



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

*A quarterly periodical dedicated to the history and culture of
Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, USA*

The *Historian* officers invite you to attend our annual business meeting in November. It will be held at Village Hall, on Heritage Drive at VMRC in Harrisonburg, Saturday, November 1, 9:30 a.m. Those who guide the Shenandoah Historians are Jim Hershberger, Norman Wenger, Gary Smucker, James Rush, Gerald Brunk, and Elwood Yoder.

In this issue, Karl Rhodes has researched and written another excellent article on the Civil War era. His article focuses on Abraham Funk (1807–1875). We also recognize sixty years in pastoral ministry for Harvey Yoder.

The footwashing photo above symbolizes reconciliation that has taken place in recent years between the Reformed Churches and the Mennonite World Conference. Watching this footwashing in May of this year was a significant moment as my Yoder ancestors departed the Reformed Church in Switzerland to join the Anabaptist Mennonites.

Elwood Yoder, editor

As a symbol of reconciliation, Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, left, and César García, general secretary of Mennonite World Conference, washed each other's feet in Zurich, Switzerland, on May 29, 2025.

Photo by Elwood Yoder



The Grossmünster church, along the banks of the Limmat River in Zurich Switzerland, in a photo taken by the Editor on May 28, 2025, while attending the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism in the historic city.

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The Civil War Adventures of Abraham Funk — The Forgotten Mennonite

By Karl Rhodes

Abraham Funk knocked urgently on the door of Elder John Kline's Broadway home at 1 a.m. on Saturday, April 18, 1863. Elder Kline was the most prominent leader of the German Baptist Brethren in Virginia and nationally, but in this post-midnight moment, it was more important that he was also a doctor.

Funk informed Kline that George Sellers had broken his leg while dodging Confederate conscription scouts west of Broadway. Sellers was hiding at Funk's home, which was a depot on the underground railroad for Mennonites and Brethren who refused to fight in the Civil War. At about 11 p.m. that night, a group of nonresistant men had gathered at the depot to meet a guide who would take them to their next stop on the underground. Their ultimate destination was New Creek Station, where they could catch a train west into Ohio or east into Maryland or Pennsylvania. It was easier in Union states for nonresistant men to stay out of the war.

After leaving Funk's home, about two miles west of Broadway, the refugees turned onto a road that ran along the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. At this juncture, the bluff above the river was nearly 100 feet high, and when their guide spotted "rebel scouts," the men scampered and tumbled down the steep embankment to the river's edge. No one was seriously hurt except Sellers, whose leg was broken. He somehow made it back to Funk's depot, and Abraham rode quickly to the south edge of town to fetch Kline.



Elder John Kline Homestead, Broadway, Va., in a 1995 photo taken by Elwood Yoder

The Brethren preacher-doctor followed Abraham home and set Sellers' leg. He built a frame to hold the fractured bones in place and returned home to record the entire episode in his daily diary.

The Brethren preacher-doctor followed Abraham home and set Sellers' leg. He built a frame to hold the fractured bones in place and returned home to record the entire episode in his daily diary.

"We are keeping the whole matter a profound secret to save the life of a good man," Kline wrote. "He was taken back to Abraham Funk's, where he is at this time receiving treatment in secret from me."¹



1. The George Sellers story comes primarily from Funk (1900), pp. 461–462 and 464. Other sources are Rodes, Wenger, and Bittinger (2007), p. 250, and Colby (1928), p. 590. Colby does not identify Sellers by name. She refers to him as a "Union soldier," who broke his leg while trying to escape and had to return to the Funk home. This "Union soldier" was quite likely Sellers, who was never a Union soldier.

Abraham Funk is the forgotten Mennonite among the many intriguing tales of Anabaptist men who refused to fight in the Civil War. Perhaps he was forgotten because he fled Virginia during the war and never moved back. Perhaps he was forgotten because none of his descendants became Mennonites, but his story is too compelling to overlook.

