

The Delaware Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter



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The Embleton Story – Of Love, Hope and Faith

By Freda Zehr



Martha Miller and John Embleton married August 17, 1926.

“I was hoping you would take me home with you this time.”

These words, spoken by a twelve-year old John Embleton touched Val Bender’s heart. He read the longing in young John’s voice and as he looked into his hopeful eyes, Val called his wife, Caroline. Her answer was simple; “There’s always room for one more.”

Thus, John Leroy Embleton was unofficially “adopted” into the Bender family.

The Conservative Amish Mennonite Conference officially opened a Children’s Home in 1915. The new church in Greenwood was a faithful

supporter of the Home. Since Valentine Bender’s daughter, Savilla, worked there, members of the Greenwood Mennonite Church frequently visited the Grantsville area and the Home. On one such visit Val Bender intended to bring three-year old William Welfley back to their home in Delaware. As he prepared to leave, John made his straightforward, heart-felt plea. Val Bender took two boys home that day. It was this historic visit that brought John Embleton to the Greenwood, Delaware Mennonite

community in 1916 after two years in the Home at Grantsville, Maryland.

Twenty-seven years earlier, when nineteen-year old Richard Embleton, John’s father, left Durham County, England to set out for adventure in a new country, Clara Shumaker was a young fifteen-year old, living thousands of miles away in Somerset, Pennsylvania. Young Richard’s destination was Somerset, Pennsylvania. From this perspective, all these years later, one would like to believe that it



Richard and Clara Embleton Family

*Back row: Richard, Jr., Richard, Sr., Gladys (On his lap) Clara, and Joseph
Front row: Clarence, John Leroy, and Mahlon*

was God's plan for these two young people to meet, as indeed they did.

Several years later, on December 20, 1892, they became husband and wife. This union produced eight living children. John, born in 1904, was their fifth child. After the birth of their last child, Richard left his wife and children to return to England for a time. It is believed that he had fully expected to return to his family. Perhaps he had gone in hopes of getting a better job for a few years. However, Richard never made it back, but became ill, and he died three years later of an embolism of the lung. His older brother John was by his side in the Darlington County Hospital, when he died at age 48.

With limited income, mother Clara had few choices. We can be certain it was not an easy thing to do when she took her five youngest to the newly opened Children's Home in Grantsville Maryland. Three years later, John was taken from this home to Greenwood. Delaware and welcomed into the Val Bender family. He was baptized and became a member of the Greenwood Mennonite Church at the age of fourteen, and John lived with the Benders until his marriage.

As John Embleton reached his late teens, another family from Defiance, Ohio, was drawn to move to Delaware. Jerry Miller and his wife, Nancy and their six daughters and three sons, pulled up roots and moved to the new settlement of conservative Mennonites in the Greenwood area.



*Children's Home at Grantsville (Home of Dan Brenneman) The New Home was being built and would open in about 18 months
Back Far right: Savilla Bender holding Bill Welfley
Sitting next to Savilla is John Embleton*

Jerry Miller's oldest daughter, Martha, a beautiful and talented young woman, caught the eye of the equally handsome John Embleton. They fell in love and were married in 1926. Life for John and Martha was difficult in those early days, as it was for most people in that little farming community. After their wedding, they lived for the first year of their marriage, with Martha's parents, Jerry and Nancy Miller.

In 1927, they bought the farm and house where they set up housekeeping and lived there for all of their years together

The children came along; Paula first, followed by Dorothy, Jay, Thelma, Manford and Merle. Their last child, a little girl named Bertha, lived only a few weeks. At one time, they nearly lost the

house through a sheriff's sale, but Martha's brother Roy Miller, placed the bid that saved the property for the family.

John worked hard at whatever job he could find, but found farming and other manual labor boring and the pay demeaning. John found work as a professional truck driver, which was a good paying job and one which John enjoyed until he retired. It was at this time, in 1940, that John's love and caring

for his wife Martha, was manifested in his buying a new car and leaving it home for her to drive.

Martha drove a school bus for many years. She was also involved in the summer Bible school for the Greenwood Mennonite Church's mission outreach in Wilmington, Delaware for many summers. She drove the bus to bring in the children while helping out with cooking. Margaret Weaver, who lived in Wilmington at the time,

says that Martha was a great asset to the work there.

