes. But then trouble came in the form of a brown rot spoiling the grapes just as they ripened. The disease was no doubt aggravated by the frequent fog which settled across the mountaintop.

In the summer of 1931, or was it '32, Wenger (hereafter referred to as Uncle A.D. because he was my uncle) gathered up a dozen Park View boys and took us on the mountain to put paper bags on the green, still-growing grape clusters. Each bag was securely fastened at the top by twisting a small wire. Uncle A.D. was foreman and blew a whistle for lunch and quitting time. At the end of the eighth and final day of work I still remember being four bags short of 8,000. Since the pay was 50¢ per thousand, my take-home amount was \$4.00.

The great experience, however, was living together on the mountain for the time. (Summer camps had not yet been invented by Mennonites.) Our quarters were the second floor of the packing shed where straw was placed on the floor for a sleeping place. Aunt Annie did the
-See Vineyard, p. 6

cooking and kept things tidy. I still recall Uncle A.D.'s devotions each morning at breakfast and evening before bedtime. Here's where we learned to sing "Twilight Is Stealing." On Sunday after Uncle A.D.'s sermon to his boyish parish we set out on a long mountain hike.

Unfortunately, putting on paper bags was not a permanent solution to the brown rot problem. After some years the vineyard was abandoned and the land reverted once again to scrub oak and chipmunks.

Membership:

To become a member of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and to receive future copies of this newsletter, send name and address and 1999 dues (\$10 per couple, \$6 per single) to:

Michael Shenk
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A spring "European Heritage Tour" is planned for April 29-May 20, 1999, to visit our ancestral lands in Germany, Switzerland, France, Holland, and Austria. Viewing the beautiful tulips in Holland and enjoying canal boat rides in several villages including Amsterdam will be followed by such memorable highlights as a night in the ancient St. Goar castle along the Rhine River in Germany; a cruise on the Rhine River; cuckoo country in the Black Forest; a German mandolin concert and a Swiss alphorn and yodeling concert; a cogwheel train ride over the snow-capped Swiss Alps; a Swiss cheese farm; tour of a concentration camp; tour of a 13th century French castle; hike to the Swiss Anabaptist Cave; plus time for shopping and meeting European historians and genealogists. Write for an eight-page illustrated itinerary to tour leaders; J. Lemar and Lois Ann Mast, European Heritage Tour, 220 Mill Road, Morgantown, PA 19543-9701, or call (610) 286-0258.