Born in 1807, Abraham learned the stone-cutting trade from his father, Christian Funk (1773–1853), who was a brother to Joseph Funk, the musical Mennonite of Singers Glen fame. Abraham and Christian operated the Funk Marble Works on Cedar Run about two miles west of Broadway. They carved many tombstones that can still be found in cemeteries throughout Rockingham County and southern Shenandoah County, and they quite often signed their work.²

Abraham married Matilda Armentrout in 1834, and they had one child every two years—beginning with David in 1835 and ending with George in 1847. The middle children were Susannah, Mary, Christian, and Catharine in that order. Abraham and Matilda had one more child (John) in 1850, who died in March 1851. Matilda died later that year.³

Two years later, Abraham's father, Christian Funk, died at age 80. "He was a very consistent member of the Mennonite persuasion and suddenly died in the meetinghouse ... in the very act of singing a devotional hymn," Kline noted in his diary. "Let us hope that as the song died on his lips here his soul caught its echo in heaven."

Less poetically but more accurately, Virginia Mennonite historian Elwood Yoder clarified that Christian Funk collapsed while leading singing at Trissels Mennonite Church and "died along the way as his family was taking him home." Yoder further noted that Abraham "made a German language grave marker for Christian and Susanna (his wife), who passed away six years earlier."⁴

In addition to cutting stone, Abraham was a farmer and a civic-minded man—particularly in the realm of public transportation. In February 1848, Kline mentioned Abraham prominently among the patrons who planned to bridge the North Fork of the Shenandoah River near Samuel Cootes' store and championed other road improvements at Brocks Gap.

Abraham also shared Kline's interest in the Manassas



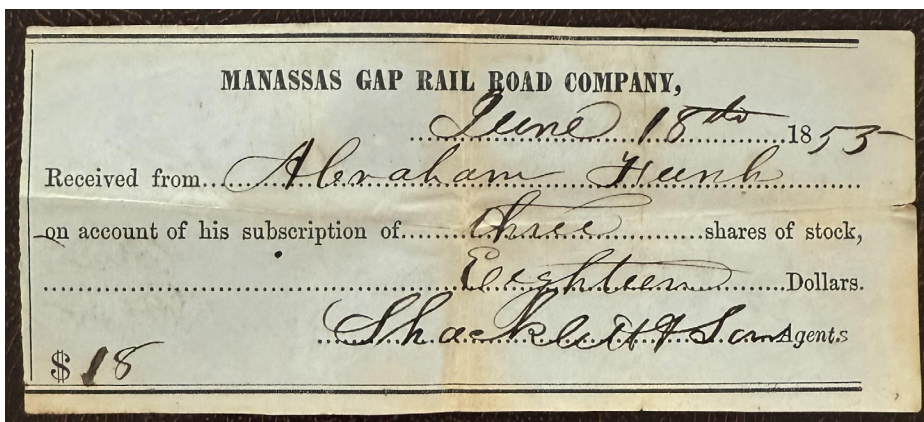
Christian Funk's German language marker in the Trissels Mennonite Church cemetery, unusual as most markers in the cemetery are in English.

Elwood Yoder photo

2. See Patteson (1984) for extensive details about Funk tombstones in the Shenandoah Valley.

3. The composition of Funk's immediate family comes from Ancestry.com and from Abraham's obituary in the *Herald of Truth*.

4. Yoder (2022), p. 23.



Funk was among several civic-minded men who purchased stock in the Manassas Gap Rail Road Company in hopes of bringing trains to Rockingham County.

Courtesy of the Gordon F. and Barbara S. Clark family

Gap Rail Road Company. Abraham purchased stock in the company in the 1850s and likely was involved in early efforts to extend the railroad farther south into Rockingham County.⁵

Abraham's oldest son, David, also learned the stone-cutting trade and moved west to Ford County, Illinois, in 1860. Then Abraham married Rebecca Shue in 1861, soon

after the outbreak of war.⁶ Abraham was too old to be drafted into the Confederate army,

but his son, Christian, was pressed into service as a teamster as soon as he turned eighteen. The army sent him home when he became sick, and he eventually escaped through the underground railroad to join his brother in Illinois.⁷



Rebecca and Abraham Funk, likely in the early 1870s.

