

# Race Relations in Virginia Mennonite Conference: A Brief History

By Elwood E. Yoder, 2023

## Era of Enslavement, 1619-1865: "We did not believe in slavery"

Enslaved Africans first stepped off a ship in the Virginia Colony at Hampton in 1619. After the Revolutionary War, Mennonites migrated to the Shenandoah Valley, arriving in Rockingham County, Virginia, in the 1770s and 1780s. They came on foot, by carriage, and on horseback, seeking less expensive land and new settlements away from tightly clustered Mennonite communities in Pennsylvania. Mennonites settled among descendants of enslaved African immigrants living in Rockingham County, approximately 10-12% of the population.<sup>1</sup>

The first Mennonite statement against the enslavement of Africans came from Peter Burkholder Jr. in 1837. Peter migrated from Pennsylvania with his family as a boy and became a leader among the Mennonites in Virginia during the early nineteenth century.

Peter Burkholder Jr.'s *Confession of Faith* includes one sentence against enslavement. "As all are free in Christ," Peter wrote, "they must take no part in slaveholding, or in trafficking [*sic*] with them in any wise."<sup>2</sup> Burkholder placed this prohibition in a discussion of Christian humility in which no "members exalt themselves above the others, but in lowliness of mind...esteem other[s] better than themselves."<sup>3</sup> For nineteenth-century Mennonites in Virginia, Bishop Burkholder's clear explanation guided them against enslavement.

In a second statement, during the Civil War, the Virginia Conference forbade Mennonite farmers from hiring enslaved workers unless the enslaved received payment for their labor "by the consent of the owner. But where neighbors exchange labor, the labor of slaves may be received."<sup>4</sup> Throughout the Civil War years, 1861-1865, when the Virginia ministers usually met twice a year, there was no further mention of enslavement, nonviolence, or issues surrounding the devastating war that came to their farms in Augusta and Rockingham Counties, Virginia.

A third primary source from the enslavement era comes from Margaret H. Rhodes, who testified about her treatment during the Civil War. Confederate and Union troops had taken livestock and food from her farm, a few miles west of Harrisonburg. When her husband, Henry H. Rhodes, died in 1864, Margaret had five children under fourteen and debt on her 120-acre farm. In front of a Claims Commissioner, Margaret asked for repayment for the animals and resources the Union troops had taken. Margaret explained that she and her husband were both members of the Mennonite Church, and "we did not believe in slavery and had no sympathy with the war."<sup>5</sup> Margaret operated a depot in the vast Unionist Underground Railroad, helping hundreds of objectors to the war flee to safety in northern states. Margaret had a trap door under a carpet in her bedroom where she hid men, sometimes for months. One account includes three African American men ("possibly slaves") among seventeen whom "pilots" guided to safety in West Virginia.<sup>6</sup> The coordinated civil disobedience of Virginia Mennonites in assisting hundreds of men who would not fight for reasons of conscience, according to historians Steven Nolt and James O. Lehman, is the largest collective act of defiance ever carried out by American Mennonites.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 From an Era of Enslavement to Segregation to Reconciliation

But why are there so few written primary source accounts opposed to enslavement among Mennonites in their first ninety years living in Virginia, 1775-1865? First, Mennonites lived in a southern state where human bondage was considered essential to the agricultural economy. As a distinct outsider minority religious group, mainly speaking German in an English-speaking region, Virginia Mennonites lived in separated communities and rarely questioned the region's segregationist climate.<sup>8</sup> As a church, Mennonites did not join the abolition movement, nor was there much thinking about enslavement or freed African Americans after the Civil War.<sup>9</sup>

Second, there are few statements against enslavement because the Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley, like the Brethren, were a small minority group, and their general stance against enslavement and their commitment to nonviolence left them as outsiders who held very unpopular beliefs.<sup>10</sup> For Bishop Burkholder to speak in opposition when he saw an ad in the 1833 *Rockingham Register*, for instance, listing nine enslaved persons for sale, from 10-21 years old, would have brought harsh criticism or worse from his neighbors. And Burkholder likely would have struggled to write something in English to print in the local newspaper—he used mainly German. Entrenched in the institutional, economic, and political evils of human bondage, Virginia was a dangerous place to speak against the injustices of enslavement.

Third, in the ninety years Mennonites lived in the Shenandoah Valley before slavery was abolished, very little on any topic is recorded in primary source documents to reveal Mennonite opinions. Few letters, records, or documents remain among early nineteenth-century Virginia Mennonites. One letter written by Joseph Funk demonstrates his opposition to enslavement.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise, most papers have been lost, taken in suitcases with migrating families to western states, or burned in the fires of war. Even twenty-five years of Virginia Conference Minutes before the war are lost. The 500-600 Mennonites in Rockingham and Augusta Counties at the time of the Civil War were farmers, had little formal education, and as a minority outsider group in the Valley, were accepted in the business economy but viewed with suspicion for their religious beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

### Era of Segregation, 1865-1955: *"We confess our former spiritual immaturity"*

Uncle Jack had been enslaved before the Civil War, though after the war ended, he became a member of Bank Mennonite Church, Rockingham County, Virginia. Uncle Jack may have been the first African American in the United States to be baptized and join a Mennonite Church, though his baptismal date is unknown. In the Bank Cemetery, Dayton, Virginia, alongside the grave of Uncle Jack, are four more unmarked graves of formerly enslaved persons.<sup>13</sup>

Uncle Jack, who lived from 1820-1900, may have voted in 1867, the first time African American men could vote in Virginia. Over four hundred African American men in Rockingham County registered to vote that year. Uncle Jack could have voted for about twenty years until Jim Crow laws made it nearly impossible for him to vote after 1890. During the last forty years of Uncle Jack's life, in the form of state-sanctioned terrorism against African Americans, over eighty African American men were lynched in Virginia.<sup>14</sup> Uncle Jack may have known Charlotte Harris,

the only African American woman in Virginia to be hung, which took place in 1876 near Harrisonburg, accused of helping to burn a Rockingham County barn.<sup>15</sup> Uncle Jack may have visited Zenda, a thriving Rockingham County community for formerly enslaved people. Uncle Jack probably went to Newtown, in northeast Harrisonburg, a growing settlement for recently freed African Americans. By 1880, Newtown had a thousand residents.<sup>16</sup>

John S. Coffman grew up in Weavers and Bank Mennonite Churches and would have known Uncle Jack. An assistant *Herald of Truth* editor in 1890, Coffman moderated a difference of opinion on race relations. A writer had criticized southern Christians for complicity in racial discrimination and violence. The writer drew from articles written by journalists from the South and published in newspapers.<sup>17</sup> A group of six Mennonite men from Virginia responded and objected to “abusing the religion of the people of the South just because some of them were slave owners a quarter of a century ago.”<sup>18</sup> The men responded that “the white people of the South freely and willingly appropriate their money to educate and elevate the colored race.” The Rockingham County Mennonites observed that not all of “the race troubles” were the fault of the whites and that some difficulties came from those in the North and West who “continue to incense the blacks against the whites.”

