

Bishop Jacob Hildebrand Votes for Secession

by James O. Lehman

Part I

The Civil War was a time of intense pressure for Virginia Mennonites. Readers are, no doubt, aware of Samuel Horst's book, *Mennonites in the Confederacy* (Herald, 1967), which documents much of what took place. Peter Hartman's *Reminiscences of the Civil War* and Harry A. Brunk's first volume of *History of Mennonites in Virginia* also supplement Horst's book significantly.

However, two diaries came to light last fall that tell us a good bit more about Augusta County Mennonites. One is a diary kept by Bishop Jacob Hildebrand for 1861, and a fragment for 1867. The other is a diary or journal kept by his first cousin, Jacob R. Hildebrand, covering much of the time between 1862-1865, and in the possession of John R. Hildebrand of Salem, Virginia.¹

Our focus is on Bishop Jacob Hildebrand (1816-1899), sometimes called Jacob Hildebrand, Jr., because he had the same name as his father. Father Jacob (1782-1862) was

married to Anna Barbara Brenneman (1780-1845), daughter of Abraham Brenneman, the large landowner along Linville Creek in Rockingham County, Virginia. Bishop Jacob's grandparents were Henry Hildebrand (1758-1849) and Margaret Musselman (1762-1832), and Henry's parents were George Michael Hildebrand (1722-1790) and Anna Zimmerman (d. 1792). For several generations the Hildebrands lived in Earl Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and the immigrant from Germany, Conrad Hildebrand (b. 1699) is believed to have been the father of George Michael, and perhaps the person of this family line who first became Mennonite.²

In 1795 Bishop Jacob's grandparents, Henry and Margaret, moved to Augusta County, and settled on the South River about five miles north of Waynesboro. Many of the family attended the congregation that became known as the Hildebrand Mennonite Church north of Waynesboro. The bishop's father, Jacob, was the oldest of six children, which also included Michael, John, Margaret, Henry and Magdalena. John married Susan Leonard and

moved to Knox County, Ohio; their son Henry later moved to Illinois and became an Illinois cavalryman during the Civil War.³ Margaret married Henry Burkholder and moved to Illinois. Henry married Susanna Grove and moved to Fairfield Co., Ohio and later to Huntington Co., Indiana. Michael and Magdalena stayed in Augusta County, the latter marrying John Rader.⁴

Michael married Frances/Fronica Heatwole and one of their 11 children was Jacob R. Hildebrand, who became a Virginia Mennonite deacon (Christmas day, December 25, 1863) and minister in 1870. Jacob R. (1819-1908) married Catherine Rodefer and all three of their sons served in the Confederate army.⁵ Son Benjamin Franklin enlisted already in July 1861 and fought throughout the whole war; he was at Appomattox when the General Lee surrendered. Gideon Peter joined the First Virginia Cavalry on January 1, 1864, one week after his father was ordained a deacon at the Hildebrand church. Michael Conrad, at 17, joined the First Virginia Cavalry at an unknown date, but we know he was in the

cavalry by January 30, 1865. The possibilities for exemption from fighting had greatly diminished by that time. On April 1, eight days before the war ended, Gideon Peter was killed. Sometime later Bishop Hildebrand held a memorial service at the Hildebrand church for his cousin's son, Gideon.

Did Jacob R. Hildebrand know that his first cousin fought in the Illinois Cavalry of the Union forces? Likely not, for one would expect he might have commented on that in his journal when he especially remarked about the Battle of Shiloh, Tennessee, a battle in which Henry Hildebrand of Illinois fought?

We return to Bishop Jacob Hildebrand. He was married to Magdalene Gochenour (1814-1891) and they had five children, Frances, born Sept. 14, 1841 (married David Kennedy and had two children); Samuel, born Jan. 11, 1845 (married Fanny Williams and had four children); Jacob L., born Aug. 11, 1848 (married Anna Berry and Emma Hildebrand and had 10 children by Anna and four more by Emma); Magdelene, born Oct. 16, 1853 (married Lindsey Swartzel); and Mary, born Aug. 5, 1856 (married James Merritt). Bishop Jacob and his wife became large landowners, reputedly owning nearly a thousand acres.⁶

Jacob Hildebrand married Magdalena Gochenour on Aug. 22, 1839. Four years later, in July 1843 he was baptized, presumably at the Hildebrand church. Only five months later, on December 3, 1843, he was ordained to the ministry there. On May 8, 1847, he became bishop. His ministry

extended for a number of decades. It diminished and eventually stopped for a number of years before his death because he suffered from palsy. All his children except the youngest "professed the same faith" as Jacob and Magdalena, his obituary says.⁷

Fortunately, the bishop's 1861 diary survives. That was the year that the Civil War began and Jacob's diary reveals a good bit about this respected churchman and wealthy landowner, who was quite busy with farming and church work, especially in the spring of 1861. For some months that spring he did a good bit of bishop work in the Central (Middle) District of Rockingham County, after the untimely death of Martin Burkholder in December 1860 and before Samuel Coffman was ordained bishop in July 1861.