Photo from the Gordon F. and Barbara S. Clark family

With no one of conscription age remaining in the Funk household, the farm became a depot on the underground railroad.⁸ Confederate officials never discovered Abraham's secret activities, but they did accuse him of providing aid and comfort to the enemy. After hiding for a brief time, he turned himself in at the Rockingham County Courthouse in late 1862.⁹

The local court moved his trial to Staunton, where he was ably defended by John Baldwin, a good lawyer and a Confederate congressman who was sympathetic to the plight of nonresistant Mennonites and Brethren. Baldwin put Abraham on the witness stand, and the

5. Funk's great-great-grandson, Gordon F. Clark and his wife, Barbara S. Clark, have several receipts made out to Abraham Funk for the purchase of shares in the Manassas Gap Rail Road Company from 1853 through 1856.

6. David's stone-cutting expertise, his marriage to Annie Neff in 1858, and his move to Illinois in 1860 are mentioned in his obituary in *The Breckenridge Bulletin*, March 11, 1921.

7. See Colby (1928), pp. 588–589.

8. Funk's reputation for assisting draft dodgers is also implied in Rhodes (1864), p. 15.

9. Colby (1928), p. 585.



A map from the Library of Congress shows the location of the Funk Marble Works, marked with an X, and the proposed alignment of the Manassas Gap Railroad, marked with a dotted line. The blue line extending south from the North Fork of the Shenandoah River is Cedar Run.

gist of his testimony was reconstructed in a 1928 article by Lydia Colby for the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*.

“Mr. Funk, you are accused of feeding two Union soldiers. Did you?”

Abraham admitted that he did, but he also offered a tolerable explanation.

“Only two weeks ago two Union soldiers came to me hungry, and I fed them,” Funk said. “But I have fed a hundred Confederate soldiers. My religion bids me send no man away from my door hungry.”¹⁰ The jury acquitted him.

Colby’s article also claimed that Abraham had sheltered six Union soldiers for seven weeks before they went north through enemy lines. She noted, however, that one of those soldiers broke his leg and had to return to the Funk home. Sound familiar? The similarities to the story in Kline’s diary are too great to be coincidental. Colby’s primary source was Abraham’s youngest son, George, who probably assumed that the Confederate deserters were Union soldiers. But

¹⁰ Colby (1928), p. 585.

even though George lived in the Funk home, his knowledge of the depot's role in the underground railroad was only second-hand. Colby noted that Abraham's children were unaware at the time that six men were hiding on the farm. In sharp contrast, Kline reported the story in much greater detail from first-hand experience, so his version of the incident—written down that day or soon thereafter—seems far more credible.¹¹

Regardless of Sellers' reasons for dodging Confederate scouts, that fact remained that Abraham was putting himself and his family in harm's way. He was despised by his Secesh neighbors as a Union sympathizer, and his courthouse acquittal in Staunton would have done nothing to assuage their contempt for him. Concealing Sellers for one more month must have made Abraham nervous.

Finally, Sellers' leg healed sufficiently for him to move a few miles west to a depot at the foot of Little North Mountain run by United Brethren preacher William J. Miller. When Sellers had fully recovered, Miller took him to the western reaches of his circuit of churches and "sent him beyond the lines."¹²



Soon after Sellers left Virginia, Abraham decided that the time had come to remove himself and his family from the Confederacy as well. To accelerate this plan, Abraham struck a hasty bargain with William Reherd, a large landowner near Harrisonburg who also owned property in Illinois. Abraham agreed to swap his Shenandoah Valley farm for 400 acres in Illinois—sight unseen.