Coffman communicated with the writer, seeking clarity about the charges. The writer backed off his claims, saying the truths of the journalists that he had cited could not be substantiated. Coffman effectively checked the writer’s claims of white complicity in racial discrimination and violence. Still, he challenged his Virginia friends: “Our brethren in Virginia should remember that the condition of the negro in their vicinity is not a criterion by which to judge his condition in other states.” Evangelist Coffman concluded that if “he believes, follows Christ in the regeneration, and is saved, he is our brother.”<sup>19</sup>

Jacob E. Yoder, from Berks County, Pennsylvania, earned an education degree and volunteered to teach with the Freedman’s Bureau in Lynchburg, Virginia. Arriving in 1866, Jacob taught freed African American children.<sup>20</sup> By 1871, when the Freedman’s Bureau ended, Jacob became a public school teacher in Lynchburg for thirty-five years, hired by the state of Virginia to teach in a school with African American children. Jacob’s story is highly unusual among Mennonites who lived in Virginia.<sup>21</sup> Jacob’s vision to help recently freed African American children contrasts with the general attitude among Mennonites in Virginia in the late nineteenth century, who rarely questioned the region’s segregationist climate. A recent interpretation of late nineteenth-century Mennonites argues that Mennonite views on race were not significantly different from prevailing views in white communities of the time.<sup>22</sup>

Lewis J. Heatwole grew up Mennonite in Rockingham County and witnessed the auction of enslaved people at the Court House in Harrisonburg as a boy of seven or eight before the Civil War began. He watched them standing atop a box in the square, sold to the highest bidder. A boy of about seventeen was sold; Heatwole always remembered watching him ride behind his new owner, headed north out of the city on horseback, with only a tied-up bandana

handkerchief for extra clothing under his arm. For the rest of his life, Heatwole wondered what had happened to the young man.<sup>23</sup>

At age thirty-two, Rockingham County public school teacher Lewis J. Heatwole got involved in politics involving race relations. In 1884, Heatwole and four friends wrote a lengthy defense of Abram P. Funkhouser.<sup>24</sup> The Virginia State Legislature had rejected Funkhouser as County Superintendent for his racially progressive attitudes. One of Funkhouser's faults had been to eat a private meal with a free African American in Funkhouser's house. The letter that Heatwole and friends wrote defending Funkhouser in the Harrisonburg newspaper drew the wrath of numerous writers in *The Rockingham Register* and other Virginia newspapers. During the early 1880s, a progressive movement within the Virginia Republican Party, which Funkhouser sympathized with, advocated for state-funded public education for all, including African Americans.<sup>25</sup> Charged as "an outrage," "traitorous," "in favor of negro equality," and "social equality proclivities,"<sup>26</sup> Heatwole and his cosigners received threats to their safety.<sup>27</sup>

Three years later, when Lewis J. Heatwole became a minister in Virginia Mennonite Conference, his venture into political activism ended. In 1909, Lydia Hines and her two daughters, African Americans, sought to join a Mennonite congregation in the Middle District. Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole and his ministers received them "separately from white converts."<sup>28</sup> In 1911, the Middle District ministers considered two applicants who "were not quite white," Heatwole wrote in his journal, and they were received "with the understanding that they commune together and wash feet together."<sup>29</sup>

Virginia Conference acted on race relations in 1924. The five Virginia Conference bishops wrote that race prejudice was unscriptural, that Jesus had ignored racial differences, and that the Apostle Paul "breaks down the middle wall of partition through the Gospel." The bishops acknowledged that race prejudice was "a delicate topic" that requires "wisdom, tact, and forbearance." The bishops welcomed "people of color" as members of their congregations, but they opposed "close social relation and marrying between the colored and white races, and in matters of Church privileges the bishop in charge shall follow a course most conducive to the spiritual welfare and peace and unity of the congregation, the first consideration being that souls shall not be turned away from the light."<sup>30</sup>

In 1923, in Knoxville, Tennessee, at the Virginia Mission Board-sponsored church, workers explained about their "colored Sunday school." The alternate Sunday school took place on Thursday afternoon, and a correspondent wrote that "there could be some good work done among these people if there would be more support from the Church." Lizzie M. Wenger, a Mennonite worker in the Knoxville mission, asked for prayers for Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, a "colored" couple in the city who showed her much respect "and are worthy of a mission."<sup>31</sup>

When the Thompson girls, "mulattoes," sought baptism at the Peake Mennonite Church in 1924, a Virginia Conference congregation in Rockingham County, their request was delayed for a year while leaders deliberated. The Middle District Council decided to receive them "if they

show genuine repentance and conversion.”<sup>32</sup> The Peake Mennonite Church received the Thompson girls as members. In 1924, the Virginia General Assembly passed a Racial Integrity Act, which prohibited interracial marriages, a law in effect until 1967. In 1928, the Virginia Anti-Lynching Law defined lynching as a state crime.

In the Harrisonburg Mennonite Mission, students in the Young People’s Christian Association at Eastern Mennonite School, who had been active in witnessing in Harrisonburg, proposed that a mission be opened in Harrisonburg along Gay Street to serve African American and white children.<sup>33</sup> One of their faculty sponsors knew it was a radical idea because in Harrisonburg, “strong race prejudice was built into the culture.”<sup>34</sup> From the opening of the city mission in 1936, it would be a dozen years until EMS allowed an African American student to enroll and thirty years until the public schools in Harrisonburg integrated.<sup>35</sup> Segregation was deeply entrenched in Harrisonburg, but students and teachers from EMS got busy, rented an abandoned restaurant, cleaned it, and began a ministry to children in the African American section of Harrisonburg.

At first, the work went slowly. In 1936, white children attended Sunday school on Sunday mornings, and African American children came in the afternoons. Services on Sunday evenings alternated between the two groups. When that seemed unsatisfactory, in November 1936, the white services were moved to a different location on Chicago Avenue, a half mile away. On the first Sunday after the separation of the two ministries, nineteen boys and girls attended the Gay Street Mission and no adults. The work progressed slowly as this movement among African Americans was hard for many to accept.

Ernest and Fannie Swartzentruber moved to Harrisonburg in 1935 from the Amish Mennonite community of Greenwood, Delaware. In 1938, with the Virginia Mission Board supporting the mission, Ernest and Fannie Swartzentruber began their work as Superintendent and Matron of the Gay Street Mennonite Mission. But, Ernest wrote, “the way had to be tried. Policies needed to be formed. The general attitude of the church needed to be reckoned with.”<sup>36</sup> Attendance and growth increased at the Chicago Avenue mission to whites, and though students and others volunteered to help at the Gay Street mission for African Americans, attendance remained low.

Rowena Lark came from her home near Washington, D.C., in 1939 to help Fannie and Ernest Swartzentruber conduct Bible School. For the children, it was their first time in a structured church setting during the summer, and the teachers found them challenging to manage. With Rowena and others helping, the children’s conduct improved in the next several years. Attendance in 1942 for Bible School was as high as ninety-two, almost double what it had been in 1939. After several years, Rowena and Fannie became good friends.

The Gay Street Mennonite Mission accepted four African Americans as members on December 1, 1940: Luther and Mary Gaines, Raymond Scott, and Robert Goodlowe. With Sunday services, Sunday school, Summer Bible School, a girl’s sewing circle, and home visits, the issue arose of whether African Americans in this emerging congregation could become members of a Virginia

Conference congregation. By the summer of 1941, at their annual meeting, the ministers outlined a “policy of organizing a colored congregation.”<sup>37</sup>

The ministers acted to “build up a colored congregation under a separate but auxiliary organization.” After baptism, the policy read, “The applicant should be greeted by a colored brother or colored sister.” The ministers kept the “kiss of charity and footwashing” separate between “white and colored.” The ministers called for segregated communion services. Bishop Samuel H. Rhodes reported to the ministers that “the colored mission” included four charter members, with two more being instructed for baptism.<sup>38</sup> Ernest Swartzentruber had not been ordained in 1941, and he was not a member of the ministerial body of the Conference, though he would be later.<sup>39</sup>

Ernest and Fannie Swartzentruber disagreed with the segregated policy for African American members at the Gay Street Mennonite Mission but continued their work. By 1944, Sunday average attendance was twenty. After the conference action in 1941, Ernest stopped greeting white men who came to the Gay Street Mission with a holy kiss. He did this because he was prohibited from offering the same greeting to African American men at the church.<sup>40</sup>