The diary reveals that Jacob Hildebrand was widely respected and had a great deal of interchange with local Dunkards (later called Church of the Brethren) and with other neighbors. It reveals how heavily he was involved in church work, sometimes preaching funerals for people not of his congregation. The diary further indicates that he had concerns about what was happening in the country at large.

On Friday, January 4, 1861, he reveals that they had preaching at the church "as the Preasident requested to have prayer." That would have been President James Buchanan, because at that time the newly elected president, Abraham Lincoln, did not take office until March. Bishop

Hildebrand's loyalties were solidly with the Union at that point, which was true of many people in Augusta County.

On Sunday February 3 he was at Brenneman's church⁸ near Edom in Rockingham County and the following day he was at Weaver's church. On February 10 he preached at "Mt. Piskey"⁹ On March 17 he preached the funeral for "Williams Madison child" On the 24th he preached the funeral of "Mrs. Kegey."¹⁰

On April 21, at a time when the uppermost topic in the minds of Virginia people was whether Virginia would secede from the Union, the bishop baptized eight people. They were William and Mary Eavers, David Kennedy, Francis Kennedy, John Landes and Anna Landes, Sarah Albright, and "Old Mrs. Hage." William Eavers, who began working for Hildebrand "by the month" on April 1, already worked his last day on April 6, says the diary, because Eavers was "going to muster." All men were expected to be involved in militia service at that time. Before the war Mennonites were usually excused for a small fine.

However, the noose was tightening and it became much more difficult to be excused from the militia. Even though the popular vote had not yet been taken it was looking more and more by this time that Virginia was going to secede from the Union. We know from the newspapers that local militia groups were forming in preparation for the possible eventuality of war. Was William Eavers possibly preparing to go and fight, if war began? From the membership

record we learn that William Eavers, Mary Eavers, Sarah Albright, and "Old Mrs. Hage" were "turned out of church" (excommunicated) in 1864.

On April 18, two days after the Staunton Spectator carried the news that war had begun on April 12, the bishop's diary simply says, "War commenst volunteeeres called on."

On April 25 he preached the funeral for the "Michel Coiner child." The next two days (April 26-27) the semi-annual Virginia Conference met at Hildebrands with two bishops, John Geil of "Lower District" (Northern), and Jacob Hildebrand of the "Upper District" (Southern), plus seven ministers. The "Central District" was without a bishop at this time. We learn that on Saturday April 27 Christian Brunk (of the Winchester District), Daniel S. Heatwole (Central District), and John Evers preached. Evers, a son of Joseph and Catherine (Heatwole) Evers, was raised near Cross Keys in eastern Rockingham County and had been ordained two years earlier at the age of 25.¹¹

What is amazing from this perspective is that the Virginia Conference minutes do not record that secession was discussed, although it must have been a very hot topic by late April. By that time it was evident that Virginia was going to secede and the eagle scream of war hysteria must have been penetrating all the nooks and crannies of Augusta and Rockingham counties.

On Sunday April 28, as was usually done after Virginia Conference meetings, Hildebrand

held a "sacramental meeting" (the word Hildebrand always uses for communion--which illustrates how English he was already). There were 38 members who communed. Also Joel Wheeler joined the church that day.

Harry Brunk thought that Hildebrand was more the center of Mennonite church activities during this time than "Kendigs" (Springdale). There is good reason to think so. For example, Virginia Conference for decades met at Hildebrands in the Upper District, not at Kendigs. However, only 38 members communing seems small. Perhaps both congregations were small at this time, so that the number of Mennonites in Augusta County was not large.

On May 8 Hildebrand preached the funeral of Henry Grove (Kendigs church), and three days later he headed for Rockingham, taking with him the new member Joel Wheeler. They stayed at Emanuel Suter's home and on Sunday the 12th he "administered Sacrement" at the "Dry River Church" (Bank?) to about 220 members. By the 14th came another funeral for the "John Landes child." On Saturday May 18 he headed for Rockingham County again and the following day he held communion at the Pike church to 110 members.¹²

We can be sure the question of secession from the Union was a topic of discussion among Mennonites even though the Hildebrand diary does not reveal it. With all this church work in Rockingham and Augusta counties, it must have been heavily discussed among the Mennonites.

It posed a real dilemma for Mennonites who had long been taught to obey government and pray for government leaders. Emanuel Suter, for example, where Hildebrand stayed on the night of May 11, voted for Virginia to secede from the Union.¹³

Virginia had set May 23 as the day for taking the popular vote on secession. Where was Bishop Jacob Hildebrand on that day? Of course, he made sure he was at home in Augusta County. His diary that day, along with weather and other news, says "I was at Waynesboro voted for Seesetion."

