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“THE GERMANS IN VIRGINIA”

Notes From the Klaus Wust Lecture, 9/25/99

There were no emigrants from Westphalia to America in the 17th century (the area of Wust’s home.)

The Germans in the Valley in the 20th century preferred to be known as “Dutch” or to emphasize their Swiss origin rather than to be known as Germans, due to the prejudice aroused by the two world wars.

The remnants of the German language still found in the Valley in the mid 20th century were mixed Frankish (Palatine) and Allemanic (north Switzerland).

There were very few emigrants from Catholic areas of Germany.

The majority of Protestants, from S.W. Germany, Switzerland, were Reformed, both German and Swiss, not Lutheran. There were also the “sectarians”—Mennonites (various branches, including Amish) and Brethren (Church of the Brethren, Brethren Church, etc.). The Amish did not come to Virginia in the Colonial period but only in the 20th century.

In Wust’s study of the German element of the Valley, there were some letters in existence between the Virginia Germans and their families and friends in Germany. John W. Wayland and Joseph K. Ruebush took him on a tour through Frederick, Shenandoah and Rockingham counties, introducing him to the German areas of settlement. Augusta County was largely Scotch-Irish.

Mennonites in the Palatinate were not Palatines; they were Swiss in origin. The first Germanic immigrants to Pennsylvania came in 1683 from Netherlands and North Germany. Most of these became Quakers.

In Page County a large Mennonite congregation, beginning in 1727, later joined the Baptists. When the militia was formed, these people emerged as “Menno-Baptists,” according to government terminology, because of their opposition to war.

The ships bringing the Germanic settlers who came to the Valley mostly landed in Philadelphia. A few came through the port of Charleston, S.C., when that was opened, and later through Annapolis, Md.

Jacob Stover talked to emigrants at English ports about settling in the German/Swiss colony in Virginia rather than in Pennsylvania. Lord Fairfax opposed this, claiming the land himself. Jose Hite, in Pennsylvania, also recruited settlers for Virginia. Prospective Valley settlers paid Hite for the land, which turned out to be Lord Fairfax’ land. After the Revolutionary War, Hite’s claim to the land succeeded.

The Valley area was generally called the “Shenando Valley, occasionally the “Southern Potomac.”

The Wayland family came in 1714 directly to Germanna colony in Virginia, not through Pennsylvania.

Some indentured servants, “Redemptionists,” came to Virginia in 1717 and settled in what is now Madison

County and in Rockingham County. They generally served from 3 to 5 years to pay for their passage to America.

By 1727, when ship lists began to be kept at the port of Philadelphia, Mennonite settlers were already in the Shenandoah Valley. For this reason, or because they may have come through other ports, the early Virginia Mennonite names do not appear on ship lists.

Indentured servants felt like slaves. Mennonites were known to object to slavery. One man's opinion was that it was not due to religious scruples, but because they were tight with their money—they had wives and children to work for free.

A Scotch-Irish letter commented on the Germanic style of heating homes—the central stove and chimney—that the Germans want to burn down their houses, whereas the Scotch-Irish have chimneys at the ends of their houses to warm the environment.

George Washington, in a comment on the Mennonites in the Valley, thought that they were "as ignorant as Indians" because they would not speak English, but, when spoken to, answered in "Dutch."

Early Brethren settlements in the area began when Eckerlin and Alexander Mack, Jr., came from Ephrata Cloisters and settled south of Roanoke in "Dunkers' Bottom;" some settled near Strasburg. They were known as "Sabbatarian Baptists" or Sabbatarian Brethren."

The eastern Virginia settlers saw the settlements in the Shenandoah Valley as a barrier to protect them from Indian attack. Therefore they did not oppose the German settlements of the Valley.

The reason there were so many Hessian soldiers in America is that the Hessians sold their troops for foreign service to gain funds and to give their troops some combat training. Almost 2/3 of them stayed and were gradually accepted into the Germanic communities.

- Lois B. Bowman

Book Review

Klaus Wust, The Virginia Germans. The University Press of Virginia, 1969 (paperback 1989), 310 pp.