By communion time in the fall of 1944, Fannie Swartzentruber became frustrated with the segregated policies imposed by the Virginia Mission Board. Earlier that year, Roberta Webb, a well-known and much-liked African American teacher in the community, became a member of the Gay Street Mennonite Mission.<sup>41</sup> Rowena Lark continued to assist occasionally at the church. Because of segregation, Fannie could not accept that her friends needed to drink from a different communion cup. After being patient since beginning their work in Harrisonburg six years earlier, Fannie walked out the door of the Gay Street Church during communion and continued to walk four miles to their farm north of Harrisonburg. Fannie took her young daughter with her on the trek home. Never again, she told her husband, would she sit through such a segregated service. Ernest finished the communion service and drove the family car home.<sup>42</sup>

By December 1944, “in view of problems relating to overall policy in the Harrisonburg Mission work,” the Virginia Mission Board appointed a committee to study the situation.<sup>43</sup> When the Executive officers of the Mission Board met on January 5, 1945, minutes of the meeting record that “following voluntary expression of willingness of Ernest Swartzentruber to discontinue as Superintendent of the Harrisonburg Colored Mission, it was moved that Ralph Shank and wife be appointed Superintendent and Matron.”<sup>44</sup>

Removing Ernest Swartzentruber as the Gay Street Mission Superintendent must have hurt the couple who had invested six years of whole-hearted work into the ministry. Several years earlier, Ernest had suggested finding a different location for a new church building, which the Mission Board accepted. Work on the new Broad Street Mennonite Church building, less than a half mile from the Mission Church, began in 1945, with dedication in 1947. The Swartzentruber couple had been fully engaged in the work, and the Mission Board had reappointed them for

another term in May 1944. Ernest's only public comment on the Executive Board's termination was wishing the Shanks "the blessings of the Lord" just a few months after his removal.<sup>45</sup> In the summer of 1952, the Swartzentruber family moved to Schuyler, Virginia, to help establish the Rehoboth Mennonite Church, later a member congregation of the Virginia Conference.

Many had contributed, worked, taught, visited, and prayed for the Gay Street Mennonite Mission. Rowena Lark wrote in 1942 that God had blessed Ernest and Fannie with the confidence of "this underprivileged, neglected group."<sup>46</sup> Ernest and Fannie's departure and voice for justice, equality, and action influenced others. Irvin B. Horst wrote that "prejudice against the Negro is present in Mennonite circles and has increased since the beginning of the present war," referring to World War II. "Many Mennonites feel," Horst wrote, "and express themselves accordingly, that the Negro is all right if he 'keeps his place,' but must be 'kept down.'"<sup>47</sup> Ralph Shank, who took Ernest Swartzentruber's place at the Broad Street Mennonite Church, spoke out strongly against racial prejudice and stated that people he ministered to are "on the whole despised, crushed, and ridiculed."<sup>48</sup>

Conference members began to speak and act toward ending segregation. From Denbigh, Virginia, C. Norman Kraus declared in 1946 that "the attitude of the white toward the Negro is another indication of the nature of our problem. White people have acquired a host of irrational fears in connection with the race problem. We are afraid of our own inconsistent position and have projected that fear on a weak minority group."<sup>49</sup> Despite deep-seated racism in the South, Bishop Timothy Showalter, from Broadway, Virginia, performed the wedding of Lewis Madden and Estella Lang at the Broad Street Mennonite Church on October 7, 1947. An African American couple, their wedding attendants were Ruth Peachey and Paul T. Yoder, both from the Conservative Mennonite Conference.<sup>50</sup>

Ridgeway Mennonite Church emerged from visitation efforts and outreach by YPCA students from EMS in the 1930s. By the early 1940s, mission work began in the Red Hill area, Harrisonburg, about a mile east of Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church.<sup>51</sup> In 1948, a new Ridgeway meetinghouse was dedicated. Dixie Williams and Nanie Curry, African Americans, invited the Mennonites in the Red Hill area to use their homes for initial outreach efforts.<sup>52</sup> The Ridgeway region was a part of Harrisonburg where African Americans and whites freely mixed and lived together, though their public schools were segregated. Frances and Daniel Smucker Jr. began their work at Ridgeway Mennonite Church in 1946 when the segregated policies of the Virginia Conference were firmly in place. Daniel wanted to invite African Americans to attend his church, but they were encouraged instead to participate in the nearby Broad Street Mennonite Church. Daniel was a young pastor, and though he knew the segregation policies of the Conference were not right, he didn't feel he could change the system without proper authority.<sup>53</sup> Not until Virginia Conference repented and changed its segregation policies in 1955 could Pastor Daniel Smucker Jr. invite African Americans to join his Ridgeway church services.<sup>54</sup>

In Norfolk, Virginia, during the 1940s, the Mount Pleasant and Deep Creek Mennonite congregations launched a mission work in the state's second-largest city. The churches

conducted a Summer Bible School near Norfolk for African American children, with seventy-two in attendance during 1944.<sup>55</sup> In an African American suburb of Norfolk, Mennonites conducted a house survey and found that most people were unchurched.<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Clark C. Yoder asked for volunteers, prayer, and financial support to purchase a lot in that suburb to begin a church. "One young man told the workers that he didn't know there was anyone in this section who cared enough for them to come and give them the blessed Gospel."<sup>57</sup> With the leadership of Levi Kramer, Norview Mennonite Chapel began with a new building in 1952. Roy G. Wenger and Harold Buckwalter served as pastors of Norview Mennonite Chapel, but in 1971 William Vaughn, from the Calvary Church in Newport News, began as pastor of the church.<sup>58</sup> With low attendance in the early years, Harold Buckwalter reported that eighty-one attended one Sunday at the predominately African American church in 1969.<sup>59</sup>

Warwick River Mennonite Church, Newport News, Virginia, emerged in the Warwick Colony that began in the late 1890s. Jo Anne Kraus, the outstanding chronicler of Warwick Mennonite history, writes that in the early twentieth century, "as a congregation, the Warwick Colony residents settled the matter of segregation off the record by quietly adopting the more benign social customs of their time and place. Some had come with the determination to accept their black brothers and sisters as family in Christ, but the local laws and culture went against it." The Mennonites in Warwick "absorbed racist attitudes."<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, there were Mennonites in the Colony who hoped for a witness to African Americans.

In the 1940s, Warwick River Mennonite Church teachers and staff conducted integrated Summer Bible Schools for children. Henry L. Nice led the way with a new program for African American children. It took some convincing of parents and pastors to assure them that the Mennonites did not have ulterior motives in mind for instructing their children in Bible School. Nelson Burkholder talked to African American pastors about the goals of teaching the Bible, and he earned their trust. However, Burkholder remembered, "The local southern white people took a dim view of our efforts to help African American people, and they had a derogatory name for us."<sup>61</sup> During the early 1940s, the Warwick Church hosted several integrated Summer Bible Schools.<sup>62</sup>

In Florida, in 1953, Michael and Peggy Shenk moved to Sarasota, and Michael served as pastor of the emerging Newtown Gospel Chapel.<sup>63</sup> Peggy remembered that Sarasota was fully segregated. Peggy helped with many aspects of the Sarasota ministry, and in 1959 she exclaimed that "the Lord has drawn a good number to the light in the past year."<sup>64</sup> H. Michael Shenk II worked at the Newtown Gospel Chapel, an African American congregation, for about three years. Interracial Summer Bible Schools included over a hundred children attending Newtown Gospel Chapel. Ransford Nicholson, a migrant worker from Jamaica, came to salvation in the Newtown Gospel Chapel while he worked for a celery farmer near Sarasota. When he returned to Jamaica, he searched for and found the Mennonites and got involved with the Good Tidings Mennonite Church.<sup>65</sup>



