

# The Delaware Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter



Spring, 2004

Volume 3 No. 1

## Eli Swartzentruber — Man of Peace



Eli Swartzentruber and his wife, Amilia

Eli Swartzentruber was a man of peace and principle; of truth and conviction. He went courageously where God led, and this journey took him to Greenwood, Delaware, a new place on God's map for his life.

Eli first came to Delaware with his family in 1914. He was 21 years old. The Valentine Bender family had moved there the year before, and Eli was seriously interested in Amelia, one of the Bender girls. He had met her

See Eli Swartzentruber on page 2

by daughter, Rhoda Showalter and sons

“Eli and Mark Swartzentruber— father and son, provided leadership in the Greenwood, Delaware Community for more than half a century—from 1921 to 1982. They were men of peace and faith, living and working among the people they served.”

## Mark Swartzentruber — Man of Faith

By Daughter, Goldie Fretz

Mark Swartzentruber was a man of faith and conviction. As one of the first children to be born in the new and bustling Greenwood community in 1918, he was a symbol of new beginnings. Although he was the first-born of eight, to Eli and Amelia (Bender) Swartzentruber, he did have an older sister, Bertha, who was adopted a few months before he was born. He was raised in a home of humble means, but of spiritual wealth, as his parents modeled a life of service to the church and community. He lived most of his life within a mile of where he was born, but his interests ranged much farther.

As a young teenager during the great depression, he experienced the hardships caused by shortages of food and heat. He spoke of wearing a coat at mealtimes to keep warm. Actually, they probably fared better than some because of their ability to raise their own food.

In his fourth grade of school, a life-impacting incident occurred that changed the course of his schooling and the education process for the

See Mark Swartzentruber on page 4



Mark Swartzentruber and his wife, Ella

## Eli Swartzentruber

*Continued from page 1*

several years earlier when they both lived in Maryland.

The beginning of their special friendship, however, was at an Amish wedding where Eli found himself on the cutting edge of an Amish custom. Young men gathered in one room, young women gathered in another. A responsible "go between" arranged the supper partners.

During the afternoon, Eli had asked, indirectly, if Amelia would be his supper partner and she accepted.

However, in the evening after he made his request, he was told, "This is not allowed. You are Amish and she is Conservative." Consequently, they each went their separate ways to the meal and the singing after-

ward. Later in the evening, Eli took Amelia home. That was not only a test of Eli's ability and willingness to follow delicate church rules in peace, but was also the beginning of a friendship which led to marriage several years later.

Eli was the oldest of Lewis (L.J.) and Elizabeth (Yoder) Swartzentruber's ten children:

Nine boys and 1 girl. He was born on July 25, 1893 in Midland, Virginia, about 50 miles south of Washington, D.C. where the family lived until 1901 when they moved to Oakland, Maryland. That was home for almost 15 years until they moved to Delaware.

Eli was 24 when he and Amelia were married. A year later, they adopted a daughter, and just a few months after that, their oldest son was born. Eli and Amelia were

cash crop, lima beans. However, the labor intensive summer bean harvest interfered with the marketing work and, since Eli was becoming more deeply involved in church work and did not want to be hindered by the marketing, it was discontinued in 1945.

Eli did not have much formal education, but was highly educated in many areas! He knew a lot about many things! He was a master mechanic who fixed and

maintained a wide variety of equipment and vehicles and, to the relief of many Volkswagen owners, could do wonders with the engine of that little car. He knew the building trade as well as house-moving. He was an accomplished carpenter, a successful farmer, brick maker and sawyer. His hobby was finding difficult



*Eli Swartzentruber and Amelia Bender Swartzentruber Family — Front row Left to Right: Earl, Eli, Amelia, David; Back row Left to right; Bertha, Lois, Twila, Mark, Rhoda, Esther, Caroline.*

parents of nine children: Bertha, Mark, Rhoda, Esther, Caroline, Lois, Earl, David, and Twila.

