

# The Delaware Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter



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## David & Savilla Bender Yoder Making room at the table, making room in the heart



*Dave and Savilla Yoder at their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary*

According to family legend, articulate and charismatic “Uncle Dave” Yoder once was stumped by an extraordinarily routine question. “How many children do you have, Dave?” he was asked by a visiting speaker at the Greenwood Mennonite Church one Sunday evening. Reportedly, David hesitated before replying in an uncertain voice, “We have ‘bout eleven.”

It’s no surprise to today’s descendants of David S. and Savilla Bender Yoder that their patriarch didn’t have an immediate answer—nearly seventy years later, family members still don’t share a ready answer to the question. Most say David and Savilla had eleven children, though some specify that there were eleven living children and a few explain all the variations: two foster children, eleven biologi-

cal children (ten living), and one adopted child.

What the descendants do know without hesitation is that David and Savilla made room in their home and in their lives for many children. The conservative and God-fearing couple modeled throughout their married life the simple yet difficult philosophy that the best tables and hearts are made to be stretched, and their shared interest in the wellbeing of children and youth was their greatest contribution to the Greenwood community.

David and Savilla, both regarded as excellent teachers, demonstrated this philosophy to their students. Savilla, born in Springs, Pennsylvania, in 1889, and the oldest child of Valentine and Caroline Gingerich Bender, was trained at the Frostburg Normal School for teachers with the encouragement of her parents. At the age of 19, she taught at local public Yoder School where a former pupil remembers her as “putting love into action” and another said “when she spoke, you never had to wonder what she meant.”

David, born in Holmes County, Ohio, to Samuel and Nancy Stutzman Yoder, a teacher by nature rather than by training, taught Sunday School classes for youth and adults for many years. His sons recall that classes often chose their father first to be the Sunday School teacher in the Greenwood Mennonite Church during a time when the church held annual elections for the position of Sunday School teacher. They also remember class members listening intently as David taught.



*Dave Yoder Family (1938)*

*Back left to right*

*Naomi, Dave(father), Ruth, Amos, Savilla (Mother) David*  
*Front: Daniel, John, Paul, Mark, Luke, Jesse*

One of David’s former Sunday School students, Dorcas Swartzentruber Miller, describes David as having a “genuine love for God and people.” Her brother Clayton remembers “how much [Uncle Dave] meant to me as a

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## David & Savilla

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teenager and young adult. [He was] the best Sunday School teacher I have ever had!" Later, when Clayton was principal of Western Mennonite School in Oregon, he asked David and Savilla to lead a youth retreat for the Pacific Coast Conference and WMS teens. "I can still see the teenagers, gasping and laughing, as [Uncle Dave] walked all the way across the gym on his hands, with his head down and his feet high in the air," Clayton says. Uncle Dave was in his 60's then at least, maybe older..."

David and Savilla shared their home with children from the time of their marriage on October 9, 1915, beginning their married life in the Grantsville (Md.) Children's Home. Savilla

continued in her role as matron of the home, a position she had taken following several years of teaching. An article in the November 1, 1914, issue of *Herold der Wahrheit*, notes, "[Savilla's] experience as a teacher has enabled her to administer the discipline indispensable in an institution of this kind." David worked in the coal mines during the day and "walked babies" at night. In February of 1917, Savilla gave birth to their first child, a stillborn daughter, buried in

the present day Maple Glen Mennonite Church cemetery.

In March of the following year, when David and Savilla moved to Greenwood, they brought two of the children from the home with them, Arley Ravenscroft, age 9, and Sadie Bloom, age 14. At that time, according to Savilla's quarterly reports, at least five additional children from the home were living with families in the Greenwood area. Two children, John Embleton and Bill Welfley, lived with Savilla's



*Dave Yoder Family (left to right)*

*Back: Naomi, Daniel, Paul, John, Jesse, Amos, Miriam  
Front: Luke, Ruth, Dave, Savilla, David, Mark*

parents; two lived with Savilla's sister Amelia and husband Eli Swartzentruber; and another child lived with Eli's parents, Lewis and Elizabeth Swartzentruber.

David and Savilla and the children settled into family life on a farm purchased from Savilla's uncle, William Tressler, and currently owned by granddaughter Alma Jean and Jerrel Heatwole. During the next 13 years, Savilla gave birth to ten living children: Ruth (Bontrager), David, Amos,

Naomi (Yoder), John, Daniel, Paul, Mark and Luke (twins), and Jesse. As the older children began to marry and leave home, the youngest son Jesse begged his parents and prayed to God for a younger sister. Jesse says that God heard his prayers, and David & Savilla, then in their late 40's, adopted the youngest daughter in the family, Miriam, in 1937. It was during the process of her adoption that David was uncertain about the answer to the question of how many children were in the family.