On June 13, Bishop Hildebrand wrote the usual weather news then said, "fast day & prayer proclaimed by the Preasident Had preaching at the church ten 16 chap of Proverbs 7 v." ¹⁴ Who was Hildebrand's president now? It was President Jefferson Davis who called for a day of prayer and fasting that day, not Abraham Lincoln. Bishop Hildebrand had completely changed loyalties in a very short time, as did many other Virginians that spring. Was it under heavy pressure? In our next installment we'll take a closer look at what the Staunton newspaper, the Staunton Spectator, was saying and how overwhelming the vote for secession was, as well as more interesting information from Bishop Hildebrand's diary.

[To be continued]

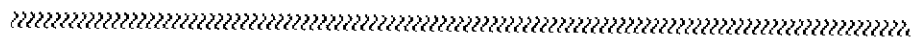
- James O. Lehman

Footnotes for Bishop Hildebrand Article

- 1 Bishop Jacob's diary is located in the Archives of Eastern Mennonite University and was purchased, along with a few other records, in October 1980, when the J. W. Merritt estate was settled. John R. Hildebrand is hoping to publish the Jacob R. Hildebrand journal.
- 2 Andrew J. White, "Descendants of Conrad Hildebrand of Earl Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage 15(October 1992), 30-36.
- 3 Interview with Donald L. Hildebrand, New Braunfels, Texas, May 3, 1995.
- 4 White, "Descendants of Conrad Hildebrand," 36.
- 5 His journal is a fascinating study of a Mennonite family with a very pro-Confederate outlook. After Jacob R. was ordained deacon at the Hildebrand Mennonite Church, the father's interest in troop movements and who's winning and who's losing battles shows no change whatever.
- 6 Albert H. Gerberich, The Brenneman History (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1938), Reprint edition (Kokomo: Selby Publishing & Printing, 1988), 519-522.
- 7 Photocopies of "Materials From Family Bible," Menno Simons Historical Library, Eastern Mennonite University. The obituary appeared in Herald of Truth 36(March 15, 1899), 93.
- 8 Brenneman's was in a sense the forerunner of Lindale Mennonite Church. Both were located near

Edom in Rockingham County. The Lindale meetinghouse was built in 1898 and by 1920 services were discontinued at Brenneman's and the building was sold and removed.

- 9 Most likely a Dunkard church not far from where he lived. In 1861 he preached there several times.
- 10 He also kept a membership record for the Hildebrand and "Kendig" (Springdale) churches, but his record is incomplete enough to be unclear at times.
- 11 Harry A. Brunk, History of Mennonites in Virginia, 1727-1900 (Harrisonburg: Pub. by author, 1959), 322, and "A Register of Ministers" in Minutes of the Virginia Conference, 1939, xxviii.
- 12 One of the important things the diary tells us is the size of these churches, which information is unavailable elsewhere.
- 13 Horst, Mennonites in the Confederacy, 27.
- 14 The bishop's "shorthand" on what passage he preached is not altogether clear. He usually ran his sentences together and, of course, his spelling is not always correct. His obituary says he was "one of the first English ministers and bishops of the Mennonite society in the Valley of Virginia."



Quick Quiz

-Answers on last page

- 1)The first annual Virginia Mennonite Conference was held at
a)Trissels b)Kendigs c)Brennemans d)Weavers
- 2)One man who was successful in leading several parties into safety across the Ohio River early in the Civil War was
a)Isaac Kendig b)Abram Good c)John Shank d)David Rhodes
- 3)The "old Weaver Church Cemetery" is more commonly known as
a)Shank Cemetery b)Blosser Cemetery c)Early Cemetery d)Brenneman Cemetery

Editor's Note

Many thanks go out to James Lehman for providing us with this edition's main article. Please note that it will continue with Part II in our Summer edition.

We are still recruiting writers to help out in future issues. We will be glad to assign a topic if that is needed.

This issue's Shenandoah Valley Pioneer is missing due to lack of space. However, that column will return. Perhaps someone has an ancestor that should be written about. Do a little research and send it along to me.

In 1885, D.J. Lake & Co. of Philadelphia, Pa. published an atlas of Rockingham County. It was reprinted by the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society in a smaller format in 1982.

In this atlas are detailed drawings of each magisterial district containing not only towns and highways, but also the names of each landowner and the location of houses. There are references to many of the businesses in each area as well.

This is an excellent source of information about early Rockingham County.

Annual Meeting to Focus on Civil War

The annual meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians is scheduled for September 22, 1995 at Weaver's Mennonite Church, just west of Harrisonburg, Virginia. Please note the change of date from what was reported in the Spring newsletter.

