Our Heritage

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historcal Society Newsletter

Spring 2014 **Volume 27, Issue 1**

Archivist Margret Shetler: A Quarter-Century of Service

In 1988, Hope Lind called together a gathering of people interested in establishing a historical society for Mennonites in the Northwest. Margaret Shetler attended the meeting, along with her husband, Ralph.

A year after the Oregon Mennonite Historical and Genealogical Society was organized, Margaret Shetler become secretary of the society and in time, she also became the society's archivist.

A quarter-century later, Shetler is still on the job, volunteering as the archivist for what is now the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society.

Although Shetler celebrated her 91st birthday last spring, she continues to play an integral role in maintaining the holdings of the PNMHS collection, now housed at the Ivan and Pearl Kropf Heritage Center, located in Hubbard, Ore.

As the archivist, Shetler organizes incoming material, tracks current holdings, and maintains the library catalog.

While some of this record keeping might be facilitated by technology, Shetler continues to prefer a typewriter and paper copies, recognizing that while technology constantly changes, there can be constancy—and durability—in more traditional forms of records.

Archivist Margaret Shetler checks the moveable stacks in the climate-controlled room at the Ivan and Pearl Kropf Heritage Center. (Photo courtesy Don Bacher)

Without any formal training as an archivist, Shetler has learned on the job. Over time, and with the help of Lind, Shetler developed successful processes for organizing and categorizing collections.

She has also learned a good deal about appropriate documentation storage, and—along with several others—helped assure that a temperature-controlled room would be an essential feature in the Ivan and Pearl Kropf Heritage Center.

Currently, the tempature-controlled room houses some of the center's most fragile documents, including English and

Margaret Shetler at a recent Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society meeting. Although she is surrounded by computer screens, Shetler continues to prefer older tried-and-true methods of documentation, and types up library catalog cards at home before they are transferred to a database at the archives. (Photo courtesy Don

German Bibles over 100 years old.

Those with archive expertise, including Colleen McFarland, Director of Archives and Records Management for the Mennonite Church USA, recognize the good work Shetler's done, noting that the PNMHS archives are well organized and up to standards.

Surprisingly, given Shetler's extensive knowledge of Mennonite history, she was not born into a Mennonite family. Her first significant contact with Mennonites was when she was a child, attending Vacation Bible School at Hopewell Mennonite. A two-year education degree at Hesston College followed, and then Shetler moved back to Oregon with her husband, Ralph Shetler of Hesston.

"I was his ticket to Oregon," Shetler said, laughing.

They settled for good in Oregon after Ralph's tenure in Civilian Public Service in Montana. While Ralph was in CPS, Margaret also spent time in Montana, while also working at Hesston College in Kansas.

Shetler never did commandeer a classroom, though she's had an interesting work history, including stints as a secretary at the University of Oregon Medical School (now OHSU) and at the Oregon Primate Center.

During their 60-plus year marriage, the Shetlers raised six children, who gave them 29 grandchildren, 53 great-grandchildren (with several more to come very soon), and two great-great-grandchildren. None of her offspring have followed Shetler into archivist work, though she wishes for them—as for other younger people—that they might find Mennonite history as fascinating as she does.

"It's hard to know how to get others interested in history," Shetler said. "One of the challenges is getting more people interested, and too many people are gone before you get interested enough to ask questions."

Shetler's passion for history is clear, as is her knowledge about Mennonites. And she doesn't feel like she's stopped learning: she enjoys reading some of the books she catalogs for the PNMHS collection, as well as spending her free time reading biographies and memoirs primarily by and about Mennonites.

Still, it is the personal collections in the archives that Shetler finds most interesting, as well as the congregational histories. She likes the insight these collections give into people's lives and into their faith.

"I just love history, period," she said.

Ray Kauffman, the Pacific Northwest Conference historian, said that "Margaret has for years been known an a 'Walking Mennonite encyclopedia.'

"She not only is an authority on Oregon, Washington, and Idaho Mennonite history, but has a good grasp of church-wide historical development," Kauffman said. "She has an extensive personal library and reads a lot. She has a memory for historical details. She is generous and has a heart of gold."

Perhaps because of her love for history and her investment in the archives, she has not set a date for her retirement, and continues to volunteer at the PNMHS archives several days a week, keeping Mennonite history in the Pacific Northwest alive, and assuring the story of Mennonites in this area will be easily accessible for many generations to come.~

The Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society

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The President's Corner

By now, you may have noticed some changes in the format and content of our semi-annual newsletter. My special thanks to Melanie Springer Mock for serving as editor and making our changes a reality. If you have comments or suggestions, please don't hesitate to send them to Melanie (at mmock@georgefox.edu) or to me (at jbarkman@canby.com).

The heart of the work of Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society is the hard work put into the archives by our volunteers. I want to give special recognition to several of these volunteers.

Harold and Eileen Weaver retired in 2013 after ten-plus years of service. Eileen has served as secretary on the Board of Directors and Harold did all the little jobs that needed doing such as mailings, printing the newsletter: those tasks that we always assume will somehow get done. Harold was always willing to do them. Thank you, Harold and Eileen.

Violet Burley has retired as librarian of our archives. She has done a good job cataloging and tracking the 2,000+ books and pamphlets in our collection. Thank you, Violet.

Thanks also to Melanie for writing the article about the work of Margaret Shetler. Through my involvement with the Society over the years, I have come to appreciate Margaret's work and her dedication to preserving the records of the Mennonites in the Pacific Northwest. Thank you, Margaret for your love of history and its preservation!

