



# Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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## ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

### Wust Reflects on 50 Years of Research

German-American historian Klaus Wust reflected on 50 years of research during the annual meeting of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians on September 25<sup>th</sup>. The featured speaker at the breakfast event, attended by about 70 people, recalled his first encounter with German descendants in the Valley when he came to study at Bridgewater College in 1949.

“German heritage was not something that people advertised then, in the wake of two wars against the Germans,” he said. The only people who still spoke German were the Old Order Mennonites and some people “back in the hills.”

The religious affiliations of the German immigrants were Lutheran, Reformed, Mennonite, Brethren, and other. Wust found that although Mennonites in the valley came from Germany, they were originally from Switzerland.

Wust said the first Germans in the Valley were the Mennonites, who settled in what is now Page County in 1727. “Many of them joined the Baptists,” he said, “but they remembered their pacifism at the time of the Revolutionary War and refused to fight.”

Wust also noted that Virginia’s leaders were happy to let the Germans and Scotch-Irish settle in the Shenandoah Valley so they could be a “frontier buffer” against Indians. A young surveyor named George Washington recorded his impressions of the “Dutch” in his journal.

Now retired, Wust divides his time between Edinburg, Va., and New York City, where he and his wife served as interpreters at the United Nations. He has worked extensively as a researcher, consultant, author, and lecturer. His best-known book is The Virginia Germans. He served as editor of the Journal of German-American History.

### Members Hear Update on Cultural Center

Dozens of volunteers are working behind the scenes to plan the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Cultural Center, reported Cal Redekop at the annual meeting of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians. A public meeting is planned on November 8<sup>th</sup> to seek ideas from an even wider group of people.

Plans for an inn and restaurant in connection with the cultural center are not materializing, said Redekop. Planners had hoped to build the three structures at the north edge of Harrisonburg on a five-acre plot donated by Lantz-Eby Enterprises at the intersection of Mt. Clinton Pike and Acorn Drive. Mennonite restaurants/hotels in Ohio and Pennsylvania were contacted about extending their businesses to Harrisonburg, but they eventually declined.

Redekop, who chairs the planning board for the new center and serves as vice president of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, said the board plans to go ahead with or without the inn/restaurant and is not limiting itself to the north Harrisonburg site. They will make a decision by November.

### Lehman Elected President

James O. Lehman, a retired historian and librarian, was elected president of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians during the group's annual meeting on September 25<sup>th</sup>. He succeeds Steve Shenk, who served one two-year term.

Lehman currently works part time as archivist at Eastern Mennonite University. Previously he served for many years as director of Libraries at EMU. He is author of several congregational history books.

- Steve Shenk

### L.J. Heatwole, Astronomer and Almanac Maker, Part I

*"The stars are the landmarks of the universe."*

-Herschel

In his early life L.J. became very much interested in the subject of astronomy. As he studied the stars, their positions and movements, he decided to try almanac calculation. He found it to be painstaking work. The manuscript copy had to be finished and sent to the publishers from a year and a half to two and three years in advance of the time the almanacs were expected to go into circulation. Each calculation took six months to prepare with ten thousand items to be considered in arranging a single set of copy. For this time consuming task L.J. received \$20.00 per copy.

To promote his work L.J. made sample pages of his calculations and sent them to several publishers: O. Swingly of Baltimore, Maryland; Allison and Smith of Cincinnati, Ohio; Walter H. Smith of Montreal, Canada; J.F. Funk, Elkhart, Indiana; and Welty and Springer, Berne, Indiana; and in time he was making calculations for sixty almanacs in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, South America and the West Indies.

Welty and Springer asked for calculations in German. L.J. readily accepted this new challenge. After a particularly difficult day of work, he made this entry in his diary: "I found myself in a fog and in trouble with the moon phases, but where there's a will there's a way and I may be able to find my way through."