Audrey B. Shank, a twenty-two-year-old EMC student, interviewed people in her home congregation about race, intermarriage, and integrating EMC. Audrey wrote her college term paper a few months before the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court action to integrate schools. With about 130 members at Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Virginia, Audrey found a range of opinions about race. A social studies teacher acknowledged to Audrey that attendance in local schools reinforces the “Southern attitude,” which tends to make “one feel sympathetic to one’s state and its part in the Civil War.” But the schoolteacher was “glad EMC has opened her doors to other races.”<sup>66</sup>

Audrey interviewed a Sunday school teacher at Zion with a high school degree, who said, “I do not think EMC should open her doors unreservedly to colored people because if she would, there would immediately arise the problem of courtship and intermarriage. I think separate campuses might be the answer.” A mother of four small children explained to Audrey that “her children are frightened at the sight of a colored person.”<sup>67</sup> A high school senior exclaimed to Audrey, “Yes, I think EMC should open her doors to colored people. I don’t think there would be any problem, even of courtship, that could not be met.”<sup>68</sup>

An elementary school principal explained: “I am against any kind of racial barriers personally. The Supreme Court will probably outlaw segregation in schools and make them accept Negroes. This will probably cause trouble because there will be a minority of people very hard against it, and they will try to cause trouble.” The pastor of Zion, unnamed, explained that “All men, regardless of race, should have equal rights, equal opportunity, and equal privileges.” However, he added, “Unnatural or forceful means of mixing or crossing natural barriers of race is creative of trouble.”<sup>69</sup> Audrey called for attitudes on race to “be thoroughly Christian.”<sup>70</sup>

Several interracial Summer Bible School sessions took place during the 1950s in Virginia Conference churches: National Heights Mennonite Church, Richmond (later First Mennonite); Calvary Mennonite Church, Newport News; Newtown Gospel Chapel, Florida; Knoxville Mission, Tennessee; Broad Street, Chicago Avenue, and Ridgeway Churches in Harrisonburg; Norview Mennonite Chapel in Norfolk; Springdale Mennonite Church; and Warwick River Mennonite Church.

An Urban Renewal project, with federal funding, razed many Harrisonburg Newtown homes and businesses in the late 1950s and early ’60s. Doris Harper Allen had attended the Harrisonburg Gay Street Mennonite Mission as a girl. She was among the predominantly African American students in Summer Bible School.<sup>71</sup> Born in Newtown, Doris Harper Allen watched the city of Harrisonburg knock down her family’s house in the late ’50s. As part of a federal initiative, Harrisonburg moved about two hundred families out of Newtown and redeveloped forty acres.<sup>72</sup> These were formerly enslaved African Americans or their children. No one asked the opinions of Doris Allen or anyone living in the Newtown section of Harrisonburg. City leaders closed businesses and dismantled buildings and houses in the name of urban progress.<sup>73</sup> Some moved into urban housing developments.<sup>74</sup> Doris Harper Allen and her husband, Robert Harper, moved outside the urban renewal area.

Paul Peachey, a Virginia Conference Minister, working at Broad Street Mennonite Church near the area that would be demolished, spoke out and asked Christian businesspeople to underwrite a housing cooperative in the community. With a doctorate in sociology and on the faculty at EMC, Peachey did not try to stop the federal urban renewal program. Still, he urged Mennonites to get engaged in helping the poor of Harrisonburg. "This," Peachey wrote, "is not the social gospel. This is the Christian Gospel."<sup>75</sup>

Northern District bishops placed Peachey at the Broad Street Mennonite Church, February 1956-May 1957. Peachey declared that "the struggle of the American Negro for complete freedom is approaching its climax. Though many difficult tasks still lie ahead, the eventual outcome seems clear. The Negro will win."<sup>76</sup>

Paul Peachey joined an eight-person delegation that attended a three-day race relations workshop conducted by the Mennonite denomination (MC) in April 1955.<sup>77</sup> The outcome of their work was a statement on race relations and a call for improvement among Mennonites.<sup>78</sup> However, a polished report on race relations needed to be implemented, which required time and effort. Peachey preached, worked, and wrote articles for improvements for the handful of folks coming to his church. By the time Peachey began as minister at Broad Street, membership was in decline. A leader at Broad Street had warned his white readers that too many cars and white families attending would ruin its character.<sup>79</sup> Ralph Shank had been right, as Broad Street membership declined from twenty-seven in 1950 to seventeen in 1959.<sup>80</sup>

The Fellowship of Reconciliation invited Peachey to attend a conference in Montgomery, Alabama, spring of 1956. A Mennonite denominational Peace Problems Committee (MC) member, Peachey joined a meeting where he met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>81</sup> The group planned a march in the streets, which would have led to arrests, but at the last minute, the protest was called off when they could not decide who should lead the way and be sent to jail. In Peachey's rousing article, "Nonviolence in the South," Peachey admitted that he did not know if nonviolence could reach "the full rights of citizenship for the American Negro," or whether "the deep stirring now going on will result in violence."<sup>82</sup>

Peachey affirmed that Virginia Mennonites, alone among the white population, went into the African American section of Harrisonburg "before the current segregation controversy arose." But Peachey honestly faced the difficulties and challenges of an African American mission in Harrisonburg that struggled considering the urban renewal program looming in the church's neighborhood, national politics, and prejudices among Mennonites.

In 1954, Peggy Webb Howard, one of Roberta Webb's daughters, became the first African American to graduate from Eastern Mennonite College.<sup>83</sup> Denied admittance to EMC nine years earlier, Peggy graduated from Hesston College in 1952 and studied education and music. EMC first integrated its campus in 1948, the first undergraduate private school to do so in Virginia. In 1959, EMC enrolled five African American students.<sup>84</sup>

James A. Curry grew up in Harrisonburg near the Ridgeway Mennonite Church. Curry attended Broad Street Mennonite Church during the segregation era. Roberta Webb called Curry a “live wire Superintendent with timely admonitions.”<sup>85</sup> Curry attended strictly segregated public schools in Harrisonburg. By the 1950s, changes slowly took place. The women’s sewing circles from Broad Street Mennonite Church and Ridgeway Mennonite Church worked together, meeting in the homes of African American women and their church buildings.<sup>86</sup> After the Virginia Conference repented in 1955, Ridgeway Minister Daniel Smucker Jr. invited African Americans into full participation. In October 1961, James A. Curry became the first African American ordained in Virginia Mennonite Conference. Ordained by lot, James served Chicago Avenue, Broad Street, and Ridgeway, where he offered communion and helped administer footwashing.<sup>87</sup>

In 1955, Virginia Conference ministers repented of their 1941 action that had formerly segregated the races in communion, footwashing, baptism, and the holy kiss. After Minister Nelson Burkholder, from the integrated Calvary Mennonite Church in Newport News, spoke on “Christian Attitudes in Race Relations,” a resolution set forth that “the teachings of Christ and the apostles declare the equality of men before God.” The ministers confessed their former spiritual immaturity, and “in the church, we extend to all true believers of whatever race or color the right hand of fellowship, and that in time there may be a realization of more perfect relationships.”<sup>88</sup>

Virginia Conference ministers expressed optimism about changes in racial relations in churches in 1955. The reality, however, remained essentially the same, despite *Brown v. Board of Education* at the federal level, despite concerted work in the Mennonite denomination to address racial issues, and despite some efforts by Virginia ministers.

**Era of Reconciliation, 1956-2022:** “God’s Kingdom has not yet fully come”

Vincent and Rosemarie Harding came to Harrisonburg for several days in May 1962. From the MCC voluntary service unit in Atlanta, Vincent served on Mennonite Church (MC) boards and received requests to speak on the race topic. Invited by EMC students, Vincent spoke at the college and one evening meeting at Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg.

