

The Delaware Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter



December 2002

Volume 1 No. 2

The First DMHS Banquet - A Success

September 7, 2002 will be remembered as a special day in the history of Mennonites in Delaware. This is the day we met as a unique group of people

When Millard Benner took the microphone in the Mennonite School auditorium and led in the invocation upon our meeting, a historic occasion was given birth. Nearly ten years of effort was brought to a culmination with this prayer.

People came from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and all parts of Delaware. Many who had moved on to other churches and walks of life, returned to their roots to share in the dream of a first class historical society and center.

From that beginning we did what we do well. We sang, we worshipped, we prayed, we ate good food, we relived our past, and we contributed to the future. About 250 people shared the enthusiasm of the evening. Donna Yoder provided an outstanding meal, which was served on tables with the artful touch of Wava Swartzentruber.

Merle Embleton captured the spirit throughout the evening by leading the group in songs that would span a half-century of singing in the Mennonite Churches. The group singing was surpassed only by the male quartet organized by Merle Embleton especially for the occasion. The first words of the first song by the men's quartet were both historical and prophetic. The Clarion Call, "The world needs a song." It's conclusion: "So sing if your gift be singing."

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Dwight Warnick

Son of a Delaware Mennonite Pioneer Family

By Fred Slabaugh

Dwight Warnick was born in Western Maryland, February 13, 1909. His parents, Maggie Wisseman, born October 30, 1878 and Charles Warnick, born December 23, 1883 shared a common birthplace at Accident, Maryland. Maggie's parents were Conrad and Barbara (Bender) Wisseman. Charles' parents were Archibald and Lena (Otto) Warnick.

The Charles Warnick family came to Delaware in January of 1916. Their adventure in the "promised land" was saddened less than a year later when Charles suddenly died. A grief stricken Maggie took her 33-year-old husband back to Grantsville, Maryland where he was buried in the Springs Mennonite Cemetery.

"It was stark and sad," Dwight recalled, even though he was only eight years old. "The scene will always be imprinted on my memory."

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Varden Leasa from Malvern, Pa. opened our minds and hearts by intertwining history with our personal lives.

DMHS Banquet (continued)

Our guest speaker, Varden Leasa is one of a kind. Wearing a traditional “plain” coat and a full Amish beard, he took the uncut cloth of time and created a garment of unity for us that night. It was appropriate that his message was the first for the Delaware Mennonite Historical Society.

Leasa spoke about the need to remember and our duty to record history. He reminded us of some of the unimportant things that once divided us. He concluded with a mandate to forge ahead in faithfulness for the future.

This first meeting of the Delaware Mennonite Historical Society has proven that history is not boring. This meeting provided an opportunity for the old to meet with the middle aged and reminisce. It provided a forum for the young to be reminded of the deep and sturdy roots of their heritage. This meeting provided the hope and affirmation that there will many more meetings in our future.



Merle Embleton captured the spirit throughout the evening by leading the group in songs that span a half century of singing in Delaware Mennonite Churches.



Dwight Warnick as many of us remember him.

Dwight Warnick (continued)

The Warnicks were not alone in their move to Delaware. Maggie’s older sister Susanna, married to Gid Hershberger bought a farm adjoining Charles and Maggie’s. Maggie’s brothers George and Henry Wiseman bought farms nearby. Will Hostetler and Harry Speicher bought adjoining farms. Will’s brother Josiah owned a farm on route 36. The Will Tressler and Valentine Bender families had moved a few years earlier. At first the farm seemed reasonable but in truth it was depleted and overpriced at \$4500.

“Why did all these families come to Greenwood, Delaware?” I asked. “They just didn’t know better,” Dwight said in thoughtful jest.

“How could a young widow with four children exist?” “My mother did the best she could”, Dwight recalled. “Uncle Gid sort of organized things. I learned early on to pull my end of the crosscut saw to cut our firewood and then the neighbors gathered with a buzz saw to cut the wood for winter.”