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### Telling Our Story

It was definitely an "Event!" The Historical Committee and Archives of the Mennonite Church sponsored a meeting of those interested in telling the Anabaptist-Mennonite story in what John Ruth called a "non-linear approach to information." How does one acquaint a generation who will not read history books with the history of Mennonites and Amish? What does one say about them? What is included in "story?" And how are history and mission integrated? Is the story telling more than a nostalgic orgy? Can telling our story be both historical narration and evangelism?

The conference was held in Berlin, Ohio at the Mennonite Information Center which houses the cycloramic mural "Behalt" (to remember, to hold on to) on September 17-18, 1999. The conference was organized as a resource for those who are interested and involved in interpretive centers, and those who led seminars and spoke to the plenary sessions shared out of their own experience with such centers. It was this focus that prompted a contingent of both Mennonites and Brethren involved in the planning of a Harrisonburg cultural center to attend.

There were working sessions on how to get started, how to organize and finance, how to keep the story authentic, how to answer questions of all sorts, how centers can be part of the larger mission of the church and genuinely invite others to become part of the story that began with Jesus, the Christ. One speaker involved in building the church in a large urban setting suggested that the interpretive centers would be good training grounds for evangelists! Other sessions dealt with the individual elements such as archives, museums, pictures and displays, libraries, and literature for sale that can be used to form such a center. In addition to "how to" information there was an excellent balance of exhilaration and stimulation.

Meeting in the setting of Holmes County which hosts over two million tourists a year coming to see "Amish Country," one underlying question which dominated much of the discussion was the need and difficulty of integrity in telling the story. We were reminded that we are defining the designation "Mennonite" and "Brethren" not only for tourists, but, and probably more importantly, for ourselves.

- C. Norman Kraus

## Book Review

**The Burning: Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley.** By John L. Heatwole. Rockbridge Publishing, an imprint of Howell Press, Inc. Charlottesville, Virginia, 1998. xii, 266 pp. \$29.95.

John Heatwole's The Burning provides a much needed day by day, indeed an hour by hour account, of the tragic thirteen days of the devastation and destruction in the autumn of 1864. It was on September 29<sup>th</sup> that Gen. Sheridan informed Gen. Grant, "I will go on and clean out the Valley." By October 12<sup>th</sup> Sheridan considered his campaign of destruction completed and tallied up the results for Grant's information.

Most historians of the Civil War give only passing attention to The Burning, a paragraph or less. Even the three massive volumes (one and one-half million words) of Shelby Foote's The Civil War, give only cursory attention to it and the few who do give more, like Jeffry Wert's Winchester to Cedar Creek, conclude that although a major event, it was less destructive and traumatic for the local population than was Gen. Sherman's raid through the South. Heatwole's account provides an important corrective to this unproven assumption.

Heatwole, as a native son of the Valley, knows his local and social geography well. Although his characterizations and descriptions are frank, Mennonite and Dunkard readers will appreciate his sensitivity to their pacifist principles while candidly relating the limited pacifism of Mennonite Henry VanPelt when he was challenged on his home turf (p.48). Heatwole treats the experiences of those of other religious and social groups, the minority of blacks and the more numerous Scotch-Irish and other Germans, with equal sensitivity. He succeeds in utilizing oral sources to discover persistent stories of contemporary happenings passed down through succeeding generations. Mennonite Peter Hartman was a classic example of how family accounts were preserved which Heatwole handles responsibly and with authenticity. After destruction was wreaked in Augusta and southern Rockingham Counties, as well as around Harrisonburg, he describes the flight of many Rockingham civilians who joined the refugee train that accompanied Sheridan as he moved down

the Valley and burned out its central, western, and eastern expanses along the way. Heatwole relates many gripping stories of families, many of them having sons and fathers fighting the Yankees far away and near.