After their marriage, Eli was involved in general farming. It was during the depression that they began going to Wilmington to the Madison Street Market each Saturday with fresh produce from their farm. There was also a new

math problems and solving them. He was a strong family man with an unusual balance of grace and truth.

It was after his marriage that Eli, in a public confession to the congregation at Greenwood, made it clear that he wanted to go all the way with the Lord. He had been baptized in the Amish Church, but

was not satisfied with his experience. He termed those earlier years as irresponsible years in which he permitted un-confessed sin. Consequently there was guilt and frustration. With his new dedication to Christ, he experienced the presence of God in new and meaningful ways.

In 1921, Eli was chosen by lot, to assist Nevin Bender in church leadership. He was never the lead pastor, but always seemed to enjoy being a strong second. He went to Johnstown Bible School in 1924 and there experienced a time of deep spiritual enrichment. Eli was not an orator, but enjoyed sharing the Good News of the Bible. One of his grandsons recalls asking him about his sermon preparation, knowing that he sometimes felt inferior to younger ministers who had attended school. He noted that he often crafted sermons while he was on the tractor working the ground. He really didn't come up with an outline; rather he would meditate upon a Scripture and think of various points.

Eli was a man of peace, and a man of prayer. Through the years, the growing church experienced some difficulties. We older children remember being called together for times of family prayers, especially for the church situation. We understood, in part, our father's deep love for the church. Many years later, one of our sons brought his new bride home to our place in Ohio when Eli and Amelia were visiting. In the midst of the usual noise and hub-bub at our house, Eli sat with a faraway look in his eyes, lost somewhere afar off. Our daughter-in-law

recalls asking our son what Eli was doing. He replied, "Grandpa is praying."

Eli was most of all a church man and a missionary. After working there at Greenwood for a number of years, Eli became a member of the Mission Board of the Conservative Conference. Conviction was growing that they needed to be more involved with mission outreach. As a result, plans were made for a trip to Kentucky.

Eli described it this way. "With people praying for us, we made our first trip. Emanuel Swartzentruber and I boated across the river and up Turners Creek. We talked to a lot of people. Someone told us that Jerry Raleigh was 'king of the creek'. He said that if we have the real thing, they'd be glad to have us. John C. Turner with just enough alcohol to feel good, gave us a hearty invitation to come, and said with heartfelt conviction, "We need someone here."

That night we made our decision. Two weeks later Ed Albrecht went down for Bible School, and three months later Alvin Swartz and his family were there.

A young coworker, on the Board with Eli, remembers that Eli was deeply concerned about the mission and its challenges. However, he was seldom rushed. A phrase which he heard time and again was, "I'd like to sleep over that once." After sleeping over it, Eli would often come back with new suggestions and new vision.

Eli was also one who was able to connect with the up-coming generation. Our son, Richard, remembers one summer, as he was

enjoying conference with his friends beside the big tent, he looked up and saw his Grandpa who was just arriving. "As we walked toward each other," Richard said, "he opened his arms wide for an embrace with a smile of friendship on his face. That memory symbolizes, for me, a precious spiritual and emotional heritage from a man who loved deeply. He communicated, not only his love, but also the Father's love, as well as the embrace of the church."

These are some of the ways that Eli Swartzentruber, quiet peacemaker, humble craftsman, and tireless servant, communicated his love and devotion, not only to God, but to God's people as well. We are thankful for his four score years and for the way he served his generation. ■

## Feedback

Your comments are needed. The editorial staff is eager to hear what you think.

We are looking for ideas for the future. What or who would you like to see featured in the DMHS newsletter? 1-W Service in Delaware, First Telephones on Molasses Street or another person in the life of the church.