Margaret was impressed with her neatness, her love of the children, and her delight in driving the bus down through the city of Wilmington to pick up the children. Margaret says she learned to love and appreciate Martha and her willingness to help wherever needed in those weeks in the summer.

Everyone who knew Martha remembers her creativity and her talent of keeping a beautiful home, neat and spotless. She was the true personification of a "place for everything and everything in its place". Her daughters have followed in her footsteps.

Martha was well known for her expertise of cooking and baking. Her children also recall her love of music and rhythm. Each of them can remember a time when they would hear their mother in the kitchen with the tape player or radio on, when suddenly she would slip into a tap dance, keeping time to the music.

Above all, Martha was a woman of strong faith and spirituality. She was a woman of prayer and not afraid to speak her faith. In fact, her devout "amen" could be heard many times when she was moved by a song or a sermon.

While John was less outspoken about his faith, he had a strong devotion to God and the church. Both of them were Sunday school teachers at times throughout their lives. For a time John taught the high school boys. One of his students remembers him as a very good teacher and one who could identify with them in those late

end of World War II, Poland had a serious shortage of horses, so the boats were taking over loads of mares. It was a rather dangerous journey as many of the mines from the war were still planted in the ocean and if hit, could blow up the ship.

There were two ships with similar names. One ship struck a mine and sank and all on board were lost. The report came back to the Greenwood community that it was John's ship that had sunk. Dorothy recalls that they were on their way to a youth meeting at the church when the word came and how they all cried. Paula was very emotional as she was very close to her father. It was sometime later that they received word that it was not his ship and John was safe. The family rejoiced in the good news.

One of Martha's dreams was for one of her family to be a minister. God provided an answer for her prayers in that

her grandson, Ronald Embleton, Manford and Ruth's son, is an ordained minister and he and his wife, Wanda with their five children have served in missions in the Middle East. Ron is now a minister of a church in Ohio.

The Embleton children are gifted in musical ability, and in their youth, the three daughters, Paula, Dorothy and Thelma sang together giving programs in their



Embleton Children

*Back row: Paula, Jay, and Dorothy
Front row: Manford, Merle, Thelma*

teen years.

John was a talented man. He was an avid reader of Do-it-Yourself books and magazines from which he taught himself carpentry and was an expert in building things, including his own chicken house.

In 1946 John Embleton, accompanied by John and Daniel Yoder, signed on for a trip to Poland on a cattle boat. After the

home community as well as in Lancaster and the Mennonite Central Committee area where Paula worked at that time.

John and Martha's son Merle has also served the church with his dedicated and talented singing ministry. He provided leadership of the youth choir for many years as well as well as planning and singing in musical programs with a men's quartet, which has continued on to this day. He occasionally adds a female voice to his men's quartet. His young granddaughter, Chelsea, who has inherited the Embleton's rich singing voice, adds variety to their music.

John and Martha also loved to go wherever their son Merle was providing the music. Merle remembers that frequently, when presenting a program some distance away, he would not be aware they were coming, but when he stood up to open the meeting, he saw their faces out in the audience. Merle says further, that while his father may have been sparse with praise for them in their younger years, his words after those meetings, "Well, boy, you done a pretty good job" was highest praise.

"Those words and the tone of his voice told me as much as if my

father had said that he loved me and was proud of me"

In John and Martha's later years, they loved visiting with their children and grandchildren and they recall how John especially enjoyed those holiday get-togethers. Dorothy recalls how her father always loved the Christmas season and the excitement of her

Manford and Ruth's youngest child, a son was born, his father finally agreed to their naming him John. Previously he had always disagreed, saying, "There are enough John Embletons".

When John Embleton died in October 1978, Martha stayed on, living alone in her home place for many years after that. The

grandchildren of John and Martha all have fond memories of Grandpa and Grandma Embleton and the visits to their home. Sydney Hamilton, daughter of Merle and Inez, said, "Grandpa used to send me postcards when he was away on a trucking trip. They were from all over and were always addressed to



Embleton Family around 1950

Back row: Thelma First Marriage Irvin Miller (deceased) Now married to Robert Clegg, Jay (Married to Elaine Benson) Both deceased, Manford, (Married to Ruth Wiseman) Dorothy (Married to John Yoder)

Front row: Paula (Married to Floyd Fink) Both deceased, John, Martha, (Both deceased)

Merle (Married to Inez Guengerich)

childhood days of going to the woods with him, to pick the tree. This memory has provided her with the impetus of making Christmas a joyous occasion for her own family of five daughters and her grandchildren.