On that Friday evening at 7:00 P.M. an interesting program entitled "Shenandoah Valley Mennonites in the Civil War" will be presented.

The program will consist of two parts. The first will be a series of vignettes called "Civil War Stories I Have Heard". Speakers will be Mary Deputy Brubaker, Mary Emma Showalter

have a short time to tell some story that was passed down to them concerning Valley Mennonites and the Civil War.

The second part of the program will be presented by Samuel Horst, author of *Mennonites in the Confederacy* (Herald, 1967). At this time he will share with us some of his discoveries about the Valley Mennonites in the Civil War.

The program will also include a short business meeting with an election of officers for the upcoming year of 1996. A proposed constitution will also be presented. There will be ample time after the meeting for fellowship and conversation. The

meeting should not last too long, however, so that persons can retire in time to be fully refreshed before the tour on Saturday morning.

Saturday morning at 8:30, a tour will begin from Weavers Church to visit sites of particular interest concerning happenings of the Civil War in the Valley. The tour will be by bus to facilitate parking and to allow for input from our trip leaders.

A more detailed program, including the cost of the bus tour, will be presented in the Summer edition of this newsletter.

Mark your calendars now so that you can participate in one or both of these events.

Valley Mennonite Churches

Brennemans Mennonite Church

Brennemans Church was established in 1826. Melchior Brennemans and his sons Abraham and Peter, along with his step-brother Christian Brennemans were the most influential promoters in the building of Brennemans Church. It was built on Melchior's farm about six miles south of the existing Trissels Church.

Melchior died in 1828 and the land passed on to his son Peter. In 1852 Peter Brennemans donated the Church and cemetery to the "Mennonite Society".

Brennemans Church was used both as a meetinghouse on Sundays and a day school on weekdays. Being centrally located between the Lower(Northern) District and the Middle District, Brennemans was used for Virginia

Conference meetings quite frequently. Joseph Funk's son Jonathan taught at the school in 1839 and there is record of five of his children attending school at Brennemans Church.

During the time of widespread opposition to Sunday Schools, Emmanuel Suter was invited to help organize one at Brennemans "to keep the children from going to the Edom Sunday School". On July 16, 1871 the Sunday school started and ran for the rest of the Summer. This was the second Sunday school held in Virginia Mennonite churches. The first was at Weavers. After this brief experiment, Brennemans did not hold Sunday school again until Spring of 1883.

The first Brennemans church was a weatherboarded log church. It was replaced by a frame church in 1875. It measured 40 feet by 50. The interior features were similar to other Mennonite churches of that era, with two entrances, one for men and one for women, and plain, two board benches. There were also "amen" corners. It was surrounded by a fence which enclosed a large church lot and oak trees.

This building was in continuous use until 1919, when it was removed because the worshipers had settled nearer Lindale Church, which was built in 1898 grounds of the original Brennemans cemetery.

- Janet Shank

Rhodes Am interested in any of the following persons and their families: Jacob Snively b. 1780-1790 in Lancaster Co. m. Maria Rhodes. His brother, John Snively b. ca. 1785 m. Hannah Rhodes, daughter of Henry Rhodes in Franklin Co. Pa. Also, John Huber, son of Rev. Abraham Huber and Hannah Besore, b. 1811 m. Mary Rhodes, daughter of Christian and Sarah Rhodes. She was born in 1819 and died 1871. Ms. Ruth Acevedo, RR 4, Box 107, Laurel. DE 19956

To become a member of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and to receive future copies of this newsletter, send name and address and 1995 dues (\$10 per couple, \$6 for single) to:

Jim Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA. 22801.

Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians
780 Parkwood Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Notes & Queries

Frantz Can anyone tell me the parents of Catharine Frank (Frantz) who married David Bowman on Christmas Day 1799. I believe her grandfather was bishop Michael Frantz, one of the founders of the Church of the Brethern. Randall Shank, P.O. Box 870, Broadway, VA 22815

Blosser Jacob Blosser (1778-1834) son of Peter Blosser and Barbary Bear married Magdalena Shank (1784-1859), daughter of Bishop Henry Shank and his wife Anna Reiff. They had five children:

Henry mar. Catherine Basinger
Barbary mar. Benjamin Wenger
David mar. Francis Funk
Joseph mar. Susanna Brunk
Jacob mar. Elizabeth Wenger
Several of these families moved to Pandora Co. Ohio during the early 1800's.

The "Notes & Queries" section of this newsletter is meant to be a forum whereby the reader can obtain information about Shenandoah Mennonite families and happenings. If you have a need for such information, send us a letter with your inquiry. We also will consider short notes which may be of interest to others. Be sure to send your name and address so that others can reply to you. We will attempt to print as many queries as space on this page allows. Send to Randall Shank, P.O. Box 870, Broadway, Va. 22815

Quick Quiz Answers: 1) d 2) b 3) a