This is a selective review, giving attention to the historical record of the Mennonite and Dunker (Church of the Brethren) settlements in the Valley of Virginia.

In Colonial America few Germans immigrated to Jamestown, to the Tidewater or Piedmont sections of Virginia. But in the second quarter of the 18th century, Germans who had originally settled in Pennsylvania began to filter southward into the Valley of Virginia. Three of the earliest settlements were in present-day Page County, the Opequon colony near Winchester, and the Massanutten colony southward from Strasburg. With simple log cabins built near a spring the Germans farmed the limestone soil, planted orchards, built mills and traded labor. The German language and their isolation from the English colonists east of the Blue Ridge led them to retain their community identity for decades.

Since the Virginia Germans lived in the buffer zone between the English settlements to the east and the Indian lands to the west, they suffered real threats during the French and Indian War (1754 - 1763). In a last outrage, the Mennonite preacher John Rhodes (Roads), his wife, and six of their children were massacred on the banks of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. During the Revolutionary War the Dunkers and Mennonites had military exemption by paying a fee for a substitute.

After the Revolution there came a steady influx of Pennsylvania Germans into the Valley to obtain cheaper land, a migration spearheaded by Bishop Peter Blosser and Elder John Garber. As free citizens now of America, the Germans tended to have political interest in local affairs, such as roads and bridges, rather than in national affairs. Most Dunkers, Mennonites and United Brethren in the Valley opposed slavery, although labor was exchanged. As Wust quipped, "Germans didn't need slaves, they had large families."

Prior to the 19th century there were no established congregations among the Dunkers or Mennonites in the Valley. Meeting in union church buildings or in homes, they depended upon itinerant preachers or devoted lay persons. The first Dunker church buildings in Rockingham County were Garbers and Linville erected in the 1820's. Trissels near Broadway was the first Mennonite church building, erected in 1823. Within five years, six other church buildings went up in Rockingham and Augusta counties.

Refusal to bear arms, opposition to any war, and the refusal to swear formal oaths were principles of the Mennonite and Dunker people. Because they stood out in dress, in habits, and in speech, they maintained their distinctives longer than most of their neighbors of German descent (Lutheran and Reformed). Wust tells about a Dunker blacksmith, Peter Driver (1766 – 1859) who, when reminded that English and German people have the same God, said, "I believe that, but He speaks to German people in a much plainer way in His Word than he does to English people."

The few books among the plain sects included the *Bible*, *Martyrs Mirror*, an almanac, hymnals and pietistic literature, such as the popular *Die Wandlende Seele* (The Wandering Soul) written in 1635 by Mennonite Johann Philip Schabalje. The Henkels of New Market published books in German until 1841 and the Wartmann print shop in Harrisonburg continued some German printing until 1872, including the German songs in Joseph Funk's *A Compilation of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. Funk conducted singing schools and produced an entirely English work, first entitled *Genuine Church Music*, but better known since 1851 as *Harmonia Sacra*. The Dunkers preferred the *Kleine Davidische Psalterspiel*. Their first English hymnbook was *The Christian Duty*.

Acculturation of the German communities into English society began at a slow pace after the 1830s. Harvest was a time for exchanging labor and fellowship with their neighbors. Popular social events of the era were corn-huskings, quilting parties, barn raisings and apple butter boiling. Many utilitarian skills developed: cabinet-making, weaving, wood-carving, iron works, pottery and clocks. One of the last vestiges of the German heritage was the

continuation of the dialect, "Valley Dutch", and the varied spellings of names and places.

Klaus Wust closes his book with brief references to the sufferings of the Shenandoah Valley residents during the Civil War and to the anti-German sentiments during World War I. (German Street in Harrisonburg was renamed Liberty Street). He takes note of the murder of Elder John Kline (1797-1864), the Dunker leader who traveled 87,000 miles mostly on horseback on his errands of faith. The author also acknowledges the more recent settlements of German sectarians to Virginia in such scattered locations as Warwick, Fentress, South Boston, Kempsville, Stuarts Draft, Gladys, Schuyler, and Catlett.