Manford says that he and his father became close, as he grew older; John accompanied him at times when he was driving truck and during those times, he learned to know and appreciate his father in a much greater way. When

'Lil' Syd'. Holidays were celebrated with all the relatives at their house. We didn't need a spacious 'great room'. Grandma just set up more tables all through the house. On Thanksgiving, we girls would make white pilgrim hats and for the boys-- black hats and tinfoil buckles for their shoes. We girl cousins would have slumber parties in their attic. In the morning, Grandma would fix whatever we wanted for breakfast. I remember wanting to sit with

Grandma in church. She would have Smarties and little puzzles in her purse. I still think of Grandma when I'm in church and feel the urge to say a hearty 'Amen' the way she did. Sometimes I do, and I smile to myself - remembering Grandma!"

It is an interesting note, that when I spoke with Sydney at the writing of this article, she and her husband, Lyle Hamilton, had just bought the old home place of Grandpa and Grandma Embleton and they and their daughters were in the process of moving into the home so filled with memories of happy times for grandchildren.

After Martha became older and unable to care for herself, her son Manford and his wife, Ruth, fixed up a room in their house and took her into their home and lovingly cared for her until her death, December 6, 2000. Martha spoke of her wonder and joy that her son and his wife loved her enough to provide this wonderful care.

"Ruth is just as good to me as if I were her own mother", She once said. She also spoke of Manford's patience, taking her everywhere she wanted to go and getting her in and out of the van. "Why I feel like a queen", she said.

A few years before Martha Embleton died, I was privileged to take her out to lunch one day. We spent several hours together. As I went to take her home she hesitantly asked me if I would drive by the old home place where she and John had lived and raised their children. As we came to the house, I stopped the car beside the road and lingered there. Martha seemed lost in memories. She spoke at first with a sense of longing and sadness in her voice, "Oh yes, here it is, it's different,

yet still looks the same" And later, "There is the window of the room where little Bertha died." I asked her then about Bertha's death, and she spoke of the grief that she bore during that time. She spoke of how difficult it is to give up so young a baby, its life just begun and how empty her arms felt for months afterward. As she spoke, her eyes filled with tears, as did mine.

We sat for a long time as she gazed and reminisced about her life there, almost as though I were not even there. She spoke of regrets that she had, how she could have been a better mother. But I told her that day, that I think, each of us, as we look back, can think of things we wished to have done differently, and that she had done the best job she knew how and had done so many things right.

John and Martha and their children have added much to the church in Greenwood, as well as numerous other communities, in so many ways. Their offspring include: nurses, a nurse practitioner, teachers, writers, ministers---singing ministries, missionaries, entrepreneurs, business men and others who by using their gifts of hospitality, caring, financial support, and their reaching out to others and simply living their lives in the community, give testimony to God's love.

The story of John and Martha Embleton lives on. It lives on in the lives of their children and grandchildren and great grandchildren. It lives on in the lives of those of us whom they touched with their wisdom and their love of, and dedication to God and the church

Grandpa and Grandma

John Embleton

Grandpa, to me was a great man. When visiting his home, he would be in his corner filled with his things, and he would always call out "Hey boy". Warmer words could not have been spoken. I loved to pull out the small leather ottoman and sit next to him as he told stories from his past. Stories of his cattle boat trip and driving the big truck, made grandpa, in my boyhood eyes, someone who was larger than life, and I had the same name!

As I think back I can see grandpa slowly pull his car next to the big oak tree in our driveway. He parked in the same spot each Saturday morning as he came in for breakfast or to sip a cup of coffee. In the later years of his life, he was such a kind and patient man I especially remember grandpa bravely and eagerly joining our family for a trip to Colorado. I cherish the honor when he stood by me atop Pikes Peak!

I was fortunate to have Grandma around for much longer and am glad that I could spend the last two years living with her, as my parents so generously and unselfishly opened their home for her. Grandma memories ranged from the color purple, to the sweet smell of Jean Nate'. When visiting Grandma's home, the front porch swing caught my attention first, and the many renditions of "swinging neath the ole apple tree. Grandma's famous raisin bars and caramel iced banana cakes were the best ever made, always eaten at the kitchen table, with a new paper place mat, and plenty of iced tea to wash it all down.