"In order to see what sort of a mudhole he had drawn in the trade, Mr. Funk came west, August 29, 1863, going over the mountains and through West Virginia on foot, until he got to the Ohio River where he could get a train," Colby wrote. Arriving in Henry County, Illinois, Abraham must have been pleased to find "nice rolling land, nearly all of it under cultivation, and a house to which he could bring his family."¹³

He quickly returned to Virginia and started preparing for the move, which was well-documented by Colby.¹⁴

"Remembering lawyer Baldwin's service for him, Mr. Funk went to him to get passes for himself and family through the rebel lines," she wrote. "In going over the list of persons for

11 Compare Colby (1928), p. 590 with Funk (1900), pp. 461–462 and 464.

12. See Rodes, Wenger, and Bittinger (2007), p. 250. George was almost assuredly George A. Sellers (1835–1914), a cabinet maker in Augusta County, who was born in Rockingham. Funk had cut a tombstone for George's sister, Adaline Sellers, in 1851. George clearly moved from Virginia to Ohio in the 1860s and gave his next-born son the middle name "Abraham."

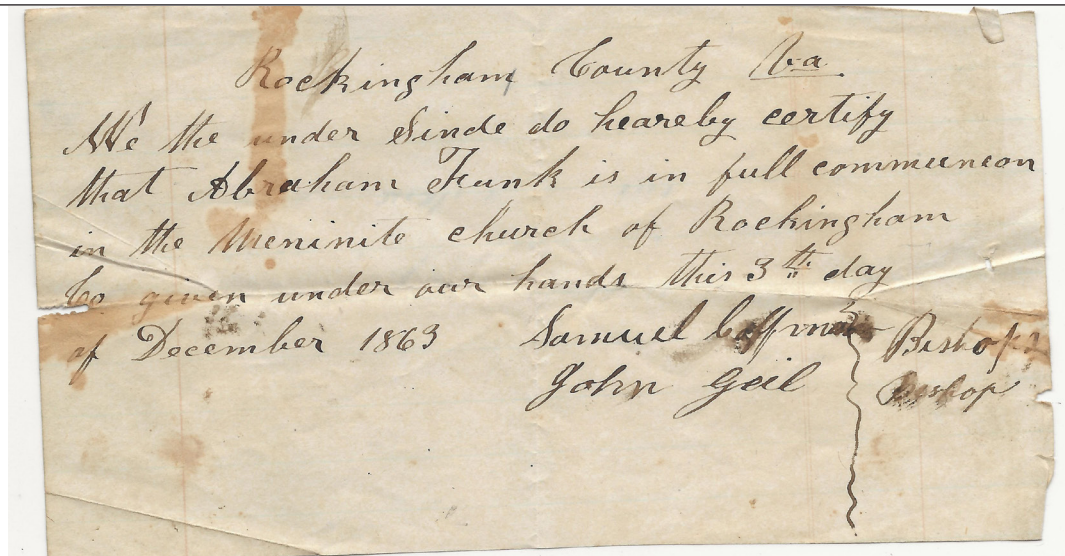
13. The details of Funk's move to Illinois come exclusively from Colby (1928), pp. 586–587.

14. Funk's great-great-grandson, Gordon F. Clark and his wife, Barbara S. Clark, have a handwritten note dated December 3, 1863, from Bishop Samuel Coffman and Bishop John Geil affirming that Abraham was in full communion with the Mennonite Church in Rockingham County. This note likely was requested by Baldwin to help obtain the family's pass to cross enemy lines in December 1863.

whom he was to secure passes, he (Baldwin) found that Mr. Funk's youngest child, George, was nearly seventeen years old. 'We will not mention him,' said Mr. Baldwin, 'or he will be forced into the Confederate service by conscription.

Your son George can accompany you without a pass and trust to his wits to

get through.' ... Funk then disposed of his stock and furniture and all goods that could not be loaded on two loads, one drawn by two horses and one drawn by four. Heirlooms, keepsakes and sentiment have no place in a country at war. They left the old home, December 27, 1863, with these two loads and struck northwest for the mountains and a railway.



Confederate Congressman John Baldwin may have requested this note to help secure a pass through enemy lines for the Funk family.

Courtesy of the Gordon F. and Barbara S. Clark family

"At the end of the first day's journey, they found themselves on top of Pendleton Mountain (Shenandoah Mountain) facing a man with a rack load of rye bundles on a one-track road. They camped for the night and next morning unloaded the bundles, took off the rack and passed by. After fording a branch of the Shenandoah River (more likely the South Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac), they met two rebel soldiers. George Funk, the seventeen-year-old, kept on the [other] side of the road, walking, and passed in silence safely."