E-mail your responses to us at: [revzehr@delawaremennonite.com](mailto:revzehr@delawaremennonite.com) [rachel@delawaremennonite.com](mailto:rachel@delawaremennonite.com) or write. ■

## Mark Swartzentruber

*Continued from page 1*

entire community. The Mennonite students were expelled from the local public school for refusing to salute the flag. One wonders what impact this had on Mark and how it influenced his decision-making in the coming years.

pencil sharpened. As she tells it, Mark offered to sharpen it for her with his pocket knife, making the nicest point she had ever had! Years would pass before they actually started dating, but this act of kindness was always special to her.

As a youth, he attended Eastern Mennonite School in Harrisonburg

work; Likes the stars; Interested in hatcheries." His life was being shaped by his conservative, yet open-minded parents, willing to sacrifice to prepare him for use in the kingdom.

In 1940, after 5 years of courtship, he and Ella Yoder were married, and for their honeymoon had the very unique privilege of traveling to the annual Conservative Mennonite Conference in the Midwest with his parents! Afterwards, they set up housekeeping in "little heaven," a rental property behind Ted Beachy's farm used by several newlywed couples over the years, hence the name! Duane and Marlin were born there, before their move to the current home place on Mennonite School Road, where their son Roger now lives. Six more children joined the family, Linford, Goldie, Glenda, Verla, Roger, and Daisy, making it one of four boys and four girls.

He was a successful farmer, growing award-winning lima beans and other crops, when the call came to be in the lot for the ministry. It was a time of wrestling with priorities, yet feeling the pull to serve the church if God called. He indeed was chosen and ordained in 1953, serving in the ministry for nearly 30 years. To his growing family, his attendance at endless committee meetings and visitations became routine, and accepted as part of service to the church. His service also included donating a piece of his farm for the new school, and serving on the building committee. There were many weddings and funerals, sermons to prepare, and books to read for personal growth, a



*Mark Swartzentruber and Ella Yoder Swartzentruber Family 1962 — Back row left to right: Linford, Duane, Marlin, Goldie Fretz; Middle Row Left to right: Verla Byler, Ella, Mark, Glenda Byler; Front Row Left to right: Daisy Miller, Roger*

Very soon after he started attending the new "school," with boards over the church benches to make improvised desks, another important event took place. The Yoder family arrived in the community from Florida, and a girl by the name of Ella joined his class. She had only arrived the evening before, and on this first day of all newness, she needed to have her

for two years, graduating in High School Bible. There he met men like Lloyd Hartzler, David Showalter, and J. Mark Stauffer, with whom he became friends for life. His participation in literary society and music groups broadened his abilities. The caption in the yearbook reads: "Eager for Bible knowledge, Not inclined to discouragement; Musical talent used in literary and Christian

home open to many guests, including visiting missionaries, chorale members, church speakers and fresh air children. Darcy Slacum, a lonely man from the community, spent countless Sunday dinners at the table after church.

His spiritual life was lived authentically before his family, as he led our family worship each morning, not subject to being canceled because of “busyness.” He loved his wife affectionately, washed the dishes after Sunday dinner and was available at inconvenient times to talk to a struggling teenage child. We were never permitted to speak against our teachers or church leaders, a cherished legacy. Surely there were times of church tensions, but we were not burdened with the details. His service to the broader church included being on the Rosedale Board 20 years; his bid at the auction purchased the present Rosedale property. He taught at Rosedale several winters while his wife and growing family held down the fort at home, served as revival meetings speaker in various locations, and attended annual Conference and Minister’s Fellowship.

Six of the children have moved from the area: Marlin, currently in Florida, Linford and Goldie in PA, Verla in Georgia, and Daisy in Indiana. Duane, Glenda and Roger live locally, helping to care for Ella, who lives in a house on the grounds of the Country Rest Home at Greenwood.