Dave and Savilla taught their children in their home with the same passion and strength they evidenced in their roles as teachers. Both loved stories and language, and they used a legacy of proverbs, poems, and Bible stories to teach their values. Daughter Naomi recalls the

warmth of family gatherings in the living room, one of two heated rooms in the house, on cold winter evenings. There the family sang, read the Bible, learned to lead in audible prayers, and were drilled on their memory work. David, an imaginative storyteller, held steadfastly to his commitment to tell Bible stories to the children at their request, even at the end of the most exhausting days.

The children and grandchildren recall David's favorite Bible verse,

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver or gold." Savilla taught her children through a whole series of pithy sayings: *Doing dishes satisfies my wishes; If you have a task begun, never leave it 'til it's done; Anything worth doing at all is worth doing right; Others may, you cannot; Be sure you're right, then go ahead.* Both parents appreciated poetry. David was inspired to write a rhyming five stanza poem entitled "Marcus and Lucas" at the birth of the twins. Savilla recited portions of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "The Psalm of Life," long after dementia had attacked her keen mind.

Life was not kind to the Greenwood community during the years that David and Savilla raised their family. The Great Depression visited large farm families with particular vengeance, and David and Savilla worked valiantly to keep their large family clothed and fed. David Jr. recalls the worst of the times: his father selling cows for \$25.00 that they had purchased for \$185.00 and sending a load of hogs to Philadelphia for \$3.00 per hundred. He also holds keen memories of picking tomatoes and selling them for 8 cents per 5/8 bushel and picking strawberries for 1 \_ cents per quart. In spite of these difficulties, David and Savilla instilled in their children the importance of stretching wide their hearts. "Don't forget to be kind," David often said. "Children, don't have fun at the expense of others."

Son Paul recalls with particular appreciation the way in which his parents emphasized the need to respect people of other ethnic

groups and other religious persuasions. "Remember," he recently reminded his siblings, "how we were instructed to call Andrew Waters, 'Mr Waters'? That was a very unusual way to address an African American when we were children, particularly in the local context."

Granddaughter Mary Ann Yoder Yutzy remembers David "as one who would often take up for the underdog. He would often invite the person to dinner that other people wouldn't have. And when folks talked to him, he listened." She also pointed out that " he wasn't afraid to tell them if he thought they were wrong."

From David and Savilla, the children grasped the importance of serving others. Of the eleven children, six have served the church as ordained ministers, one of whom was a medical missionary in Ethiopia for many years. Today, a preponderance of their descendants is employed in the medical field as physicians, nurses, mental health and elder health care providers. Many are teachers; others are artists, farmers, writers, and business persons. Almost all are actively involved in a local church; most belong to a Mennonite church.

Today, the descendants of David & Savilla carry on the family traditions of communication, storytelling, and faith building via an egroup called Yodelings, having logged 10,605 communications since August 17, 2000. On a recent Thursday morning in September, seven messages had been posted by 9:49 a.m. Several messages reported the safety of family members amidst the devastation of

Hurricane Ivan; several were updates on the separation of the conjoined Block twins posted by granddaughter Lucy Bontrager Yoder who provided translation and support for the parents during the ordeal. On ordinary days, members discuss health, politics (carefully), recipes, observations, and daily happenings.

Becky Yoder Whitham, adopted into the David and Savilla Yoder clan by her parents Daniel and Mary Lois, recently paid tribute to the ongoing legacy of making room at the table. "I hold my head high and proudly tell people I am a Yoder," she said. "The name brings respect because those who have been before me have paved the way and instilled godly attitudes and kindness. My husband tells me I could not have been any more like my Dad had I come from his loins. I consider that a compliment."

Becky's words bring home the lines from Longfellow often quoted by her grandmother Savilla:

*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footsteps on the sands of time. ■*



*Gloria Y. Diener (granddaughter of David & Savilla, daughter of Luke) lives in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where she recently retired after 20 years of teaching English at Eastern*

*Mennonite High School. Gloria enjoys gardening, quilting, travel, and she shares her grandparents' love of language and relationships. She and her husband Gene are the parents of two young adult sons, Obie and Brian.*

## History Lovers Visit Grantsville

*By Freda Zehr*

At six o'clock early Friday morning, October 1, 2004, an enthusiastic crew of 45 history-loving Delawareans gathered with bag and baggage beside the Greenwood Mennonite church to load up for a very memorable trip to the land from whence many of our ancestors originated, Grantsville Maryland. This trip was the dream of Truman Schrock a member of the board of the historical society. He and his wife Mary worked together to make this dream come true. Lester Beachy was our very able driver and we were in competent hands

After we rubbed the sleep from our eyes and settled in to look around us we found we were surrounded by friends both old and new, an interesting mix of Mennonite and friends of Mennonites, all of us eager for the journey.