“What did you eat and where did the money come from?” “Well,” Dwight replied, “Mother got a widow’s pension of \$25.00 a month which later increased to \$36.00. She also rented some of the land to neighboring farmers. Then in the fall we all made holly wreaths for three cents each to supplement our income. Mother kept a cow or two and butchered a hog now and then. We also had a couple of mules for farm work and a spring wagon for transportation.”

“Dwight, what was your job in those early years?” “Twice a month, at age eleven, I would hitch up a team of mules, load up some chickens, eggs and butter and with my mother’s list I would make a trip to Greenwood. I got good at it.” Dwight recalled. “The chickens were sent to the city and the eggs and butter were traded for the staples we needed. On the way back I stopped at Coulter’s mill for feed for the livestock. I even did the trading for Uncle Gid and Milt and Fannie Zook.

“Most of the children went to the Carlisle school on Johnstown Road,” Dwight remembered. There was a road through the woods to the schoolhouse. I bought some good books from Ishmael Garner for \$12.00. I’ve kept them all these years. They provided me with the equivalent of a college education”.

When the family came to Delaware, Dwight was 7 years old, Archie was 4 1/2, Leota was 2 1/2. Walter was born the following April. Their father Charles died the next December. These four children have a high regard for their mother. When their mother lost both legs in her aging years Leota cared for her.



Dwight and Sue with children Don and Mary Katherine.

Dwight recalled fondly that the children usually got along together. But once in a while if things didn’t go right, Maggie would say, “Ach, if I’d brought you up right, you’d act better.” The

Warnick home was a regular gathering place for the young people where they gathered for old-fashioned singings. Then there was the hunting. “Rabbit hunting was a priority for the fellows. I had three dogs,” Dwight reminisced. “Now Buster was the best hunter, Sooner was a devoted companion, and Jackie just enjoyed the hunt.”

In 1932, a Sunday school was organized in Amelia Orendorf’s home. Chris Hostetler and Dwight were the leaders. Dwight read the Scripture and Chris led the prayer in that first gathering. Sometime later Will Tressler bought the old Owens Station schoolhouse for a worship center. The school furnishings and the bell tower were removed. Then seats were borrowed from the Community Center in Greenwood. Later they bought pews from the Shawnee Methodist Church for \$50.00. “Those pews were designed to punish people for their sins and they did a good job of punishment for all who ever sat in them.”Dwight said with dry humor.

“Cal Hershberger was the first pastor at the Tressler Mennonite Church, and several interim pastors followed. Millard Benner pastored for many years. Our whole family were members there. I married Sue, Archie married Evelyn Miller (Molly Miller’s daughter) and Walter married Mary Hazel. I’ve had a good life, “ Dwight concluded. “And I will always remember my parents as kind gracious helpful and stable citizens in the community who have always loved the Lord and his people.”



The Warnick home place with Dwight's mother and three of the children

That Which Came Before

By Freda Zehr

It is said that in a remote village in Thailand, once every four years the primitive people there remember their ancestors by a weeklong celebration.

They take food and flowers and play music and tell stories and dance by the graves of their ancestors.

In every religion and every land, there is a need and a longing to connect to our past. Every culture finds ways to honor those memories. Some even go so far as to worship their ancestors. While we do not dance on the graves of our ancestors or worship them, we create buildings dedicated to the saving of physical things we can touch and read, and we have history meetings and dinners and conferences to find out more about our past. We visit our graveyards to find out our genealogy.

Why do we need to, or want to study our history? When we were young, for many of us, history did not seem important.

Indeed I do remember being bored by my father's stories of his past and his many relatives and my being introduced to them, "Now this is your Great Uncle Joe", or "This is your second cousin once removed".

But it seems to me that there comes a time in everyone's life when we yearn to know about our past. That moment of epiphany hits and we suddenly wonder about those who came before and we are hooked. We become history buffs.

That moment came to me twenty years ago when my father was still living and together we spent a day visiting places he wanted to show me.

I stood on the very soil where the first Wert (spelled Wirth, at that time) ancestor who come over from Germany and had built his home in the early 1700's. We visited a number of old graveyards. One contained the graves of my great grandparents and their children, who had died in infancy,

To my surprise, I saw 12 little gravestones all in a row. There were twins David and Susan--still born. There was Mary--three weeks old, Fannie, less than a year, another set of twins, Willis and Ammon, who lived only a few days, and on and on--12 of them. My father told me that only three of my great grandparents fifteen children (my own grandmother being on of them) lived beyond infancy.