Grandma's living room was always neat and tidy with its covered sofa and the candy dish filled with after dinner mints. It was also home to that outstanding salt and pepper collection--sets placed in rows, as reminders of trips taken and places visited and gifts from special people, but each with a story behind them. Outside you could not miss the sweet peas in the back garden or the roses by the front trellis. One could not visit and leave grandma's house without posing for a picture with the most unique of all mailboxes--the Silver King tractor.

Grandma always made special birthday memories for me as well, birthday cards with the dollar tucked inside. After grandpa' died, she took me to Taylor and Messick's John Deere Agency, each year to pick out a toy tractor. I was entitled to one because; after all they were named after grandpa and me!

Fall was not complete with out our annual pilgrimage to Elmer's Market to carry as many pumpkins as we could for \$2.00. Grandma took great pride that I wanted to follow in her footsteps and drive a school bus. She even took several rides with me, and one of the fondest memories is when I was a substitute bus driver on the Milford route that passed her home she waited outside waving her purple dish towel, as she did every morning, when the bus passed. My grandparent's support for our community and school has left an indelible memory with me and I am honored to follow in their footsteps.

John Embleton is the youngest grandchild of John and Martha Embleton, and the son of Manford and Ruth Embleton. He bears the

name of his grandfather and his great-great-great grandfather's before him. He is a member of the Greenwood Mennonite Church where he teaches Sunday School for the youth and serves on the school board of the Greenwood Mennonite School.

John is employed by the United States Postal Service. He currently serves as Vice President and State Chaplain for the Delaware Rural Letter Carriers Association.

Journey of the Heart

Joan Rae Mills

Grandma has an attic. In years past, it had been finished out of necessity to shelter her rough-n-tumble sons. But time is childhood's steady current, pulling and tugging. Boys grow up and go away. Still the attic waited, expectantly, cuddling memories against its slanted roof, shades pulled to keep out the prying light of the present.

It welcomed my cousin Laurie and me, as if we were now its sole purpose; we scampered up the steep, painted steps for slumber parties and secrets. Two iron beds graced with chenille spreads endured our exuberant bouncing. We peeked into forgotten bureaus, fascinated by the fragile miniature lamps cradled there.

The mornings found us sliding down the banister and dashing outdoors to search for chestnuts. Like our parents before us, we searched the lawn for the polished gems, tucking them into pockets for later. Or we "played store" in the pantry, where Grandma kept a ready supply of food and paper bags.

But granddaughters also feel the tug of time and Laurie and I quit going to Grandma's for slumber parties. We found new friends, finished our schooling, began our

careers, got married and eventually had children of our own--as close in age as she and I.

Grandma came often to our home for dinner, driving her silver Honda and delighting us in stories gathered from growing up Amish and living eighty-four full years. I felt grateful that my children could connect with such clarity to their great-grandmom. Roots can give such security to all of us and I want my children to know theirs go deep and that families are priceless heirlooms far more valuable than any object passed through generations.'

One afternoon, memories of those slumber parties washed over me. Couldn't we do it again--with our little ones? My cousin loved the idea. So did Grandma.

When the evening arrived, I carried my suitcase up those steep steps and the lines of an old poem by Elizabeth Akers Allen, rushed through my mind,

"Backward, turn backward, O time in your flight;

Make me a child again, Just for tonight "

Had it really been over 20 years since we'd played up here? The lamp glowed softly against the autumn night. I took in the sight almost hungrily. It was as I had remembered, only smaller. The trunks, the cedar chest, guarding their treasures, were still there. The library table, standing in the place of honor at the top of the stairs hid photographs in its only drawer. The beds were made up in crisp white sheets and embroidered pillowslips.

The children danced. This was a splendid adventure. They padded up and down the steps in fuzzy slippers and flannel gowns, exploring making memories of

their own. Lying on their tummies, they admired Grandma's glass-encased salt-n-pepper shaker collection. It had always drawn us, too. They draped chairs and ottomans with afghans, creating hideouts in the living room. They thumped with Grandma's cane.

Anticipating slumber in those cozy beds inspired all of us and we kissed Grandma goodnight. We snuggled down and soon were all asleep.

I awoke early as the sky blushed pink, and thought I'd have a few quiet moments. But the children burst to life almost as one and dashed downstairs for breakfast. They ate quickly and were gone--outside to hunt chestnuts.