Our first stop was to refuel our bodies at Hardees near the Bay Bridge, and then on we journeyed. The next stop was to view the site of the memorial of the Flight 93 crash of 911 where forty innocent people died at Shanksville, Pa. It was hard to imagine the impact the plane made as it hit the ground.

It was a very somber time as we viewed the many mementos placed on the walls, and read the memories of the loved ones and the pictures of those who had died. The enormity of the experi-

ence of that time became real to me in a way it never had before. One of the younger members of our entourage, six year old Cody Carter, son of Ramona (Yoder) and Dale Carter had, carefully carried a bouquet of flowers to lay on one of the memorial stones. It was great to see one so young being exposed to history and to see him actively enjoying being a part of our group.

As we approached our destination we passed several places of interest which were pointed out by our expedition leader, Truman Schrock, who had been acquainted with these landmarks since being brought there as a child by his parents.

One such place of interest was the Bender farm, the first home of Wilhelm Bender, the great-grandfather of Truman, as well as many other of the Bender descendants who were with us.

We saw the children's home where Savilla Yoder, wife of Dave Yoder, had worked. Their story is featured on the front page of this news letter. It was also the home where John Embleton, and several other children lived until they later were provided homes in Greenwood.

Later after a refreshing shower and a hasty nap, we were then ushered into the Penn Alps restaurant where an upstairs room was prepared and ready for our meal.

We were joined for this meal by fifteen or more of our Greenwood and former Greenwood relatives and acquaintances, including, Owen and Twila Swartzentruber Guengerich,

who now live in that area, and their daughter and husband, Greta and Willis Beitzel. Grant and Ella Guengerich visiting from Florida, Merle and Inez Embleton and Sam and Effie Yoder. It was a good time of reuniting with friends and relatives.

Following the meal, Richard Yoder, of the area gave our group some history of the Springs Historical Society of the Casselman Valley in the Grantsville and Springs area. He spoke of the interest of Alta Schrock and her passion for history and her influence in the development of the Historical Museum and Artisan village which is carefully preserving the history of this landmark Mennonite colony located at the border of western Pennsylvania and Maryland.

The Penn Alps gift shop was also an interesting part of this place. Joyce Zehr Maust, daughter of Vernon and Verna Zehr, who grew up in the Greenwood Mennonite Church, is manager and artistic director of this shop and it was inspiring to see her gift of arrangement and artistic touches exhibited there.

After an evening of fellowship and singing of songs, led by Merle Embleton, we retired to our motel rooms to refresh ourselves with a good night's sleep in preparation for the following day at the Springs Folk Festival.

And historical it surely was! What an array of shops and displays were there to see, from the antique shingle making machine operated by Owen Guengerich and his brother

Grant, to the corn husker and shredder to a functioning spinning wheel. For those of us eager to sit down, tired from all he walking, we found that we could take in any of the hourly music programs of the area and were blessed with many musical programs such as the Mountain Anthems, and the Byler singers, a family of twelve children and their parents, as well as the bands of blue grass music, and old country western songs that brought back memories of our

youth. Some I had totally forgotten, but found the words came back to me as I listened. Finally we saw a theater production which portrayed the story of the coming of Wilhelm Bender to that area.

At four o'clock we called it a day, and all loaded up in the bus to head for home. We had one final stop to eat our supper at the Cracker Barrel in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Our trip was punctuated by stories Truman related to us of

the surrounding area and how it related to our Greenwood families. We were blessed to have such a competent leader. We arrived back at the church with many happy memories of the two days and a feeling of reluctance, to leave the bus for the final time. We left with a vow to go again should we be afforded such a splendid opportunity by the historical society. Did I hear someone say that our next trip will be to Branson, Missouri? Count me in! ■

## Third Annual Banquet

*September 4, 2004*



The third annual banquet of DMHS was held on Saturday, September 4, 2004 at the Greenwood Mennonite School. Our guest speaker was Jan Gleysteen who gave his presentation of, *Rails Around the World*. Jan reminded us that history is more than just our religious heritage but involves the ordinary in life as well. Gleysteen, born in Holland, once attended the oldest Mennonite

Church in the world dating back to 1608 in Amsterdam. He is a well renowned artist and world traveler with in depth knowledge of Mennonite history and a passion for travel and trains.

Special music was provided by a men's group; Chris Yoder, Gabriel Heatwole, Ryan Kaufman and Lemuel Yutzy. The food was prepared and served by Donna Yoder with her team including Max Yoder, John and Lois Mast, Mark and Carolyn Chisenhall, Bruce and Carmen Pape and



Verlene Warfel. Violet Swartzentruber, assisted by Eblen and Darlene Chisenhal and Cecil Swartzentruber, led decorations and table set up. The youth of Cannon Mennonite Church provided table service. Donated tips will help pay for their spring trip to Guatemala.