As I stood there sudden tears filled my eyes. I envisioned my great grandmother's young, frail body trudging up that hill to the graveyard, twelve times. What was she thinking? How did she endure that? Each time she knew she was to have another little one, did she dare to hope that this one would live? Why did they all die? Some of her descendants, who have become physicians, have speculated that she may have had the RH-negative factor since that has been found in her some of her descendants.

How interesting it would be if she had written and preserved her thoughts and feelings of that time. If she had recorded the facts surrounding their deaths for us following after. The only words recorded about her thoughts were verbal-- words from my own grandmother, who told us that her mother said, "A piece of my heart went with them each time".

I have had other moments of insight, one just recently when, on impulse I visited the Greenwood Church cemetery alone and followed the gravestones of my husband's family. I realized as I read dates of births and deaths that my own mother-in-law, Verna Schrock Zehr, lost her mother when she was a young 13 years of age and most likely had the responsibility of helping raise the younger ones. I understood then her close ties and attachment to her only sister, Cora Mast, who was five years younger.

These thoughts lead me to an important tool in recording history--writing our own stories.

We may not be great writers; our stories may not always be completely accurate, but each of us experiences events differently and we can only write as we remember.

Another thing, which I think is important, is to write down everything, even the unpleasant things we may want to forget. A member of the older generation once told me, “don’t write the ‘bad’ things. That serves no purpose”.

I think it does, it gives a clearer picture of the past. It is a tendency to want to whitewash the facts when they do not correspond with what we want to remember or how we wish it would have been.

While we appear to study history to know our ancestors, I think the deeper need is to know and understand ourselves, and how our past impacts upon our lives today.

A woman speaking of her son’s depression, said that when her son’s therapist wanted to know about his parents and grandparents, she finally told him of her own fathers ups and downs, his manic states and his depressions, she had never shared this with him, because it was too painful to remember and she did not want to taint her son’s memory of his grandfather. Yet this was a very important piece of history to know in diagnosing his own condition.

I love to look at my own children and see the past memories shining from their eyes and faces. My oldest daughter, Kathy has her grandmother Zehr’s large blue eyes and sweet manner, My youngest daughter, Andrea, has the beauty and the almost exact looks of my sister Gladys when she was young, and there are times when I am with her that I catch my breath for I am taken back in time to another day, another time in history. Yes, We are a part of all who came before us. We study history to know ourselves. We study history to understand our parents and their past We study and record our own history because we are aware that some day the earthly reminders of us will just be that row of gravestones in the cemetery or the faded photographs in the albums.

I record my own history so that my descendants will read it and know who I was, know how I lived and how I loved, what I believed and what I stood for

When God’s people crossed the Jordan to the Promised Land, Joshua asked a man from each tribe to bring a stone from the river and build a monument on the river bank. Josh. 4:20

He said to the Israelites, “In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, “Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.” Let us set up our stones and tell our stories.

Banquet Video Available

Highlights of the first banquet of the Delaware Mennonite Historical Society are being made into a 15-20 minute VHS video. This will include informal pictures of the banquet including congregational singing. The video is available for \$12.00 plus \$3.00 postage and handling. All profits from this will go to the DMHS general fund.

Since the banquet, the men’s quartet has continued singing. Merle has just made a CD with all the music they sang at the banquet as well as six other songs. This is an outstanding group of men’s music. He is selling it for \$8.00. For your convenience we are making this available for \$8.00 plus \$2.00 postage and handling. Make checks payable to DMHS. Both the Video and the CD may be ordered from: Vernon Zehr, 2721 Skylark Road, Wilmington, Delaware, 19808. Allow six to eight weeks for delivery.

