

(Mauck Meeting House); tour Fort Egypt, the wonderful log house of preacher Abraham Strickler including the fort cellar and visit the current Big Spring Mennonite Church. You will hear lots of interesting stories and the foliage could be very beautiful. Our goal is to return to EMHS around 4 p.m.

The cost for the day's activities is \$27 for the SVMH members and \$29 for non-members. This covers bus fare, a buffet lunch at the Brookside Restaurant, speakers and copying costs. Take advantage of this opportunity and join us. Tell your friends about this opportunity. Fill out the attached registration card and send it along with your checks as soon as possible to insure your place on the bus. Direct your mailings and questions to Jim Rush: 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Phone: 540-434-0792.

**Fred Kniss, *Disquiet in the Land*
Rutgers University Press, 1997, 257 pp.**

Although we Mennonites are widely known for our peace witness, the ironic fact, according to Fred Kniss, is that our history is a story abounding in disquiet and contention over religious values and cultural practices. In this dissertation study, Kniss identified over 200 conflicts at congregational or conference levels occurring among Mennonites in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio and Indiana between 1870 and 1985. Four Virginia conflict events narrated in some detail are presented here in abbreviated form. The subheadings are those used by Kniss.

- Editor

Contesting a Religious Innovation

The promoters of Sunday school among Virginia Mennonites were led by Bishop Samuel Coffman, father of John S. Coffman and father-in-law of L.J. Heatwole. By the late 1860's some Mennonites were sending their children to Presbyterian and Methodist Sunday schools, but preferred them to get proper Mennonite training. In 1869 Samuel Coffman brought the matter of Sunday school to the Virginia Conference annual meeting.

At the conference Coffman debated with John Geil, a bishop who opposed Sunday school. The first conference vote for organizing Mennonite Sunday schools failed to pass by the required two-thirds majority. Coffman revised the resolution limiting

Sunday schools to those neighborhoods where there were enough Mennonite children to form a school. The revised request passed by a margin of one vote.

Bank Church organized a Sunday school in 1870, followed by Weavers a year later. An anti-Sunday school pamphlet by Abraham Blosser listed 25 reasons to oppose the innovation and was circulated to all ministers. The opposition was ultimately successful. By 1873 all Mennonite Sunday schools in Virginia discontinued. Not until 1882 were Sunday schools again organized here, this time for good.

Defeat of a Religious Innovation

In 1874 Virginia Mennonite Conference ruled against conducting revival meetings, although there seemed to be an unwritten rule that meetings could be held on no more than three consecutive nights in any one church. L.J. Heatwole recorded in his diary that in the fall of 1888 John S. Coffman, the well-known revivalist from Indiana, made a ministerial visit to the Middle District in Virginia and that he preached at Weavers Church for eight consecutive evenings from December 9-17, 1888. The meetings resulted in 45 conversions.

The bishops from the adjoining Lower and Upper districts took offense on account of the continued meetings. This resulted in a two-hour heated discussion at the spring conference on May 10, 1889, with proponents speaking for and against the holding of a series of meetings. An agreement was reached that no more series of meetings would be held within the jurisdiction of the Virginia Conference for a number of years. No revival meetings were held in established Virginia Conference churches until after 1900.

Breaking Down Sectarian Boundaries

During World War II some 4665 Mennonite draftees in the United States were granted conscientious objector status and assigned to Civilian Public Service camps. These young men served in base camps, hospital units or on detached service in locations often distant from Mennonite communities. They were exposed to the association of a wide range of Mennonite, Quaker, Church of the Brethren and other religious objectors. Many work assignments involved intense interaction addressing social problems and exposure to broader cultural opportunities.

In 1942 the Virginia Mennonite Conference Executive Committee sent a letter to H.S. Bender, chairman of the Peace Problems Committee expressing disapproval of the influence of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in some camps. The letter also urged Mennonite withdrawal from any camp project involving cooperation with other churches. Some Virginia Conference members, because of their unhappiness over C.P.S. administrative issues, urged the conference to withdraw from MCC and the denomination's General Conference. This initiative, however, was squelched by the Virginia Conference Executive Committee.

Following the war returning COs brought with them new ideas and attitudes. Many were interested in events and issues in the outside world and ways in which the church might address them. Some were active in postwar relief and reconstruction efforts in Europe. Others continued in health care work, church extension efforts, or went on to further schooling.

Departure of Sectarian Traditionalists

In 1963 the Middle District of Virginia Mennonite Conference was divided into West Valley and Central Districts. The division was partly administrative because of the size of the former Middle District, but also gave occasion to place the more conservative congregations into a district where they could have some autonomy in maintaining discipline.