Vincent saw “deep patterns of racial segregation” in Harrisonburg. He concluded that “many Mennonites were totally unaware of the extent to which practices of segregation and racial injustice were being carried out in their community.” However, Harding did acknowledge that on the race issue, “many individuals—students and adults—were beginning to struggle deeply with the implications of discipleship in their setting.”<sup>89</sup> A student newspaper editor wrote of “some negative reaction” to Harding’s visit to the campus.<sup>90</sup>

Mahlon Blosser, President of the Virginia Mission Board, learned of Vincent Harding’s critical assessment of race relations in Virginia several months after Harding’s visit. Bishop Blosser responded by wondering how “any person would go into a community and make such a superficial survey and proceed to circulate it over the church.” Blosser gave details of work

toward racial integration in Virginia but concluded that “we have not made the progress that we have desired.” In response to a denominational executive who inquired with Blosser about whether Virginia would host a Race Conference, Blosser concluded that such an event “may do more harm to the progress being made than the help it would give.”<sup>91</sup>

The following year, in April 1963, Vincent Harding spoke for seven evenings at the Broad Street Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg. These were annual revival meetings, though Harding ended each message asking for discussion rather than the usual altar call.<sup>92</sup> Afterward, Mahlon Blosser summarized that “the attendance was good.”<sup>93</sup> In February 1964, a hundred Mennonite leaders gathered from nine southern states for a race conference in Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>94</sup> Speakers included EMC faculty Linden M. Wenger and Grant Stoltzfus, with Harold Regier, Guy F. Hershberger, and Vincent Harding. In response to national and denominational discussions on race, Virginia Mennonite leaders held their own race conference on March 31, 1964, at Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church. Minister Nelson Burkholder stated that “in the many years of oppression and humiliation of the Negro in America, the churches have been a partner in the crime. Often, we have been silent when others showed race prejudice and practiced discrimination.”<sup>95</sup>

Samuel and Lucille Ewell purchased a house on South College Avenue in Harrisonburg on August 27, 1964. They bought their home from Allen and Lois Yoder.<sup>96</sup> This sale marked a new moment in Harrisonburg’s history when an African American family with six children moved into the all-white Park View, on the edge of Harrisonburg and near EMC, which was then in Rockingham County.

Five years earlier, the Ewell family had moved to Harrisonburg, Lucille’s hometown, after the Prince Edward County schools in central Virginia closed rather than allow integration. In a broad statewide program of political resistance during the early ’60s, some public schools in the state closed rather than integrate African American students with white students. When Prince Edward County schools closed, Samuel Ewell, a teacher and principal, lost his job.<sup>97</sup> For about five years, before purchasing a house on South College Avenue, the Ewells sent their children to the African American Lucy F. Simms school in Harrisonburg that included elementary and high school grades.<sup>98</sup>

In the early 1960s, Harrisonburg schools, the theater, the hospital, and restaurants were segregated. Employment opportunities for African Americans were limited, as Samuel Ewell discovered when he looked for work after moving to the city. African Americans could not vote and sat in the back of public buses. If the Ewells went to the local theater, they had to sit in the balcony.

The Rockingham Council on Human Rights emerged in the context of many pushing for civil rights changes in the 1960s. Four men met in Harrisonburg in January 1963 to launch a new organization. EMC faculty John A. Lapp and Samuel Horst, with Eugene Souder and Brethren minister Charles Zunkel, shared a common vision. Soon they invited other Brethren and

Mennonite leaders in the community, and other denominations, to join them in using the church's influence and teaching for needed social change without conflict and violence.<sup>99</sup>

The Council was active, with monthly meetings and subcommittees from 1963 until 1970. Samuel Horst and Allen Yoder led a Housing subcommittee seeking better housing for African Americans in Harrisonburg. Approximately fifty people from many denominations joined the Council during the sixties. The Rockingham Council on Human Rights was associated with twenty chapters in a statewide network connected with the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta.<sup>100</sup> John A. Lapp, a professor at EMC, attended several state meetings.

Defenders of Constitutional Government, a small but vocal group, organized in direct opposition to the goals of the Rockingham Council on Human Rights. The Defenders articulated a historical, constitutional, and moral basis for a segregated way of life. The opposing group accused the Council on Human Rights of contributing to "lawlessness and violence."<sup>101</sup>

Soon, African Americans joined the Rockingham Council on Human Rights, including Roberta Webb, Carlyle Whitelow, Richard Bell, and Lucille Ewell, with about a third of the members African American. Lucille was an activist, as Council member Harold D. Lehman explained.<sup>102</sup> Lucille found her voice for change and integration through the Council's work, a desire to educate her children, and hopes for her own house. Lucille Ewell spoke to groups in the area, like the Bridgewater Brethren Women's Circle, where Lucille was "enthusiastically received."<sup>103</sup>

The faith-based and independent council worked hard to integrate the segregated maternity ward at Rockingham Memorial Hospital and succeeded. Quietly and without confrontation, the theater in Harrisonburg integrated through sustained work by various committees of the Council. The members saw restaurants begin to serve white and African American patrons, and they encouraged large employers to hire African Americans, which they did. The Council celebrated that Little League in Harrisonburg had been integrated in September 1963. The following month the Council noted that "a negro sales lady is now working at Joseph Neys." In 1966 council chair John A. Lapp wrote a letter to Virginia Governor Mills Godwin, commending him for condemning the Ku Klux Klan and their actions in the state.

Reverend Charles Zunkel and John A. Lapp had attended the August 1963 civil rights march in Washington, D.C. Several other EMC faculty members also participated in the march, where they heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Brethren pastor Zunkel explained that the demonstration "was conducted in the best possible manner. It was almost like a worship service. There was no violence but kindness toward each other."<sup>104</sup> John A. Lapp said he would never forget the singing at the civil rights march.

Integrating public schools in Rockingham County and Harrisonburg was the central issue for the Council to work on in 1963-66. They wrote letters to Carl G. Showalter, a Mennonite from Broadway, Virginia, who chaired the Rockingham County School Board. They also wrote letters urging integration to Wilbur Pence, Superintendent of Rockingham Schools, and Harrisonburg

school officials. Council members were professors, pastors, and businesspeople with connections and knowledge of local leaders and how systems worked.

The Harrisonburg and Rockingham County public schools made integration optional for the 1964-65 and 1965-66 school years. Lucille Ewell brought her children to the steps of Park School, a public school in Harrisonburg, to enroll them on September 8, 1964. She was unaware that there was still a rigorous state application process to get the needed documentation for her children to attend a white school, part of the state's resistance to integration.

Mennonite Principal Jon Scott Bender, twenty-three, greeted Mrs. Ewell when she arrived at Park School near EMC. Bender knew that county policy required him to comply with arbitrary state laws. The Superintendent, whom Bender called, instructed Bender to send the five Ewell children home. But Bender's conscience would not allow him to turn the Ewells away. He consulted with his Mennonite teachers, who agreed to ignore the policy. According to Margaret Ewell, Bender stated, "I will not send them home."<sup>105</sup> Bender and his teachers risked their jobs but decided to seat the children and begin their education. County administrators never addressed Bender's action, and the Ewells remained enrolled at Park School. Public schools opened that same week in Prince Edward County, Virginia, fully integrated for the first time in five years.

Calvary Mennonite Church, Newport News, Virginia, began in 1952 and grew in attendance. Ministries at the interracial church blossomed through the leadership of Nelson and Dorothy Burkholder, the steady efforts of workers and church members, and the financial support of the Warwick District.