Heatwole's nativism has not prevented him from objectively comprehending the angry reactions of Sheridan to the killing of his indispensable young engineer, Lt. John Meigs, and his order to burn all homes within a three-mile radius of the site while at the same time describing his terrorized expectations of the residents of the town of Dayton and surroundings. He reveals how only the sensible appeal of Lt. Col. Thomas Wildes, on the basis of Dayton's kindness to his men, prompted Sheridan to rescind the order for the town while destruction proceeded in the surrounding area (p.103-104). However, Heatwole discovered, when Sheridan's subordinate Gen. Custer spared the farms of numerous Dunkards and Mennonites south of the Dry River, their neighbors who lost their farms were embittered and referred to them as "nigger-lovin' pacifists" (p.223).

If the burning was over by mid-October the war was not and the prospect of the approaching winter compounded the fear. Heatwole concludes with graphic illustrations the severe deprivations that followed. It is appropriate that he traces the return to the Valley of persons from Confederate service or from places to which they had fled. He does not inform us of how many farmers or others were compensated for losses, although he notes that only a minority of Mennonites and Dunkards had processed claims. They had little success. The rejection of one Mennonite claimant's appeal may reveal why. Even though he "was opposed to the rebellion" he did so "according to the rules of his church" rather than from "strong Union principle" (p.230).

Time has a way of cooling strong passions which John Heatwole illustrates well. When in 1886 Sheridan, then commander of the entire U.S. Army, visited the Shenandoah Valley, he was greeted with Schaffer's Coronet band at the Shenandoah house in Woodstock. Still later, Augusta County John Opie, who had been a Confederate cavalryman in the war, concluded his reflections on The Burning with a thoughtful question: "Which is the worst in war, to burn a barn, or kill a fellow-man?"

-Samuel L. Horst

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He did get through it and the publishers were pleased with the results. Later he also did calculations in Spanish and Hebrew.

When L.J. began his work in almanac calculation there was less than half a dozen persons in the United States who spent full time in this type of work, and it was considered to be important as it was the best medium for the average person to keep track of time and the seasons.

Among those who encouraged L.J. to pursue the study of astronomy were John S. Coffman and J.F. Funk. Coffman, noticing how L.J.'s reports were in demand by newspapers and magazines, remarked: "I almost envy you in your privileges in the study of astronomy." Funk thought L.J. ought to do serious study in astronomy. He also thought that Vennor's (a noted meteorologist and astronomer who had recently died) mantle should fall on L.J. Heatwole. Funk was pleased that one in the Mennonite family was able to do such work.

After years of experience in Almanac calculation and further research in the field of astronomy, L.J. wrote the book, Key to the Almanac and the Sidereal Heavens, which was published in 1908 by the Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, Pennsylvania.

With emphasis on the biblical viewpoint, the book contained the history of astronomy, with chapters on fixed days, eclipses, the constellations, the stars, sun and moon, comets, the planets and life on other worlds. In the preface L.J. explains his purpose in writing the book:

"Aside from the general plan for bringing about redemption of the human race through the gospel and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, no more interesting and inspiring field can possibly be presented to the mind for contemplating the power and majesty of the Creator than a study of the heavens that lie above and around us."

L.J. hoped the book would be of value to the casual reader and he very much appreciated this encouraging note from D.H. Bender, June 8, 1908. Bender writes: "I have just finished going over your manuscript for

your new book, Key to the Almanac, and am very pleased with it."

For writing the book L.J. was given the choice of receiving a royalty of five cents per copy or one hundred dollars for the manuscript.

After the public had access to the Key to the Almanac, L.J. received more requests to write articles for magazines. N.E. Byers, president of Goshen College, asked L.J. to write something interesting and instructive for young people along the line of general astronomy and methods of almanac calculating, the Weather Bureau, and weather reporting, for the new young people's paper that was soon to be started at the publishing house at Scottdale, Pennsylvania.

Hesston Academy and Bible School wanted to know on what date Easter would fall in 1915 so they could make up their next year's catalogue.

He also received requests to give lectures. Once when on a trip to General Conference in the Midwest, J.E. Hartzler of Goshen College asked L.J. to stop and give a lecture on meteorology and astronomy there.