Amy Schlabach and Emily Byler were added to the board or directors. The terms of Vernon Zehr and Rachel Schlabach were extended for three more years. Next year the annual banquet and business meeting will be held Saturday, September 3, 2005. ■

## In Training

The engine that powers my soul  
Is controlled by Another.  
As I speed down the preordained path  
laid down by Others,  
I wonder if I was expected to  
Lead others along that course  
to freedom, or simply chug along alone  
simply making noise and getting nowhere fast.

Am I expected to pull  
The tanker that provides the fuel,  
The freighter that holds the payload,  
The caboose that houses the communication?  
They are all bound together by the engine  
that powers my soul.  
Do I treat them with humility and dignity or  
do I huff and puff my way to freedom  
without a hoot or toot toward anyone?

God forgive my soot and smoke,  
My whining noise and bondage.  
Grant me freedom to use  
the firm foundation called rails and tracks  
until I finally am able to leave the  
this burdensome pile of stuff  
I call mine and fly away home.  
Train me, monitor my "train of thought",  
Brake me from my reckless ego trip  
And give me the mind of  
The One who built it all,

Benediction at the Banquet  
By Vernon Zehr



## Future Perfect

There is something almost magical about the future perfect tense. It gives us all the opportunity to see things as we wish them to be. It gives us a chance to state our faith in an unusual way. We can state with certainty that by a given time in the future we will have experienced something. On October 9, 1915, Dave and Savilla might well have said, "*In twenty years we will have had a family of ten children around our table. We will have survived a period of near poverty, we will have joined a fine group of like Christians in fellowship and praise.*" They might well have sat down in despair when their first child was still born, when the economy left them with a growing family of ten, with little money and nothing but hope to keep them going. They survived and they put their future perfect tense to work, little knowing that it would be even better than they could have imagined.

The present tense provides us with an anchor. It is the now of our lives. The past tense makes us nostalgic, it paints a picture of yesterday's present. The future tense is a simple picture of our tomorrows. The most exciting of all is the future perfect tense. The future perfect tense gives us the opportunity to push beyond the boundaries of our life when those in bondage are set free, the sick are healed and life is the only option.

With confidence I state, in the future perfect tense, that by the year 2014 *DMHS will have celebrated one hundred years of a Mennonite presence in Delaware. We will have enjoyed a large number of supporters and hundreds of participants going in and out of a state-of-the-art center to learn more about their past. In a breathtaking way this will confirm the words of Joel. (2:28) "Old men will dream, young men will have vision and young women will prophesy. God will pour out His spirit upon His people."* Our past may be interesting, our present may be challenging, our future may be blocked from view, but our faith in Christ gives us a future perfect that helps us describe a perfect future with God. ■

## Your Membership is Important

A most important goal of DMHS is recording our stories. The newsletter you are reading now is currently the single most tangible thing we do.

I invite you to do two things. Go to the DMHS website [delawaremennonite.com](http://delawaremennonite.com) and review the newsletters that have been published in the three years since DMHS has been organized. Send us an email with your comments, suggestions, or questions.

**Secondly, It is our hope that you will join as a supporting member.** If you have not joined, please take the time to cut out the membership form, fill it in and send it along with the annual fee of \$15.00.

A small army of supporters helps pay for printing and postage to make this a quality newsletter with items of interest to all of you.

**Please join now.**

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### Membership/Renewal Form for: Delaware Mennonite Historical Society

Please check one:

\$ 15.00 - Regular Annual Dues

\$ 30.00 - Regular Annual Dues for 2 years

\$ 100.00 to \$400.00 - Special Supporter, Also pays Annual Dues

\$ 500.00 - Lifetime Membership

\$ 1,000.00 - Endowment Fund - Lifetime Membership, with Plaque

I would like to make a Memorial Gift in Memory of \_\_\_\_\_

All gifts receive a certificate. Gifts of \$1,000.00 or more, with plaque.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: DMHS, 11123 Wood Lane, Greenwood, DE 19950

Thank you so much. We sincerely appreciate your support.. God bless you!

Rachel Schlabach, Secretary, Treasurer - (302) 349-5596

## **DMHS Board Members**

Vernon Zehr, President

Paul Bender, Vice President

Emily Byler, Recording Secretary

Amy Schlabach, Corresponding Secretary

Rachel Schlabach, Treasurer

Truman Schrock

Harold Huber

Harvey Mast

Dean Swartzentruber

Rachel Schlabach, Treasurer of the Delaware Mennonite Historical Society Board was hospitalized for surgery Monday, October 4, 2004. We encourage you to keep her in your prayers for her recovery. Rachel has been a motivating force in the formation of DMHS and leadership since its onset. She has been our recording secretary and kept detailed records. We will keep you posted about her recovery on our website: [delawaremennonite.com](http://delawaremennonite.com) ■



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