At retirement age, as he and Ella looked forward to more travel and a less harried schedule, Parkinson’s

Disease invaded his life, bringing a downward slide physically, along with many questions for God. His eventual acceptance and quiet endurance through the next 13 years were a supreme example of his trust and willingness to wait until eternity for the answers. He passed to that eternity on November 29, 1995, with his wife and most of his children by his side. The way he died, uncomplaining and brave to the end, truly showed us how to live. Those of us who follow, found him faithful. ■

## THE ONION SNOW

*From the Journal of Freda Zehr 1990*

It is April the 10th, and as I look out my window, I see a storm of snowflakes, swirling, twisting in the air. They appear playful, as if to be laughing at the incongruity of falling on my blooming daffodils. A sudden memory comes into my mind. My mother, standing by the old blue wood burning kitchen range, looking out the back window at her freshly dug garden, at her onions planted in neat rows, a look of pleasure on her face. “Oh, look, it is the onion snow,” she says.

Now I, on that day so long ago, was weary of winters cold and snow and eager for the warmth of spring and I did not share her pleasure at seeing the snowflakes. But she assured me that it was always so, as long as she could remember, after she planted her onions, the snow flurries came one more time. “It is like the winter giving one last feeble fling as it is leaving,” she said. And so I looked at the snow that day as an

omen of better things ahead—the start of spring.

Today the snow clings for but a moment on the budding tree outside my window and on the golden daffodils below and even as I watch, the sun appears and kisses it away. I am filled with a sudden surge of joy, with a promise of better things ahead—a spring and summer filled with the loveliest of things—the laughter of my college aged daughter, returned home from her travels in far away places, the sticky kisses of my first grandson, the joy of discovering again with him all those wonders that somehow get lost in my stress filled adult world—the walks in the fragrant woods behind our house, the family reunions, the wedding of my nephew, days on the beach.

Oh I know there is pain and suffering in this world, there is that hole in the ozone layer, the impending water shortage, the landfills that are overflowing with a nation’s garbage. Wars and death and starvation scenes haunt us from our television screens. It feels as though our earth is teetering on the brink of disaster and at times I feel overcome with helplessness and hopelessness.

But not today! Today the onion snow fell, reminding me of the continuity of life, of the promise of springtime and harvest, and so today I shall rejoice in that promise. Today, even while the snowflakes swirl, I shall go out and buy a sandbox, and put the screen door back in the sliding door, ready for the heat of summer, for if the onion snow is here, surely summer cannot be far behind! ■

## New Website:

### [www.delawaremennonite.com](http://www.delawaremennonite.com)

DMHS has a Website; [delawaremennonite.com](http://delawaremennonite.com) will take you there. Since this site is new, it is a work in progress. The goal is to introduce new members and supporters to DMHS. We eventually will have copies of brochures, a copy of our bylaws and certificate of incorporation and archived copies of the newsletters as well as a variety of photographs. Best of all, readers will be able to send e-mails which will be forwarded to the proper person for a response. You will be able to submit article suggestions and letters to the address listed below.

Our first choice of a domain name was DMHS, but it was taken by the Des Moines Historical Society in Iowa. The name: [delawaremennonite.com](http://delawaremennonite.com) provides us with the important characteristics for a domain name. It tells where and what. Check it out; [www.delawaremennonite.com](http://www.delawaremennonite.com)

This site is privately funded and we are looking for help to pay the modest monthly fee to keep this site going. If you are interested, send me an e-mail: [revzehr@delawaremennonite.com](mailto:revzehr@delawaremennonite.com). ■

## DMHS Expansion Project

The DMHS Board has made plans to move ahead with a short term expansion of the Bender House that will provide a room 16 by 20 feet. This will be used for climatized storage of print documents and a place for individuals and small groups to examine these. This addition will be faithful to the original design of the building. This addition will be on the side of the house facing Millard Benner's home. The proposal includes a powder room with a septic system. This addition will make the Bender House more accessible for visitors and encourage them to read some of the historical document that will be made available. It is estimated that the cost will be between twenty five and thirty thousand dollars. Since any project of this nature will require donations from you we encourage your comments. We will post a picture of this on the newly formed web site when we have an artists rendition of the addition. ([delawaremennonite.com](http://delawaremennonite.com)) Your donations for this project are welcome at any time. ■