Publishers outside Mennonite circles also requested articles on meteorology and astronomy. Sometimes they would ask for a picture and a biographical sketch to be sent with the article. One editor was disappointed when L.J. refused to do so. Perhaps the response that he had once received when he did send a picture to a free lance writer, with whom he was corresponding, made him reluctant to comply with the request. With complete candor the man had written: "I received your photograph. I was disappointed in your appearance, of course, for I had expected to see a face clean-shaven, except a mustache, and then altogether a different physiognomy." But the man was kind enough to conclude his remarks with, "I am favorably impressed with your face, and think it is the type to command respect and veneration. I am particularly impressed with the mild, placid countenance I see in the picture." (To be continued)

-Grace Suter Grove, from the  
Mary E. Suter manuscript  
on L.J. Heatwole

## Book Review

### **L.J. Heatwole, Key to the Almanac and the Sidereal Heavens, Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, PA. 1908.**

L.J. Heatwole wrote this book with the intent of bringing together in one place the answers to numerous questions that he frequently received about the many different terms used in almanacs. He pays special attention to the science of almanac making and the usefulness of almanacs in family life. Additionally he relates the use of the almanac in the study of the heavens. The book has two major parts. The first part of the book describes the history of the almanac and describes all the various features of a typical almanac. The second part describes the seasonal changes of the constellations with sections about time, weather, Sun, Moon, planets, other celestial objects, telescopes, and life on other worlds. He also discusses the long day of Joshua when the sun stood still and the time when the Sun moved backwards for King Hezekiah.

I was particularly interested in his view of science which is dated by the advances of science at that time and a comparison to the views held by scientists today. L.J. Heatwole considered the heavens and Earth as a "stupendous piece of machinery that has been created and set in motion by the hand of God" (p.23). The perfect time-keeper "has never run down or varied even to the smallest fraction of a minute" (p.23, 180). We now know that the Earth's rotation is slowing due to tidal friction. This discovery was made possible by the use of atomic clocks which were able to measure small change. He notes that sunspots cause strong magnetic currents on the Earth and "suggests the strong probability that" electric communication exists between earth and other planets (p.185).

His general description of the weather is still acceptable for the mid-latitudes of the United States. However, his idea that weather comes in 28-year cycles and the assumption that the Moon affects the weather by interrupting the magnetic current between the Earth and other planets would not be accepted today. Also, his strong belief in the signs of the Moon and the appropriate time to perform certain activities would no longer be entertained as scientifically valid. The perfection of cycles based on the ultimate perfect

clockwork Universe would seem out of place in the world of science today.

L.J. Heatwole considered the horoscope to be part of the superstitions and mythology of the past with no foundation in science. As such it had no place in a scientific almanac. He conceded that it would be several more generations before almanac patrons would be ready to accept almanacs without symbols of superstition (p.31). Today most scientists would place the authority of almanacs and horoscopes in a similar category.

His description of the constellations that are visible each month of the year together with the telescope objects of beauty that appear in some constellations is just as good today as it was then. He did not understand that many of the fuzzy objects were distant galaxies since that wasn't discovered until the 1920s. He also does not include Pluto in his description of the planets and how to observe them since Pluto was only discovered in 1930.

L.J. Heatwole did a masterful job of tying together the many items that are recorded in almanacs with the sights in the heavens and seemed to understand the science of his day. As an almanac calculator we would conclude that he put too much faith in the belief that nature follows exact cycles but that was not uncommon in his day.

-Joseph H. Mast, Director,  
M.T. Brackbill Planetarium,  
Eastern Mennonite University

### **History of the Pike Mennonite Church**

Herman L. Burkholder

My grandfather, David H. Burkholder, was very sincere in taking his family to the Pike Mennonite Church, the first Mennonite church built south of Harrisonburg. The land for the first Pike Church was secured in two separate lots. It is believed one was for the church and the other for the school which was built between the church and the side road which goes to Dayton. This first church, built in 1825, was a log church. The logs came from the Sam Burkholder farm near Dale Enterprise.