The Sunday following Nelson Burkholder's ordination in November 1952, only two youths from the community attended the first church service in a house on Madison Avenue.<sup>106</sup> Nelson and others held evangelistic street meetings in the African American section of Newport News, and many knew Nelson. Once the Burkholders and other workers began holding regular services, community people came, especially children and youth. In 1953, thirty attended regularly; the following year, forty-seven of sixty-one at a church service were African American.<sup>107</sup> In 1955, the growing church had an average attendance of seventy, with 120 coming for Easter Sunday. Community people packed the house, and growing attendance pushed the Warwick District to buy land and build a meetinghouse. On April 14, 1957, Calvary Mennonite Church first used its new building for worship.<sup>108</sup>

Leslie Francisco II was one of the men who worked on the building crew for the new meetinghouse at the interracial Calvary Mennonite Church. In 1958 he came to the church, made a new commitment, received baptism, and by 1960 was a deacon leader.<sup>109</sup> Nelson and Dorothy Burkholder and their family lived nearby the Calvary Mennonite Church in Newport News and experienced difficulties. Though no one attacked Nelson for his street preaching or ministry to the poor and needy, he said, "I felt sure that I may have come pretty close several

times. Of one thing I am certain,” Nelson stated, “I made enemies because of my boldness in preaching the Gospel.”<sup>110</sup>

Leadership at Calvary Mennonite Church, Newport News, Virginia, changed in 1971 when Leslie Francisco II assumed the lead pastoral role. Nelson Burkholder had been the church’s pastor, with help from others. Ordained in Virginia Conference in 1966, Leslie assisted Burkholder and preached every other Sunday. Nelson and Leslie served together on a Virginia Conference Race Relations Committee. Conference ministers from integrated churches in Durham (Frank Nice), Knoxville (Ezra Good), and Newport News (Leslie Francisco II and Nelson Burkholder) attended the July 1969 Virginia Conference meeting, where they made a confession. One hundred and ten ordained ministers confessed that, regarding race relations, they had not met their verbal commitments and agreed to make new progress toward sharing “with the underprivileged” and “share the Gospel with all who respond in faith.”<sup>111</sup>

During the 1960s, changes occurred at Calvary, a congregation in the Warwick District of the Virginia Conference. With Leslie Francisco II preaching regularly and an integrated pastoral team, a new charismatic impulse permeated the congregation. A researcher of Calvary’s history concluded that Francisco’s boldness in preaching and his vision for the church “led the church from the staid, traditional Mennonite way of worship to a free, lively form. The blacks were responsive to this change,” LeRoy Bechler wrote in 1986, “and it brought about a greater identification of the church with the community. However, those who had learned to appreciate the traditional Mennonite way soon felt out of place and left.”<sup>112</sup>

By 1973 Nelson and Dorothy Burkholder departed Calvary, where Nelson had served for twenty-two years in ministry. “The people at Calvary,” Nelson concluded, “were very dear to us, and therefore, our feelings about leaving were an ambivalent mixture of pleasure and pain.”<sup>113</sup> LeRoy Bechler studied African American churches across the United States and concluded that at Calvary, “the social crisis of the sixties had its effect on black and white relations. There were times of tension between the local community and those driving in from Warwick, and sometimes even points of tension within the church itself.”<sup>114</sup> During the early 1970s, Calvary Mennonite Church became more charismatic, including speaking in tongues, energetic music, weekly altar calls, and testimonies.<sup>115</sup>

Trissels Mennonite Church invited Minister Leslie Francisco II and his wife Naomi for a Sunday evening program on August 19, 1984. The Francisco couple brought along the Calvary Singers. Warren Showalter, from the Trissels congregation, had served with Mennonite Disaster Service in Hampton, helping to construct a new church building for the growing Calvary Mennonite Church. Warren sometimes stayed in the Francisco home while he volunteered his building skills. Warren invited the Trumbo Electric Company, Broadway, Virginia, to come and install wiring, and two vans loaded with supplies and electricians drove over two hundred miles to Hampton to help wire the church. The 1984 program is remembered fondly by those who attended as lively, energetic, friendly, and spiritually uplifting.<sup>116</sup>

In 1993, Leslie Francisco III was ordained bishop of Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Virginia. With tremendous growth, Calvary became the largest African American Mennonite Church in the United States. Calvary used radio and television broadcasts, formed a Bible College, and reached out globally in missions to Ghana, South Africa, and Jamaica. Calvary planted churches in several U.S. and African settings. In 2010 Calvary became “C3 Hampton.” Bishop Leslie Francisco III has served several terms on the Executive Board of MC USA.<sup>117</sup> Bishop Francisco joined the Virginia Conference staff in 2022 as Minister of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. In 2020 Dr. Lesley Francisco McClendon, the third generation in the Francisco family, assumed senior leadership of C3 Hampton, a Virginia Mennonite Conference and MC USA congregation.

Since the early 1970s, Virginia Conference and Virginia Mennonite Missions have established fraternal mission relationships in many locations worldwide and in the United States. To offer the gospel to “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7:9), Virginia Mennonite Missions has helped Virginia Conference develop partnerships with ministries internationally.

By 1971, the Jamaica Mennonite Church Conference achieved fraternal independence, established sixteen years earlier by the Virginia Mission Board. In the 1970s, the Italian Mennonite Churches, a Virginia Mission Board mission endeavor, increasingly became independent. Whether in Guyana, Trinidad, or later in Albania, Thailand, Indonesia, Turkey, Bengal, Dominican Republic, or Bolivia, mission workers have learned new languages and ministered alongside others in gospel partnership. Since 1976, a half dozen Spanish language churches have emerged in Virginia Mennonite Conference, and a Vietnamese congregation worships in Northern Virginia.

Virginia Conference recently hired staff to help eradicate systemic racism and personal prejudice while celebrating and embracing diversity. In June 2022, Zion Mennonite Church heard prophetic sermons on racial justice preached by Melody Pannell and Caleb Schrock-Hurst. In the fall of 2022, thirty to forty adults and youth from Zion gathered in a Sunday school series to discuss, discern, and be challenged toward racial reconciliation.<sup>118</sup> Before the seven-week Sunday class met, Pastor Sarah Piper stated that “Some of us are eager for this conversation and learning. Some of us are saying, ‘This feels uncomfortable and scary.’ That’s valid. I expect this class to stretch us. I expect us to listen and love fully. That’s hard work. Yet my hope is that after we have gone through the challenge, we will have learned some things about God, ourselves, and others, all of which will help us in being followers of Christ in this present moment when God’s Kingdom has not yet fully come.”<sup>119</sup>

***(The stories and history in this article are excerpts from a forthcoming history book about Mennonites in Virginia, Herald Press, 2025, with co-authors Elwood Yoder and Steve Nolt. No parts of this article may be reproduced in print or on the internet without the permission of co-author Elwood Yoder.)***



<sup>1</sup> The percentage of enslaved in the Shenandoah Valley may have ranged around 20% of the population in the early nineteenth century. However, the best estimates for Rockingham County are approximately 10% of the population. The numbers of enslaved are difficult to calculate in the antebellum era. A good source is Stephen L. Longenecker, *Shenandoah Religion, Outsiders and the Mainstream, 1716-1865*, Baylor, 2002, 115.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Burkholder and Joseph Funk, *The Confession of Faith of the Christians Known by the Name of Mennonites: In Thirty-Three Articles*, (Winchester: Robinson and Hollis, 1837), 419.

<sup>3</sup> James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Minutes of the Virginia Mennonite Conference*, vol. 1, 1950, 6.

<sup>5</sup> David S. Rodes, Norman R. Wenger, and Emmert F. Bittinger, *Unionists and the Civil War Experience in the Shenandoah Valley*, vol. 3 (Harrisonburg, VA: Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center, 2003), 703.