The Virginia Germans is a well-researched comprehensive history of the German settlements in Virginia. The understanding of our heritage as Shenandoah Valley Mennonites and Brethren is greatly enhanced by the work of scholar Klaus Wust.

- Harold D. Lehman

Valley Brethren Mennonite Cultural Center Progress Report

1. The Valley Brethren/Mennonite Cultural Center organization has become a reality. A board composed of equal numbers of Brethren and Mennonites (up to 18 members) has been formed. The organization has been incorporated in the state of Virginia, by-laws have been approved and a tax exempt status approval is being awaited.
2. The board has met four times, meeting alternately at Brethren and Mennonite church facilities, and has formed several sub-committees, including a program committee, a site/facilities committee, a publicity committee, a fund raising committee and an executive committee. These committees are busy at work:
 - A. The program committee is nearing completion on a vision/goals/purpose statement that will guide the VBMCC activities.
 - B. The site/facilities committee has met numerous times investigating the alternative sites for the center. Al Keim will report on specifics.

C. The publicity and fund raising committees are poised to begin work pending the decisions taken during the VBMCC all-day working session on October 22.

3. A contingent of VBMCC board members attended a "Conference Resourcing Mennonite Interpretive Centers" sponsored by the Historical Committee of the Mennonite Church, in Berlin, Ohio on September 17 and 18. It proved to be a very helpful experience.
4. On October 22, an all day work session was conducted to bring together all ideas, thinking and issues that have emerged in this last year with the objective of making a number of definitive decisions regarding the purposes and program of the cultural center, the selection of the site, the general profile of the facilities that will be needed, the form of raising the necessary resources and funds for the project.

- Calvin Redekop
9-25-99

L.J. Heatwole, Astronomer and Almanac Maker, Part II

As L.J. Heatwole continued his work with the almanac, a news item caught his attention. A committee of the League of Nations was considering the reconstruction of the Gregorian Calendar in order to remove its acknowledged inconveniences and to better meet the needs of businesses and other interests. The principal objections were: 1) that the months, quarters and half years were of unequal length, and 2) that the year having one day over fifty-two weeks, the date of the month falls on a different day each year from that of the preceding year.

The League of Nations' plan was a year of thirteen months of equal lengths (28 days) with an added day between December 25th and the first day of January, and in the leap-year, another day between the last day of June 28th and the first day of July, these days to be treated in business as "bland days" and to be observed as universal world holidays.

A perpetual calendar would have benefits. It would remove the difficulty and confusion in remembering dates. Easter and all other special days and movable feasts would have fixed dates.

L.J. was so interested in the calendar change that he began making calculations for the year 1913. He arranged it after the system of the ancient Hebrew and Egyptian calendars with the addition of a 13th month he called "Evember" coming between the months of August and September. It also contained a column of the former system running parallel with the new dates.

After a certificate of copyright was issued to him by the librarian of the United States Congress on October 27, 1911, L.J. was ready to bring his work before the public and he wrote the following letter to a member in the legislative body, asking for endorsement:

My Honorable Friend;

The system of time measure that calls for a recast of the World's calendar having for sometime been claiming wide attention from the public press, and being now a much discussed topic with religious, educational, and scientific bodies in Europe and America; the plan set forth by the folder herewith handed you is one well calculated to appeal to the judgement and good sense of almanac makers everywhere, and also, to meet the ready approval of a generous public.

No doubt it has already come to your notice that the National Board of Trade at its last session, held in the City of Washington, gave ready endorsement to the movement now on foot for revising the Gregorian Calendar, and furthermore that plans are materializing for holding a Calendar Revision Congress at the City of Geneva, Switzerland, summer 1912, which is to be composed of a representative delegation from each of the civilized nations of the world.

A certificate of Copyright has been issued to me by the librarian of the United States Congress for the system herein offered for your examination; yet it is to be observed that

the author's intention is not that the Gregorian calendar shall be entirely dispensed with but that the two together shall form a combination by which the data columns of the new and old system may stand side by side for comparison; the first for establishing all future records from the time it goes into use, and the latter for preserving in proper connection all records of the past.