Soon after arriving in Henry County, Illinois, the Funk family was joined by Henry G. Brunk, a Mennonite friend from Rockingham County, who had fled to Hagerstown, Maryland, to avoid conscription. Brunk had grown up as an orphan near the Funk Marble Works, and it is quite possible that he had been apprenticed to Abraham as a teenager. It also seems likely that Funk helped his old friend find plastering work in Henry County at \$3 per day.¹⁵

The Brunk family worked a rented farm near the Funk place, as did the Charles Rodgers family, Reuben J. Heatwole, and a few other Mennonites. They subscribed to the *Herald of Truth*, a fledgling newspaper that helped keep the war-strewn Mennonites in touch with one another, but a Mennonite Church never materialized in Henry County.

In 1863, three nearby churches—Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian—merged and became Liberty Church of Cornwall Township. The name came from the "liberty pole" across the street

15. Funk's connection to Henry G. Brunk comes from Erb (c1944), p. 28.

from the church building.¹⁶ During the war, residents of Cornwall Township would fly the U.S. flag from the top of the pole when the Union Army won battles, and they would lower it when Confederate forces prevailed. Abraham attended and supported this Liberty Church until he died in 1875.

His obituary in the *Herald of Truth* summed up his Illinois years quite well: “He was a native of Rockingham County, Va., and left there about 11 years ago, to avoid the terrors of war, which during that period so fearfully devastated the beautiful valley in which he had lived. During his residence in Illinois, he did not enjoy the privileges of his own church (Mennonite) relations, yet his walk and conversation showed that his heart was always warm in the cause of Christ. We miss him but feel assured that he has gone to the rest which remaineth for the people of God.”

Karl Rhodes is the author of Peggy’s War, a true story that highlights the underground railroad for Virginia Mennonites and Brethren who refused to fight in the Civil War. Karl credits the Gordon F. and Barbara S. Clark family of Henry County, Illinois, for their generous assistance in preparing this article. Gordon is a great-great-grandson of Abraham Funk, and he grew up on the family farm in Illinois.

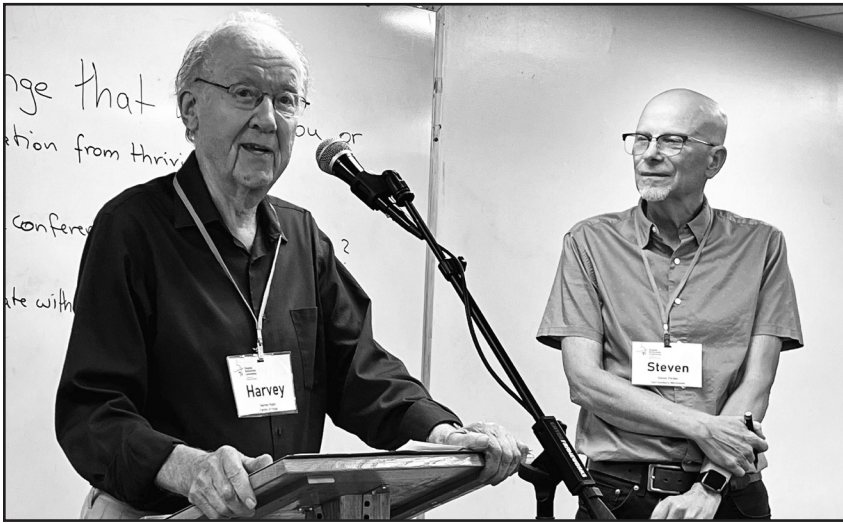
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16. Geneseo Historical Association (1985), p. 34.



Karl Rhodes (above) spoke to participants on a 2024 *Peggy’s War* bus tour. Contact Karl if you are interested in an upcoming possible fifth *Peggy’s War* bus tour at karlwrhodes@gmail.com.

Photo by Elwood Yoder



Harvey Yoder (left) was recognized for sixty years in pastoral ministry at the Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly, August 22, 2025, with Steve Pardini (right), Virginia Conference Chair. The annual assembly met at Ridgeway Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.