<sup>6</sup> Rodes, Wenger, and Bittinger, *Unionists and the Civil War Experience in the Shenandoah Valley*, vol. 3, 2003, 954.

<sup>7</sup> James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 227-8.

<sup>8</sup> Lehman and Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War*, 2007, 222.

<sup>9</sup> Jo Anne Kraus, *Holy Experiment: The Warwick River Mennonite Colony, 1897-1970* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press, 2021), 230.

<sup>10</sup> Historian Stephen L. Longenecker, Professor of History, Emeritus, at Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, Virginia, developed the thesis of Brethren and Mennonites being “outsiders” in the Virginia context, in *Shenandoah Religion: Outsiders and the Mainstream, 1716-1865*, 2002 (see especially the chapter on “The Slavery Debate,” 113-151); see also Nolt and Lehman, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War*, 2007, 25.

<sup>11</sup> *The Funk Letters, 1833-1847*, Funk to John and Mary Kieffer, March 26, 1847, Menno Simons Historical Library, Harrisonburg, Va.

<sup>12</sup> There are no census numbers or documentation of the number of Mennonites in Rockingham and Augusta Counties at the time of the American Civil War. The author’s estimate is 500—600. The number is relatively low because so many Mennonites migrated west to other states. At the time of the Civil War, the six congregations of Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley constituted the largest settlement of Mennonites anywhere in the Confederate states. Pre-Civil War Mennonite churches were Trissels, Springdale, Pike, Hildebrand, Brennemens, Weavers, and Bank Mennonite Churches.

<sup>13</sup> Uncle Jack’s name was Jesse James, and he lived from 1820-1900. The account of Uncle Jack is a part of the Bank Mennonite Church’s history and was written by Regina M. Goering, *A History of the Bank Mennonite Church*, published by Bank Mennonite Church, 1989. See an article about Uncle Jack in *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*, Spring 2021, 7. The first documented African American baptized members of a Mennonite Church were in 1897, Lancaster Mennonite Conference, Pa.

<sup>14</sup> Rosemarie Joswick Palmer and Dale E. MacAllister, *A Chronology of Local Black Culture & History in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, Virginia 1619-2020* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Rocktown History, 2021), 34.

<sup>15</sup> For details about lynching in Virginia, including an account of Charlotte Harris, see “Racial Terror: Lynching in Virginia,” at <https://sites.lib.jmu.edu/valynchings/>.

<sup>16</sup> Palmer and MacAllister, *A Chronology of Local Black Culture*, 2021, 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> “The Race Troubles,” *Herald of Truth* 26, no. 22 (Nov. 15, 1889), 341-343. The writer was Abram Kolb.

<sup>18</sup> “The Race Troubles, A Reply,” *HT* 27, no. 5 (Mar. 1, 1890), 74-75. The Rockingham County Mennonite men who signed their names to the reply were David A. Heatwole, John Brunk Sr., Elias Brunk, Peter S. Hartman, William H. Rhodes, A. D. Weaver, and Samuel M. Burkholder.

<sup>19</sup> For an analysis of the exchange in these letters in *Herald of Truth*, see Caleb Schrock-Hurst, “Mennonites, Race, and Reconstruction: A Survey of Racial Attitudes in *The Herald of Truth*, 1864-1897,” Thesis, Eastern Mennonite University, 2022; and see Jo Anne Kraus interpretation in *Holy Experiment: The Warwick River Mennonite Colony, 1897-1970* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press, 2021), 225-227.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel L. Horst, *The Fire of Liberty in Their Hearts: The Diary of Jacob E. Yoder of the Freedmen’s Bureau School, Lynchburg, Virginia, 1866-1870* (Richmond, Va.: The Library of Virginia, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Nolt and Lehman, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War*, 2007, 221-222.

<sup>22</sup> Caleb Schrock-Hurst, “Mennonites, Race, and Reconstruction: A Survey of Racial Attitudes in *The Herald of Truth*, 1864-1897” (thesis, Eastern Mennonite University, 2022), 106.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis J. Heatwole, “A Slave’s Future Recalled,” *Daily News-Record*, April 12, 1929. See also James O. Lehman, “Selling Slaves on Court Square Recalled,” *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*, 16, no. 3 (Summer 2009), 5-6.

<sup>24</sup> “County Superintendent of Schools,” *The Rockingham Register*, January 24, 1884, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald L. Heinemann, *Old Dominion, New Commonwealth: A History of Virginia 1607-2007* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 255-260.

<sup>26</sup> "Reasons Why A. P. Funkhouser Should Not Be Confirmed," *The Rockingham Register*, January 24, 1884, 2; *Staunton Spectator*, July 10, 1883, 1; *Valley Virginian*, March 13, 1884, 2.

<sup>27</sup> In 1917, Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole and others purchased land from Abram P. Funkhouser in Harrisonburg that became Eastern Mennonite School, including EMHS, EMU, and VMRC. For further information, see *The Common Roots of Bridgewater College, Shenandoah University, Goshen College, James Madison University, and Eastern Mennonite*, E. K. Knappenberger, 2022, 17-19.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis J. Heatwole, *Church Record Book*, Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives, 398.

<sup>29</sup> Lewis J. Heatwole, *Church Record Book*, Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives, 416.

<sup>30</sup> *Virginia Mennonite Conference Minutes*, vol. 1, 1950, 152. The five bishops who wrote the statement on race relations were George R. Brunk I, Anthony P. Heatwole, William Jennings, Lewis Shank, Lewis J. Heatwole, and Samuel H. Rhodes. Likely either Brunk or Lewis J. Heatwole did the writing.

<sup>31</sup> Lizzie M. Wenger, "Knoxville, Tenn.," *Gospel Herald* 16, no. 10 (June 7, 1923), 185.

<sup>32</sup> Middle District Council Minutes, Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives, May 29, 1926.

<sup>33</sup> Donald B. Kraybill, *Eastern Mennonite University* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 2017), 119.

<sup>34</sup> Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, vol. 2, 1972, 389.

<sup>35</sup> Willis Johnson became the first African American to enroll part-time at EMS in 1948, and Ada Webb became the first full-time African American student to enroll, January 1949; details from Kraybill's *Eastern Mennonite University* book, 2017, 176.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Swartzentruber, "History of the Colored Mission of Harrisonburg, Virginia," *Missionary Light* 3, no. 2 (Apr. 1943), 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Minutes of the Virginia Mennonite Conference*, vol. 1, 1950, 257.

<sup>38</sup> *Minutes of the Virginia Mennonite Conference*, vol. 1, 1950, 257 & 253.

<sup>39</sup> Ernest Swartzentruber was ordained in 1955 by the Conservative Mennonite Conference, and as a bishop in 1958. His credentials transferred to the Harrisonburg District of Virginia Mennonite Conference in 1984.

<sup>40</sup> John Weber, "The History of Broad Street Mennonite Church, 1936-1971" (Harrisonburg, VA: History Seminar Paper, Eastern Mennonite College, 1971), 15.

<sup>41</sup> Ernest Swartzentruber, "Harrisonburg Colored Mission," *Missionary Light* 3, no. 2 (April 1943), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Elwood E. Yoder, "A Challenge to Segregation," *Virginia Mennonite Conference Pathways* 7, no. 4 (Winter 2021), 10.

<sup>43</sup> VMBM Executive Board Minutes, December 1, 1944. The Minutes show that the study committee was Daniel W. Lehman, Lewis Martin, and Moses Slabaugh.

<sup>44</sup> VMBM Executive Board Minutes, Jan. 5, 1945, with officers Jacob A. Shenk, John H. Alger, Daniel W. Lehman, and J. Ward Shank.