Believing that you will find this improved system of time measure worthy of your approval and support, that you will find it congenial as well as practical to recommend it for endorsement by the department of study or legislative body of which you are a member, and that you will accord to me the courtesy of an early reply to this letter, I have the honor to remain,

Humbly but Sincerely,
L.J. Heatwole
Co-operative Observer,
U.S. Weather Bureau

With the advent of such a world-wide movement, it is natural that the promoters of plans and propositions for improving the calendar should use special effort to bring their schemes to the attention of the World's Calendar Revision Conference for consideration and adoption.

Among the calendar revisions to be presented at the Geneva Conference in 1912 was The Rational Calendar proposed by M.B. Cotsworth of York, England. This provided for 13 months of 28 days each. The Invariable Calendar by L.A. Grosclaude of Switzerland divided the year into four equal quarters of 91 days each. L.J. Heatwole's The Perpetual Calendar had a few extra features along with the basic calendar of 13 months, each of 28 days. The extra month was named "Evember." The new year and each new month always began on Sunday, making the 7-day week the standard of measurement. The most distinctive feature of L.J.'s plan was to provide a parallel Gregorian Calendar. Each of these proposals had their own way of providing the extra day (two days in case of Leap Year) to be listed as "days without date."

Through the courtesy of the American Consular Service L.J. was informed that the Executive

Committee appointed by the Swiss Republic in co-operation with the International Chambers of Commerce was, during the summer of 1912, taking the initiative of inviting the different world powers to consider the proposition of holding a World's Calendar Revision Congress at Geneva Switzerland. Not all the governments to which invitation has been sent have responded, but it is known that with the different countries in Europe, more than anywhere else in the world, the sentiment favorable to calendar revision is rapidly taking definite form."

L.J. was unable to go to Geneva in the summer of 1912. His brother, Cornelius J. Heatwole, an educational leader, went instead to present L.J.'s calendar before the meeting of the League of Nations. When his brother sent a report of the meeting, L.J. replied. "The account of the address you made before a thousand people gave me quite a thrill."

To L.J.'s disappointment, the final decision of the Congress was not to undertake making a change in the age-old calendar.

To have been a participant in those days when the study of astronomy and weather forecasting was being developed in the United States was a privilege that L.J. greatly appreciated. He comments:

"Astronomy and meteorology are the two most inspiring studies in the whole catalogue of science and there is no reason in the world why the student in each or both should not be a devoutly religious man.

"In my experience, at least, I can testify that it has been the means in many ways of confirming my religious belief and often lent inspiration to me in my work as a minister."

From time to time illustrations of these interests would be reflected in L.J.'s sermons. The following excerpt is an example:

"Were ministers to preach always on spiritual things alone, the people would gradually grow weary of having one side of the matter presented to them. And even with such who delight to converse on the spiritual side of religion do not object to us ministers once in awhile talking about the things that are seen with the natural eye and heard with the natural ear. One illustration, God speaking to

Job and his friends out of a storm, whirlwind, storm clouds, all these such as are comprehended through the natural senses, the eye and ear. And in each of these we have one of the grandest and noblest attributes of God most strikingly set forth.”

“Now we shall notice that of the three most destructive elements known to this world are fire, flood, and storm. The most widespread and raging fires may be subdued and brought under control by man; the overrunning flood, though not to be held in check at all, it can be kept within certain bounds through the agency of man. But before the howling sweep of the storm, the puny arm of man remains utterly powerless. The Lord seems in his wisdom to have reserved to himself the sole and entire management of the storm. Nowhere in sacred or profane history have we discovered where man ever made the attempt, much less succeeded, in having his way with the storm.”

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“The greatest lesson for us to learn here is that this is one of the means by which God commands universal attention of all mankind.”

The marvels of the late 20th century would have delighted L.J. But his lifetime wish to understand the mysteries of the universe was granted when he met, face to face, the Creator of “all things visible and invisible” before these marvels had come into our sphere of knowledge and understanding.

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

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