The second Mennonite church was Weavers Mennonite Church west of Harrisonburg, built in 1827. The third was the Bank Church, built in 1849 near Rushville on a bank between Muddy Creek and Dry River, hence the name Bank Church. The fourth was Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church, dedicated in 1875. In those days they were considered the four home churches.

In the early days there was a problem with church rowdies and I saw some of that in my young life. The Pike church had the fewest rowdies of any and was also considered the plainest of the churches. It sent more workers out to other places than any church for its size. When I was a child a large percentage of the people attending the Pike Church were descendants of Bishop Peter Burkholder or Bishop Henry Shank, and I am happy to be descended from both of these men. They were outstanding church leaders. Another reason was that Benny Landis taught school when they still had school. He was an outstanding man of God and had much influence for good over the Pike congregation as well as the surrounding community.

In the late 1800's preaching was held only once a month at each of the four churches. I heard my father go over the order of services many times: the first Sunday of the month at Mt. Clinton, the second Sunday at Weavers, third Sunday at the Pike and the fourth Sunday at the Bank. On the fifth Sunday evenings we had singing at the Pike. Historian Harry Brunk said that the first meeting in the Mt. Clinton Church was March 6, 1875 when my father was nearly two weeks old.

With services at just one church a Sunday it made a long horse-and-buggy drive for most people who lived where I now live at Pleasant Valley to drive to the Mt. Clinton Church which is  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile above the town of Mt. Clinton. When people drove that far they were glad for a dinner invitation. My mother said if you lived near a church you could expect a lot of company. They also had to feed the horses. Some men would put aside hay of second quality to feed the guest horses. "Company horse hay" became an expression to describe something of inferior quality. People other than Mennonites did the same thing.

I do not have much information on the Pike Church up through the Civil War. In 1878 the church was rebuilt

and enlarged. The entire church property was gathered in five different lots at different times.

In 1880 there were so few scholars they thought of closing the school. My father, Martin Burkholder, and his sister Annie went to their grandparents, Michael and Lydia Shank, who lived on the farm closest to the west of the church along the road to Dayton. Father said he was so small his aunt got him ready for school and the teacher would hold him on his lap for recitation. I do not know how long after that they closed the school.

In 1885 there was a large gathering at communion at the Pike Church, including a number of visitors. One was a man named Thurman from a distance, who was still much talked about in my childhood. Before the communion Mr. Thurman set a date for Christ to come. He preached it so strong that a number of people believed him. I was told that some people sold their property and gave their money away, saying they wouldn't need it. His set day came and they went in the morning to a hill south of Harrisonburg. On the way one man went past John Blosser's home where he was working in the garden. The man said, "Goodbye, John, I won't see you any more." Christ did not come but evening did.

Another time Mr. Thurman said he was going to be like Christ and walk on water. He went down to Silver Lake and put a row of benches just under the water so they couldn't be seen. Some boys took one bench about halfway out. The day came for him to walk on water. A crowd of people gathered to see it. He was like Christ until he got to the place where the bench was taken out. Then he was like Peter. He almost drowned before they got him out.

One hundred years ago when the difference between us and the Old Order Mennonites was in full bloom, an action was taken that brought the issue to a quick, positive separation. My father told me about that action when I was young. In later years an official told me that soon after it occurred, the action was officially acknowledged to be a mistake.

When the division came between Mennonites and Old Order Mennonites in 1900 the Pike Church gave the schoolhouse to the Old Orders to have preaching in. As they were accustomed to have preaching on the third Sunday morning of the month, to save confusion

among the horses, the Mennonites had church services in the afternoon. There were often severe thunderstorms in the afternoon. In church you could hear a great clap of thunder and three or four men would almost run out of church to turn the buggy seats up against the back to keep both seats and backs dry for the ride home.

Probably because of the thunderstorms they stopped having afternoon services. Before my recollection the Pike Church started having services on the first Sunday, same as Mt. Clinton, as they were the furthest churches apart. In 1923 the schoolhouse was too small for the Old Orders and they took it down, used the best lumber and added to it to build Oak Grove Old Order Mennonite Church.