<sup>45</sup> Ernest Swartzentruber, "The New Building for the Colored," *Missionary Light*, 5, no. 2 (April 1945), 4. The interpretation that the Swartzentrubers were removed from their positions at the Gay Street Mission is developed by Tobin Miller Shearer, *Daily Demonstrators*, 2010, 42; Nathan E. Yoder, *Together in the Work of the Lord*, 2014, 171; and John Weber, "Broad Street Mennonite Church" Term Paper, 1971, 18-19.

<sup>46</sup> Rowena Lark, "Summer Bible School at the Mennonite Mission for Colored at Harrisonburg," *Gospel Herald* 34, no. 41 (Jan. 8, 1942), 861.

<sup>47</sup> Irvin B. Horst, "Mennonites and the Race Question," *Gospel Herald* 38, no. 15 (July 13, 1945), 284.

<sup>48</sup> Ralph Shank, "Problems and Possibilities in the Field of The Broad Street Mennonite Church," *Missionary Light* 6, no. 3 (July 1946), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Norman Kraus, "Faith Not; Fight On," *Gospel Herald* 39, no. 14 (July 2, 1946), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Stanley Shenk, "A Mennonite Colored Wedding," *Gospel Herald*, 40, no. 36 (Dec. 2, 1947), 782-3. A carefully folded copy of the December 1947 *Gospel Herald* article showing a photo and article about the wedding of Lewis Madden and Estella Lang is included in Ernest Swartzentruber's collection in the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives, Harrisonburg, Va.

<sup>51</sup> Karen Smucker and Jean Smucker Fisher, *The Light on the Hill: History of Ridgeway Mennonite Church* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Ridgeway Mennonite Church, 1986), 14-15.

<sup>52</sup> Gary Smucker, "Integrating Ridgeway Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.," *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2022), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Gary Smucker, "Integrating Ridgeway," *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2022), 7.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Smucker Jr. served Ridgeway Mennonite Church as pastor from 1946-1981.

<sup>55</sup> Amos D. Wenger Jr., "Fentress, Virginia," *Missionary Light* 4, no. 4 (Oct. 1944), 2.

- <sup>56</sup> Robert W. Mast, *Building at Mt. Pleasant: A History of Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church, Chesapeake, Virginia* (Chesapeake, Va.: Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church, 1980), 50-51.
- <sup>57</sup> Mrs. Clark C. Yoder, "Deep Creek Congregation," *Gospel Herald* 42, no. 1 (Jan. 4, 1949), 21.
- <sup>58</sup> In 1983, Norview Mennonite Chapel became Word of Life Mennonite Church.
- <sup>59</sup> "News Briefs, Norfolk," *Missionary Light*, 29, no. 2 (March-April 1969), 26.
- <sup>60</sup> Jo Anne Kraus, *Holy Experiment: The Warwick River Mennonite Colony, 1897-1970* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press, 2021), 232.
- <sup>61</sup> Nelson Burkholder, *I Remember-- Reminiscing on 78 Years of Mennonite Life in Denbigh* (Newport News, Va.: N. Burkholder, 1997), 104.
- <sup>62</sup> Jo Anne Kraus, *Holy Experiment: The Warwick River Mennonite Colony, 1897-1970* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Herald Press, 2021), 280-283.
- <sup>63</sup> Betty Brunk, "Young and Surprised—and Needed," *VMC Connections*, December 2002, 1.
- <sup>64</sup> Peggy B. Shenk, "Sarasota, Florida," *Missionary Light* 19, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1959), 14.
- <sup>65</sup> Ransford Nicholson, "Hunting Real Spirituality," *Missionary Light* 21, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1961), 3.
- <sup>66</sup> Audrey B. Shank, "Racial Attitudes of the Zion Congregation," EMC term paper, Menno Simons Historical Library, 1954, 2.
- <sup>67</sup> Audrey B. Shank, "Racial Attitudes of the Zion Congregation," 1954, 3.
- <sup>68</sup> Audrey B. Shank, "Racial Attitudes of the Zion Congregation," 1954, 5.
- <sup>69</sup> Audrey B. Shank, "Racial Attitudes of the Zion Congregation," 1954, 10.
- <sup>70</sup> Audrey B. Shank, "Racial Attitudes of the Zion Congregation," 1954, 11.
- <sup>71</sup> Doris Harper Allen and Esther Yoder Stenson, *The Way It Was, Not the Way It Is: A Memoir* (Harrisonburg, Va.: D. H. Allen, 2015), 59.
- <sup>72</sup> Doris Harper Allen and Esther Yoder Stenson, *The Way It Was*, 2015, 109.
- <sup>73</sup> Rosemarie Joswick Palmer and Dale E. MacAllister, *A Chronology of Local Black Culture and History in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, Virginia 1619-2020* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Rocktown History, 2021), 58.
- <sup>74</sup> Lauren McKinney, "Remembering Project R4," *Eightyone* 3, no. 2 (Oct. 2000).
- <sup>75</sup> Paul Peachey, "Broad Street," *Missionary Light* 17, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1957), 5.
- <sup>76</sup> Paul Peachey, "Nonviolence in the South," *Gospel Herald* 50, no. 8 (Feb. 19, 1957), 177.
- <sup>77</sup> Those from Virginia Conference who attended the 1955 Mennonite Church Study Conference on Christian Race Relations, Goshen, Indiana, April 22-24, 1955, included John H. Alger, Aldine Brenneman, Nelson Burkholder, C. Norman Kraus, Rosa Mae Kurtz, Paul Peachey, Ralph Shank, and Grant Stoltzfus.
- <sup>78</sup> *Christian Race Relations: Proceedings of the Conference on Christian Community Relations Sponsored by the Committee on Economic and Social Relations of the Mennonite Church and by the Mennonite Community Association*, Goshen, IN, 1955.
- <sup>79</sup> Ralph Shank, "Broad Street," *Missionary Light* 14, no. 3, (May-June 1954), 5.
- <sup>80</sup> LeRoy Bechler, *The Black Mennonite Church in North America, 1886-1986* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 74-75.
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- <sup>96</sup> Rockingham County Deed, August 27, 1964, between Allen O. Yoder and Lois P. Yoder, and Samuel E. Ewell and Lucille W. Ewell.
- <sup>97</sup> Rosemarie Joswick Palmer and Dale E. MacAllister, *A Chronology of Local Black Culture and History in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, Virginia 1619-2020* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Rocktown History, 2021), 61.
- <sup>98</sup> Samuel (1914-1975) and Lucille (1927-2003) Ewell’s children were James, Margaret, Charles, Elizabeth, Samuel Jr., and Karen.
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- <sup>110</sup> Nelson Burkholder, *I Remember: Reminiscing on 78 Years of Mennonite Life in Denbigh* (Newport News, Va.: N. Burkholder, 1997), 111.
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- <sup>114</sup> LeRoy Bechler, *The Black Mennonite Church in North America*, 2001, 146.
- <sup>115</sup> “Leslie W. Francisco II: Leader in Evangelism and Church Development,” *VMC Pathways*, by Elwood Yoder, Summer 2016, 10.
- <sup>116</sup> Elwood E. Yoder, *Under the Oaks: A History of Trissels Mennonite Church, Broadway, Virginia, 1822-2022* (Broadway, Va.: Trissels Mennonite Church, 2022), 267.
- <sup>117</sup> C3 Hampton has a good overview of the church’s history at their website: <https://c3hampton.org/get-to-know-us/>
- <sup>118</sup> The Zion Mennonite Church Sunday school class was called “Creating Beloved Community: Engaging in God’s Transforming Work of Racial Reconciliation.”
- <sup>119</sup> “The Goodness of God,” sermon by Pastor Sarah Piper, September 4, 2022, Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Virginia.