Through the 1960s the West Valley District increased a stricter discipline and protested the other districts' lenience on traditional dress regulations. In 1968 the West Valley District Council sent a statement to the larger conference decrying the relaxation of sectarian practices and asked for an intention to enforce the 1963 Virginia Conference Rules and Discipline. On May 30, 1970 the West Valley District requested release from Virginia Conference organizational ties "in view of the diversity of doctrine and practice and administrative policies" that existed in the conference, and in order to carry on "the work of the Lord in our own district in Scriptural unity."

Ways were explored to grant West Valley District more autonomy while maintaining Conference ties. No acceptable resolution was worked out. So in July 1971 the Virginia Conference annual meeting approved the request of the West Valley District for release from Virginia Conference affiliation. Transfer

agreements were worked out regarding membership and property equity transfers. Thus a new Southeastern Conference was formed. The amiability of the separation is conspicuous in this statement by the new conference: "While organizational union with Virginia Mennonite Conference may no longer be mutually beneficial, we do recognize the unity of all true believers in Christ supersedes organizational relationships, and we are desirous of maintaining fraternal relations with brethren in Virginia Mennonite Conference." In accepting this breakup, the conference invited the West Valley group to continue its representation on Conference mission and program boards.

Stories of David Henry Burkholder (1852 -1920)

Herman L. Burkholder

David Henry Burkholder, my paternal grandfather, was born January 16, 1852 near Harrisonburg, VA and died October 22, 1920. He was the son of David Burkholder and Anna (Beery) Burkholder. David H.'s father died when David was four years old. His mother died six years later when he was ten years old. He was then put into a private home where conditions were hard. One of his jobs was to feed the hogs.

When David was nearly 22 years old he married Hettie Margaret Shenk (born August 2, 1853, died July 7, 1924)). She was the great-granddaughter of Bishop Henry Shank written about in this paper some time ago. They had nine children. One died at age four months. All the rest lived to maturity.

After marriage David H. purchased some land, in two tracts at two times, totaling 57 acres, south of Harrisonburg. This land is now in the city limits. On his land he built a house, barn and other farm buildings. Later he built a summerhouse in the yard.

Above the house was a spring. Grandfather piped the water down to a large trough, one end of which was in the basement of the summerhouse. At the other end of the trough he had a pipe to carry the surplus water out of the basement. They put crocks of milk in the trough to keep cool, with the water flowing around them. Also in the trough he put flat rocks on which to place dishes to keep cool. An elevator ran from the basement to the first floor of the summerhouse. When

preparing a meal they would go to the basement, put everything needed for that meal on the elevator and pull it to the first floor. When the meal was over, everything to be kept cool was put on the elevator and taken down to the basement of the summerhouse.

In those days there were tollgates on the main roads close to the towns. Grandfather's land reached into the town limits. He could go to town by way of his land without paying toll. A man who raised watermelons found this out. He would come past Grandfather's house and offer them watermelons, then go out through Grandfather's land without paying toll. One day he had a bigger load than usual. There was a large hill he had to go up and the horses balked on that hill and some watermelons were damaged. The man asked Grandfather to help him out of the situation, and then gave him the damaged watermelons. They had all the watermelons they could eat for some time. The man decided that was too high a fee to pay, since the regular toll was only 2¢.

In those days nursery companies sent out catalogs of their stock. Often there was a picture on the front of the catalog of a beautiful large peach. My father became quite interested in raising peaches. He'd show these pictures to his father to try to arouse his interest, but Grandfather would say, "Paper holds still." Finally the ambition got the best of Father and he planted a number of peach seeds. When they reached proper size he grafted them. When ready to set out, they were planted on a tract Grandfather owned about 2½ miles from the home place, a place very suitable for fruit. When the trees bore, the fruit was just as beautiful as on the catalogue cover. My father in his youthful delight would take a large beautiful peach to show to Grandfather and say, "Paper holds still."

The location of the orchard had to be guarded at peach-bearing time. This was my father's job as the oldest living son. He had an old muzzle-loading musket. One evening he was alone guarding the peaches, time was heavy on his hands and not knowing anyone was near he fired the old gun. When the roar of the shot died out, he heard a man going down the road saying, "I'm not going to steal his old peaches." After that my father was very careful when he used the old "hand cannon."

The farm Grandfather owned then is now part of the city of Harrisonburg. They made hay where Avante

Nursing home now stands. With his business ability and cautious spending he got along well for his day. Grandfather was very sincere in his Christian life and a good example to those who came after him.

--as told to Ruth L. Burkholder

L.J. Heatwole as Weather Observer

"What gusts of weather from that gathering cloud my thoughts portend."

--Dryden

Even before he could read, L.J. exhibited a great interest in the heavenly bodies. He often stood beside his mother as she sat in her rocking chair and listened with the keenest interest as she explained to him the meanings of the moon-faces appearing on the calendar pages. He was attracted too by shooting stars and meteor showers.

At the age of 15 in 1868, L.J. began keeping weather records in his diary, using descriptions such as hot, clear, cloudy, rain, windy, cold, snow, or sleet. After their marriage, wife Mollie noticed his interest in keeping record of temperatures and surprised him with the gift of a thermometer.