---

## More Members Needed

Have you been enjoying the newsletters? The editorial staff, along with our writers, work hard to that end. How about becoming a member now, so that you'll be assured of receiving every copy? There are many of you that we know personally, and when we attach your label, we know that if you were sitting across the table, you'd say, "Of course I want to join. Here is my \$15.00" and then with a sheepish grin, you'd add, "I've been meaning to do that." That's OK. We all have those things that we just put off doing. Now that we are getting ready to build a room for the storage and display of historically important items, we need you as never before. How about stopping right now, and taking care of this before you forget. Complete the form, put it into the addressed envelope, and drop it in the mail. We're also including a membership list, so check and see if your name is there. If it is, you

can check your label and see when your membership expires. We need your financial support, but we also need the moral support that is evidenced by your continued membership. Won't you join with us today? Thank you so much. If you have questions about membership send an e-mail to: [rachel@delawaremennonite.com](mailto:rachel@delawaremennonite.com). ■

## DMHS Board Members

*Vernon Zehr – President*

*Paul Bender – Vice President*

*Rachel Schlabach – Secretary/Treasurer*

*Dean Swartzentruber*

*Harvey Mast*

*Harold Huber*

*Truman Schrock*

## Jan Gleysteen to Speak at Third Annual Banquet, September 3, 2004

Jan Gleysteen will be the featured speaker at DMHS third annual Banquet, on

September 3, 2004. Gleysteen is an unusual man who is most known in the Mennonite

Church for his work as an illustrator with the Mennonite Publishing House in Scottdale, Pa.

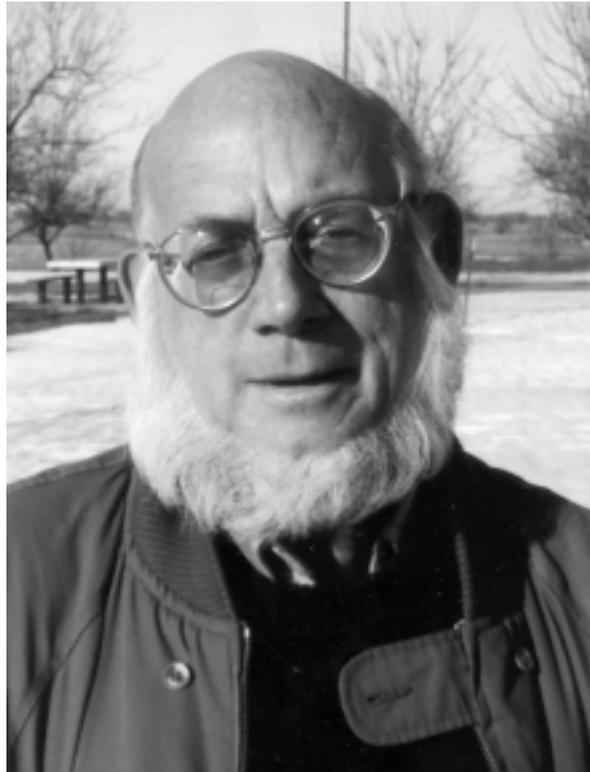
Furthermore, Jan Gleysteen is a painter, photographer, story teller, tour guide, slide lecturer, Mennonite environmentalist, humorist and train lover. He will be presenting his fascinating slide lecture, "Rails Around the World" at our third annual banquet.

For more than 50 years, Gleysteen has been in love with trains on five continents. From steamers in the jungles of Paraguay, to the Glacier Express in Switzerland to the fastest trains in the world, specifically, Japan and Europe all the way to the United States,

Jan has snapped pictures with his camera and painstakingly sketched long forgotten trains from retired lines such as the NYC and the B&O, which are now only a memory in the minds of engineers gone by.