Photo by Juan Carlos Malvaez

Pastor Harvey Yoder (above left) liked the yoke of Jesus theme found in the gospels. Harvey preached from Matthew 11:28-30 in his first sermon at Zion Mennonite Church on September 12, 1965. In 2022, Harvey preached on the text again at Zion. Harvey asked that the church's ox yoke be hung in the pulpit as a visual aid to his sermon.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV).

Charles C. Turner gave a life-sized wooden yoke to Zion in 1979, which dates to the Civil War. Pastor Harvey had worked with Charles and helped to restore his membership in the Mennonite Church at Zion. In 1948, Charles bought a prize-winning Tennessee walking horse for \$55,000. Merry Go Boy was the finest Tennessee walking horse in the United States. Turner's fascination lay with prize horses. That did not sit well with the Mennonite bishops, because it appeared to be a worldly involvement, and because the Virginia Conference had warned its members to stay away from the "unequal yoke" of association with unbelievers.¹

Because of his tangled involvement in the world of show horses, Charles forfeited his membership at Zion and the Virginia Conference. Charles' interest in the church never waned, though, and ten years into his pastoral ministry at Zion, Pastor Harvey Yoder restored Charles' membership. Ten years later, in 1985, Pastor Yoder conducted Charles' funeral and burial services at Trissels Mennonite Church.

Bishop J. Ward Shank and Deacon John H. Alger came to Yoder's house in 1965 and



Postcard from 1940s showing Merry Go Boy, a Tennessee walking horse, owned by Charles C. Turner.

1. For more details about Pastor Yoder and Charles C. Turner, see *We're Marching to Zion*, 2010, Yoder, 133-134.

invited him to join Zion Pastor Jesse Byler as an assistant pastor. “We are called to be yoked with Jesus,” Harvey said, and so at age twenty-six, with a college teaching degree, Harvey began his sixty years of ministry. “If we’re not yoked with Jesus, we will be yoked with unbelievers, following the demands of name fashion, mammon, Mars, the god of war, and yoked to death by materialism, nationalism, and other isms that sap our strength and distort our understanding of who we are as children of God.”²

Harvey Yoder was pastor at Zion Mennonite Church from 1965 to 1988 and at Family of Hope from 1988 to 2025. Harvey was a founding member of the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians since its inception in 1993. Harvey served as Director of Highland Retreat 1965-66, and for the first twenty years of his pastoral work at Zion, he taught half-time at Eastern Mennonite High School. Harvey graduated from Eastern Mennonite Seminary and worked as a mental health counselor for many years at Family Life Resource Center in Harrisonburg.

Congratulations, Harvey, on your many accomplishments and for sixty years in ordained ministry!



On April 3, 2022 Zion Pastor Sarah Piper and husband Mike Piper read Scripture before Harvey Yoder preached from Matthew 11: 28-30. The ox yoke was a visual for the sermon.

Screenshot from Zion YouTube video of the service

New findings about Joseph Funk

By Evan K. Knappenberger

On a journey this summer, which could be mischaracterized as a vacation, Andrea Early and I traveled from Harrisonburg to Worcester, Massachusetts, via Harleysville, Pennsylvania, Madison, New Jersey (where I am in graduate school), and New Haven, Connecticut.

At the Mennonite Heritage Center in Harleysville, we got a tour of the museum by Joyce Myers and had a pleasant time with Joel Nofziger and Eileen Kinch. Joyce directed us to the Delp and Klein historic meeting houses nearby to the museum, as well as to the Christian Funk mill along Indian Creek. At the Delp Meetinghouse are buried, among others, Bishop Heinrich Funk, grandfather of Joseph Funk of Singers Glen, and Barbara Showalter, Heinrich’s wife. Seeing these graves left a deep impression on Andrea, who is descended from this important man.