Over the years, beginning in 1884, L.J. sent weekly and monthly weather reports to local newspapers, among which were the Commonwealth, The People, the Rockingham Register, and the Bridgewater Journal. Others outside Rockingham County included the Staunton Spectator and the Winchester Times. L.J. also compiled a year-end report which he sent to magazines and interested persons outside the State of Virginia.

The following is a typical year-end report, which included a hand-drawn comparison chart.

The year 1889 goes upon record as being in a number of ways a remarkable one. The three most noticeable features are: First – Its heavy and evenly distributed rain fall which in the aggregate is far above normal. (Total precipitation for the year, 52.58 inches.) Second – for the phenomenal mildness of the winter season at both extremes of the year. Third – the marked deficiency in snow of

which nearly half of all that fell within the year was after the vernal equinox and before the winter solstice.

On July 10, 1884, L.J. was appointed a voluntary observer for the U.S. Signal Service, forerunner of the Weather Bureau, in Washington D.C. He received a certificate signed by General W.B. Hazen, stamped with the official seal, by which he was recognized as a weather observer. A package of government blanks was sent along with instructions for filling them out.

L.J. now felt he had a responsible position that would require the keeping of accurate records. The maximum and minimum thermometers provided by the government for recording daily the high, low and set (when the maximum and minimum thermometers are adjusted to read the same) would help him accomplish this. He also obtained a barometer for measuring atmospheric pressure and a large gauge to record the amount of rainfall and snowfall.

Because L.J. had access to this information, local merchants and shippers would call him to learn of weather conditions 24 to 48 hours in advance. Some unusual calls were also received. A farmer wondered if it was advisable to mow a field of hay, and a group going on a picnic wanted to know if it was safe to leave the windows of their house open.

Of course there is always a chance of a sudden change in the weather that is not in the earlier forecast. L.J. learned to watch the clouds and wind direction to discern when some of the changes might occur. A west wind shifting south then east, clouds moving against the wind, or brilliant color in the sky at sunrise and the sun hidden by a bank of dark gray clouds in the evening were some of the signs he knew to portend a drastic change.

Occasionally L.J. was called into court to testify during a trial as to the exact weather conditions on a given date. Over the years, he had many visitors come to the weather station who were interested in the art of weather forecasting and recording weather information. Teachers from the public schools in Rockingham County brought their students to see the instruments and gain some knowledge how a weather station operated.

In addition to sending reports to the Weather Bureau, L.J. kept a meteorological record from 1884 through 1932. This included daily maximum and minimum temperatures, daily precipitation and a monthly summary, indicating the mean, the normal, and the departure from normal. Unusual weather such as blizzards, floods, destructive winds, and severe electrical storms were noted as well as eclipses, meteor showers, comet and aureole displays. Following are samples of entries:

“On the night of the 22nd of March 1920, occurred one of the most magnificent aureole displays known to the oldest inhabitant. The climax of the display occurred at about 11 p.m. when bands of light sprang upward from the quarter of the horizon and met in a whirlpool of light at the zenith. Manifestations of this display in less general form appeared on the night of the 23rd, 24th and 25th following.

“1930 – Greatest drought on record giving the driest July known to the oldest inhabitant. The great drought of 1930 continued through August.

“On April 27th and 28th, 1928, a great snowstorm backed off the Atlantic Ocean over the states of the North Atlantic plain and extended inland as far as the crest of the Allegheny mountains where it is said the snow in places was three feet deep. Here in the Shenandoah Valley from six to nine feet of snow fell but much of the snow melted as it fell. (The amount of melted precipitation indicated the inches of snowfall.) In east and west roads the snow drifted badly. Visitors and school children were obliged to stay in homes along Rawley Pike.

“A destructive wind storm prevailed in Virginia on the 7th and 8th of March 1929, which overturned silos, unroofed houses, barns, and residences at various points in the state.”

This record is now complete except for eleven days in April 1888, when L.J. made a notation that the temperature readings for those days were missing because the wind blew the record sheet out of the

weather tower. The most unusual recording was an earthquake at 10:00 a.m. on February 8, 1910.

Before he was appointed weather observer by the government, L.J. had been corresponding with and sending weather reports to Walter H. Smith, a meteorologist who became president of an Astro-Meteorological Association organized in Montreal, Canada, October 29, 1884. It was the aim of the association to formulate a system of rules for simplifying the science of weather forecasting and to conduct and report experiments of lunar influence on vegetation and also the exact time best suited to plant and gather crops.

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

Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians
1345 Hillcrest Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22802

Treasurer's Report

Receipts for 1999 through June 13 totaled \$1,117.17. Newsletter expense, insurance, & supplies amounted to \$499.45, leaving an operating balance of \$617.72.

--Elroy Kauffman, Treasurer

Membership:

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

Michael Shenk
1345 Hillcrest Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22802