Grandma, Laurie and I savored our coffee and raspberry danish and nibbled at the morning, trying to make it last. I brought down the attic pictures and we besieged Grandma with questions. "Who's this? Is this Grandpa?"

She was full of nostalgia, laughing over her son's clowning for the camera in one picture, then the next would bring tears. "It's almost too much she whispered. "So many memories."

It was a tender morning—one I will tuck away forever. And I realized that sometimes, time really can be turned backwards when the journey is in the heart.

Joan Mills is the third daughter of Dorothy Embleton and John Yoder,

She received a BA degree from Messiah College and is a freelance writer as well as a teacher of English As a Second Language, at Delaware Technical and Community College. Joan and her husband John attend Canon Mennonite Church. They have a daughter Kelly, age 22 and a son Andy, age 19.

Editorial

Finding Our Roots

Vernon Zehr

The Embleton family name came early into the Greenwood, Delaware Mennonite community along with others with different cultures and genealogies. The Embletons worshipped, with us and joined our churches. They married our daughters and our sons and now they are not them but us.

It isn't easy to find our roots with clouded memories of a children's home, with its resulting loneliness, during a vulnerable and formative age such as John Embleton faced from age ten to twelve. Yet those of us who follow in later generations can take the tools of the internet and build an exciting and vibrant family tree. The Jerry Miller family was new stock for Delaware who introduced the Belgium and Percheron work horses—large and proud-- not common to the area. Jerry Miller came from a town called Defiance in Ohio. He was Martha's father. Richard Embleton came from a town called Hetton Le Hole in Durham County, England. He was John's father. Together they contributed a unique strength to a community, a people, and later a church who had been the "quiet in the land" long enough.

When young Richard stepped off that ship from England, the Embletons became a part of the melting pot of America, Somerset, Pennsylvania and eventually Sussex County, Delaware. They faced the daily dangers of the coal mines, and they fought the ravages of poverty and lack of opportunity many of our parents faced.

They were poured from the same crucible just a different batch from a different place. Our Mennonite community melting pot is the richer for it.

Our chapter of the Embleton started in 1805 with John Embleton and his wife Margaret Lainey. He bore a son James Embleton who married Jane Hope. Their son Richard Embleton and his wife Clara Shumaker who met in Somerset, Pennsylvania bore a son named John Leroy, born in 1904. John married Martha Miller and their first son Jay married Elaine Benson. Their first-born daughter Susan recently became a grandmother for a third time. That son, William Zachary Sweeny, just months old, has the honor in 2005, two hundred years later to be the youngest great, great, great, great grandchild of that Embleton patriarch from Durham County, England. The name John Embleton will always be remembered. To his descendants, be proud to be an Embleton, be proud of your Mennonite heritage, and thankful and blessed to be a child of God.

Fourth Annual Banquet

September 3, 2005

Vernon Zehr

Nearly two hundred supporters of The Delaware Mennonite Historical Society gathered at the Greenwood Mennonite School for fellowship and memories. The program centered around the theme of music. The people who gathered represented the major Mennonite churches of Delaware as well as others in the community who remember some of the ninety years of Mennonite History which began at Greenwood in 1914.

Jesse Bontrager opened the service with a prayer song familiar to most of us, "Savior Breathe an Evening Blessing". Kevin Yoder led us in an invocation and the prayer song, "As the Deer". From that point on, the spirit of God was indeed upon us. Robert and Naomi Miller and their children sang several of their favorite Gospel songs.

Merle Embleton guided us into a careful tour of our singing roots with favorite songs from the most familiar hymnals of our past century of worship. His quartet lifted our spirits,

Vernon Zehr, President of DMHS challenged us with a nostalgic remembrance and hope for the future in his presentation of Ninety Years of Music—a Perfect Score.

We are looking forward to next year's banquet will be held On Saturday October 21, 2006. Look for updates on the dmhs website www.delawaremennonite.com

DMHS Continues to Negotiate For Land for a Permanent Home

Vernon Zehr

The Board of Directors is in serious negotiation for the purchase of land that will provide permanence for the future. You will be kept informed about the progress of this exciting prospect for the preservation of Delaware's Mennonite History. Check the website, www.delawaremennonite.com, regularly for information regarding the progress of our land purchase.

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