Jan Gleysteen most likely has a picture somewhere in his collection of 200, 000 slides, of an old steam engine that has pulled a train through, our own town of Greenwood, Delaware or along the B&O line in Wilmington, or the Strasburg Railroad in Gap Pennsylvania.

Jan Gleysteen has lived a colorful life that began in Amsterdam, Holland, July 16, 1931. He was born a Mennonite and attended the historic Singel Mennonite



Church that traces its roots back to 1608 in Amsterdam. Gleysteen's family lived through the five year Nazi occupation during World War II; suffered near starvation during the winter of 1944 and 1945.

Gleysteen attended Goshen College and Eastern Mennonite University before going to work full time at the Mennonite Publishing House in Scottdale, Pa. as editor, illustrator and designer of books in 1955. He and his wife Barbara Ellen Detweiler from Newton Kansas lived in Scottdale for forty years while he devoted

his life to the service of the church at the Publishing house. Jan and Barbara now live in Goshen, Indiana. They have two adult children, Linda Jo and Richard David.

Jan was cofounder of Tour-Magination and has personally led 60 tours through Europe. He has done many illustrated lectures of Mennonite History in churches throughout the world.

Jan Gleysteen has had his personal art work displayed at Goshen College and Canada and will be featured in southeastern Pa. next year. These works include, pen and ink drawings, watercolor, oil painting, calligraphy, book designs, model trains and documentary photography. Make sure you have a place at the banquet table September 3, 2004 to see

and hear this gifted speaker, artist and world renowned traveler of Mennonite origin and faith. Go to the website at: [delawaremennonite.com](http://delawaremennonite.com) or write to us for your reservation. If you wish, you may call Amy at 302-349-5176 or Rachel at 302-349-5596 for reservations. The banquet is free. An offering will be taken for the support of (Delaware Mennonite Historical Society. ■

*Jan Gleysteen, painter, photographer, story teller, tour guide, slide lecturer Mennonite historian, and train lover. Will present a slide lecture September 3, 2004*

## Editorial: Lest We Forget

*By Rachel Schlabach*

Recently my husband and I had the opportunity to enjoy The Holy Land Experience in Orlando, Florida. In addition to a replica of Old Jerusalem, The Temple, The Garden Tomb and more, the complex included a building called, The Scriptorium. This building houses one of the world's finest private collections of biblical artifacts. It's a dramatic portrayal of how the Bible came into being with a fascinating collection of cuneiform scrolls, and manuscripts. On display were many of the earliest Bibles: the Vulgate, the Septuagint, the Gutenberg, the Tyndale, and hundreds more. We walked through the cell-like rooms where courageous men dedicated and often lost their lives to translate, duplicate, and take the Word of God to the ends of the earth. It was a wonderful experience, and I came away with an overwhelming sense of God's faithfulness in preserving His Word, when many, over the years, have tried to destroy it. I was profoundly grateful that those priceless manuscripts had been preserved and displayed for us in such a beautiful setting.

Several months ago, Paul Lederach gave us an old leather bound Prayer and Hymn Book that was printed in 1834. It had been given to him by the late Orrie Bawel, of Greenwood. Orrie knew it was a rare and valuable book, and gave it to Paul Lederach for safe keeping before he died. Paul felt that DMHS was the proper place for it to be preserved, and has entrusted it to us by its return.

This is just one of a number of old and valuable items that we have. We seriously take the responsibility of preserving them for you, your children, grandchildren, and future generations. Can you picture a future group of school children viewing significant artifacts that have been preserved in the DMHS museum? Can you imagine how their faith may be strengthened as they read the personal stories of the unique ways in which God has led in the formation and growth of this community and its people?

The Scriptorium in Florida has been a blessing to so many, and it started with a vision. Today, your board has a Vision. We, at DMHS, have an opportunity and a responsibility to the children of tomorrow. Now is the time for us to join hands, to build, and to move forward. Will you help us, "Lest we forget."? ■



DMHS 11123 Wood Lane  
Greenwood, DE 19950-1055