The Yale Special Collections Library, Beinecke, in Connecticut, is a beautiful building, six stories of translucent marble that shines with natural sunlight, with millions of volumes stored in glass vaults inside. Here we found several interesting pieces of information regarding early Har-

2. Zion Mennonite Church, April 3, 2022, YouTube video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y00nIVoJLMO>

risonburg abolitionists.

At Drew University, in New Jersey, is the Global United Methodist Archives, a vast treasure trove that includes the papers of Abram Paul Funkhouser, a good friend and peer of Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole, who sold to Eastern Mennonite the land in Park View, which makes up most of Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community and the schools still called Eastern Mennonite.

Finally, at the American Antiquarian Society, an unassuming hidden gem in Worcester, Massachusetts, we spent a day perusing their amazing collection, which included the only copy of my ancestor Phillip Knappenberger's (Strasburg, Ohio) treatise against Jesus of Nazareth (1856). But more importantly, we discovered two books of Joseph Funk: the first being his handwritten manuscript rejoinder against the theology of Elders John Kline and Peter Nead; and the second being a log of personal outgoing correspondence from Funk's desk from roughly 1856-8.

The significance of this log has been lost on history until the present moment. Tyler Brinkerhof wrote his 2022 Master's thesis at James Madison University in part on the business of Funk's musical-cultural empire, analyzing the subscription data published by Funk himself; now, with the rediscovery of Funk's deeper business and personal records, historians might begin to paint a more nuanced picture of the Mennonite man who birthed the Southern Sacred Music tradition.

The Shenandoah Mennonite Historians Annual Meeting is set for Saturday, November 1, 9:30 a.m. at Village Hall at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community (VMRC), Harrisonburg. From Route 42, follow Heritage Drive, cross Shank Drive, and you will find Village Hall. Plan to attend the annual Historians business meeting, with input from Nolt and Yoder on the new book, People of Peace: A History of the Virginia Mennonite Conference. All are welcome!

Gary Smucker spoke about the Tusing sisters at a gathering in Lost River, West Virginia, September 13, 2025. Ora Tusing (1896–1974) and Lynn Tusing (1905–2000) attended the Mathias Mennonite Church in West Virginia. Relatives of the Tusing women spoke on September 13 and told stories about the pioneer women who lived on Branch Mountain in Hardy County.

You can read about the Tusing sisters and their unique mountain lives in *People of Peace: A History of the Virginia Mennonite Conference*, 2025. In a book section on women in ministry during the 1960s and 1970s, stories are told about Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus, the Tusings, Catherine R. Mumaw, Lena Yutzy, and Ruth Byler.

People of Peace is available to purchase at Rocky Cedars store in Dayton, Rocktown History in Dayton, and the Brethren & Mennonite Heritage Center. You can also contact Elwood Yoder to purchase a copy for \$25.00 (elyoder@gmail.com or 540-383-2490).



Gary Smucker spoke at
Lost River, West Virginia,
September 13, 2025.
Photo by Elwood Yoder



The Pleasant View Mennonite Fellowship (above), Mount Crawford, Virginia, is a part of the Nationwide Fellowship Churches. The congregation held an ordination for a deacon, conducted by lot, on September 16, 2025. The service was held at the Pike Mennonite Church, a larger meetinghouse, because approximately 400 people attended. The Editor attended the service. Photo by Elwood Yoder, Sept. 19, 2025

Officers of the Historians: Chair, James L. Hersberger; Treasurer, Norman R. Wenger; Secretary, Gary Smucker; James L. Rush, newsletter circulation; Gerald R. Brunk; and Elwood E. Yoder, Editor.

The Shenandoah Mennonite Historian is published quarterly by the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, established in 1993. If you have an idea for an article for the Historian, contact the Editor at elyoder@gmail.com.

Past issues of *Historian*, from 1994-2025, can be found at mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net. This site includes a link to over 1,650 photos related to Mennonites in Virginia.

An annual individual membership fee for the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians is \$10.00 per year, which includes a subscription to the *Historian*. Additional family memberships are \$5 each. Send membership fees to James Rush, e-mail at jameslrush@comcast.net, phone 540-421-7890, or U.S. mail to James Rush, 5736 Brookside Circle, Lowville, NY, 13367.

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