DMHS Board Members

Vernon Zehr, President
Paul Bender, Vice President
Rachel Schlabach, Secretary/Treasurer
Truman Schrock, Legal
Dean Swartzentruber, Public Relations
Harold Huber, Consultant
Harvey Mast, Artifacts
Millard Benner, Board Advisor

Membership DMHS depends upon donations and dues for its operating budget. This includes Maintenance at the Bender House (electricity, insurance) legal fees postage, the newsletter and miscellaneous. The \$15.00 dues are annual. If you paid your dues in 2001 we would appreciate your membership now. Those who joined at the Banquet will not pay again until next year. Following is the list of members and membership expiration dates. A blank space indicates that the member has contributed to the lifetime membership or endowment fund.

Kris Aschemeyer	2003	Phyllis Ezard	2003	John & Joan Mills	2003	Earl and Carol Swartzentruber	2002
Galen Guengerich & Holly Atkinson	2003	Goldie & Paul Fretz	2002	Frederick & Judith Morgan	2003	Ella Swartzentruber	2002
Nevin & Anna Marie Beachy	2003	Nan & Ken Garber	2003	Kenneth & Judy Nafziger	2002	John Mark & Marjorie Swartzentruber	2002
Joan Bender	2003	R. Bradley & Toni Gehman	2003	Michael & Allison Richards	2003	David & Beulah Troyer	2003
Malcolm and Jackie Bender		Robert & Edith Gehman	2003	Elsie Russell	2002	Allen & Aileen Warfel	2003
Mildred Bender	2003	J. Lloyd Gingerich	2003	Charlie & Amy Schlabach	2003	John & Judy Warfel	2002
Nevin James and Lourene Bender	2002	Jan. Gleysteen	2003	Delmer & Angie Schlabach	2003	Linford & Ronda Weber	2003
Paul and Ginny Bender	2003	Anna Hand	2003	Titus & Rachel Schlabach		Paul & Mary Lou Wesselhoeft	2003
Titus and Anne Bender	2003	J. David & Ilva Hertzler	2002	Walt & Kendra Schlabach	2003	Benjamin & Carol Yoder	2003
Lowell & Alma Bergey	2003	Harold and Vida Jane Huber		Truman & Mary Schrock	2003	Bonnie Yoder	2003
Eli and Ruth Bontrager	2002	Keith E. Hummel	2003	Ralph & Puff Scott	2003	Caroline Yoder	2002
James & Karen Bontrager	2003	Dale & Donna Jones	2003	Daryl & Lisa Sharp	2003	Gerald & Ruth Yoder	2003
Jesse & Christina Bontrager	2003	David Jones		Sim and Betty Sharp	2002	Jesse and Gladys Yoder	2003
Debbie Chaffinch	2003	Kenneth & Queena Kauffman	2003	Stanley Sharp	2002	John & Dottie Yoder	2003
Drexel & Esther Chaffinch	2003	Cynthia Lapp	2002	Nathan & Christine Showalter	2002	Luke and Cora Yoder	
David & Lisa Chupp	2003	K. Varden Leasa	2003	Richard & Jewel Showalter	2002	Mark and Alene Yoder	2003
Menno & Dorothy Chupp	2003	W. Kenneth & Betty Leasa	2003	Fred & Barbara Slabaugh	2003	Monroe and Naomi Yoder	2002
Clyde & Esther Clemens	2003	Dale & Miriam Mast	2003	Barry & Angeline Solway	2004	Paul M Yoder	2003
Rosie Cupler	2003	Harvey & Grace Mast		Merlin and Hilda Swartz	2002	Paul T. and Daisy Yoder	2002
Edward and Esther Diener		Roy & Olive Mast	2003	Cecil & Lee Ann Swartzentruber	2002	Vernon & Freda Zehr	
Bill & Louise DiGennaro	2003	Cliff & Joyce Maust	2003	Clayton and Margaret Swartzentruber		Robert and Vivian Zehr	2002
Roy and Margaret Eby		Barbara Miller	2002	David and Violet Swartzentruber	2002		
Harvey & Janice Ellingsworth	2003	Dorcas Miller		Dean & Lisa Swartzentruber	2003		
Maynard & Shirley Miller	2003	Laverne & Esther Yousey	2002	Daniel & Mary Ann Yutzky	2003		



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