At that time services were held at Pike Church the first and third Sundays of the month and at Weavers the second and fourth Sundays. We alternated with Weavers Church for a long time. I remember teaching Sunday school at both churches alternately. When they decided to have preaching at all churches every Sunday I was asked to teach at three Sunday schools. I decided to stay at the Pike to help keep the mother church conservative and send out workers to other places, which occurred again this year (1999).

A man older than I told me the Pike Church did not have a cemetery until 1897. Martin Layman (or Lehman) and two of his sons were three of the first four graves in that cemetery.

In 1909 my father provided maple trees and grandfather furnished the horse and wagon. The trees were planted at the Pike Church for shade. They are now all gone. In 1916 or 1917 the old shingle roof was replaced by a new metal roof. In 1920 the old iron fence was replaced by a new iron fence. In 1913 Mary Landis gave two lots to the trustees of the church with the agreement they would pay \$30.00 interest per year as long as she lived. I do not know what the lots were used for, possibly added to the cemetery.

The Pike Church at that time owned the land where Rockingham Motel now stands. A dwelling house stood there and the family were janitors at the church. A daughter was very faithful in her duties at the church. The son was of a different character. Once some mischief was done in the church and it was thought to be this boy. It caused considerable concern.

My grandfather was a trustee of the church and superintendent of the Sunday school. He went to see the family about the mischief done. Before he told why he came, the mother said, "Roy didn't do it. No indeed, Roy didn't do it." How did she know what he came for before he told her? I never heard how it was settled, but I know the family did not live there much longer.

There was no bell in the church at that time, but my grandfather as Sunday school superintendent had a large pocket knife which he would hit on the stand to signal the close of Sunday school.

The pulpit was long and at the right end was a door leading to a one-story mothers' room which was also used for the primary Sunday school class. I remember going in there when I was so small I could hardly get up on the bench. From the door to the corner and from the corner to the first window were strips with hooks on where the women would hang their large split bonnets.

In the church were two stoves, one on the women's side and one on the men's side. Chairs were near the stoves where some people sat during the service.

In 1948-49 a two-story Sunday school addition was built. When I was a child there was an iron fence around the church with an arched gateway in the front. A narrow gate hinged to each side of the arch. A post was in the middle where the narrow gates latched. At a funeral the center post was taken out so the coffin could be brought in. The church at that time had high steps up to the men's door and to the women's door. The steps were wide enough to get up with the coffin but the door was narrow and they had to swing the coffin back and forth, letting one pallbearer in at a time until they all got in. The ones in the back would have to hold up until the others all got in. When the new front addition to the church was built in 1956 this was corrected.

In early years there were two sections of benches for men and two sections for women. Where the benches met in the middle there was a solid board partition between the men and women about shoulder height sitting down. The partition used to go all the way to the front, making it difficult at funerals. Later the partition was taken out between the four front benches, making it more convenient.

Martin Layman, a trustee of the church, died in 1904 and his office was given to grandfather. He held this office until his death in 1920. He is buried in the Pike Church cemetery.

Mary Wenger gave a sum of money to the Pike Church which was used to buy the land where the third church now stands. It was built in 1981.

Most of the people attending the Pike Church when I was a child were related to me closely, medium, or distant, either on my father's side or my mother's side. Since my sister Esther died earlier this year, I am now the person attending there the longest. I am still attending the Pike with fond memories of a 90-year life term there. My burial plot is in the cemetery and some day I'll be laid there to wait for Jesus' return.

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*"History is, in one sense, a story written by the finger of God; but have we the text?"*

- C.S. Lewis, Christian Reflections

*"Who will remember the great work of memory itself, that basic human task?"*

- Robert Pinsky

*"Deciding to remember, and what to remember, is how we decide who we are."*

- Robert Pinsky

**Membership:**

To become a member of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and to receive future copies of this newsletter, send name and address and year 2000 dues (\$10 per couple, \$6 per single) to:

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