By the way, if you are interested in serving as a volunteer in the Ivan and Pearl Kropf Heritage Center, please contact me and we will put you to work!

Jerry Barkman,
President/Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society

History in the Kitchen:
What Food Tells Us About our Mennonite Past and Present

Compiled by Melanie Springer Mock, PNMHS newsletter editor

The many thousands of meals my mother made during my childhood exist now in a mostly-hazy idyll: our family gathered in the parsonage's bright kitchen, cocooned by Kansas's darkest winter, eating soup and homemade bread; or later, when we lived in Oregon, the late summer dusk warming us as we ate Rollkuchen on our deck.

My mom was and is a great cook, and although I can't recall what she made throughout my childhood, I remember her cooking as wholesome, tasty, and taken for granted by her family.

Only one meal remains especially vivid in my mind, its memory neither hazy nor idyllic, its construction only wholesome, not tasty. Our family had moved from a Mennonite Mecca in Kansas, where even the school cafeteria served Bierrocks and Vareniky; to the Oregon Diaspora, where people confused Mennonites with Mormons, and even my church peers didn't know Pluma Moos from Jell-O salad.

Yet when I invited a new high school friend for dinner, I hadn't considered a possible cultural clash. Of course, my parents embarrassed me; my dad's career as a pastor and the clothes my mom made me were a constant shame. But I figured one meal seemed harmless—until mom put a *More-With-Less* Cookbook mainstay on the table, assuring adolescent mortification.

An image of Zwieback, a yeast bread enjoyed by Russian Mennonites. (Photo courtesy Wikipedia.)

The meal, a Savory Baked Lima dish (page 105 of *More-With-Less*). I imagine my mom served other popular *More-With-Less* items with the bean bake: perhaps oatmeal bread or cinnamon/raison muffins, or maybe even Elise's Fruit Cobbler, an acceptable dessert low in sugar, high in fiber.

I recall only that bean bake, the big lima beans swimming in a yellow casserole dish. Scooping a small spoonful on my friend's plate, I apologized; and while my friend swore she liked the casserole, I knew she was lying, and that my family would be forever labeled odd for serving strange (but healthy!) fare.

In many ways, this *More-With-Less* story exemplifies the relationship I had with my mother and with my Mennonite identity. Doris Longacre's *More-with-Less* cookbook is also emblematic for me of my mother and her familial role: as nurturer, for she cooked our meals and met our needs; as financial watchdog, for she compelled our family to live simply; and as conduit of Mennonite traditions, for her own ties to ethnic Mennonites defined our family's Mennonite identity, not my father's much-later conversion.

In this, I am not unlike many Mennonites, for whom food is intricately tied to ethnic and even religious identity. Indeed, scholars are increasingly recognizing the importance of food in understanding culture, and thus in understanding a people group's history. For this reason, historians are spending more time looking at how Mennonite domesticity—its foods, cookbooks, and in-home practices—reflect changes in the North American Mennonite church at large.

In *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History*, Marlene Epp writes about Mennonite cookbooks, arguing that "Cookbooks, initiated and produced by women, shaped both Mennonite cultural understanding and generated external perceptions and knowledge about Mennonite historical development and sociological identity."

Historians often write about the larger movements that help to define a nation or a people group: wars, elections, the activities of powerful leaders. But, just as often, the seeming minutia of life can give us clues to history and to what was important to a certain people, in a certain time.

During our fall meeting in 2013, then, we talked about food. Our presentation differed in many ways from those we've had in the past, in great part because we invited more than one presenter, and in part because these presenters shared stories more personal in nature, though I'm a firm believer in the power of personal narratives to reflect larger movements in history.

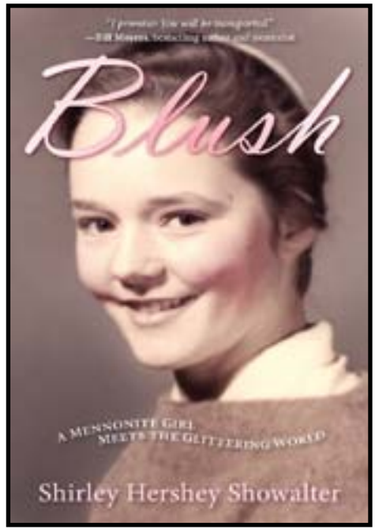
In some ways, the audience was tasked with thinking about how the stories they heard connected to Mennonite faith, identity, and history, though the presenters also made some of those connections clear.

Our first presenter joined us via video. Shirley Showalter, president of Goshen College from 1997-2004, read from her excellent memoir, *Blush*, which was published by Herald Press in September 2013. Showalter's upbringing was as a conservative Mennonite in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and her memoir details the ways she was nurtured and challenged by this environment.

In a chapter on "The Seven Sweets and Seven Sours," Showalter wrote about the ways Mennonite food traditions of her heritage reflected the place and time in which she lived.

Showalter asserts at the beginning of her video that "almost every religion uses food to support its most cherished values." Pennsylvania Dutch food is the "staff of life" for Showalter, and seven sweets and seven sours constitute a "true" Pennsylvania Dutch meal.

The seven sweets included condiments and desserts—up to twenty kinds of pie—and the sours included vinegar-based relishes. Such meals are also "light on vegetables," Showalter claimed, "and heavy on desserts and pickles."



Perhaps more significantly, Showalter believes the seven sweets and seven sours reflects her "complicated relationship with the Mennonite church." Showalter's complicated relationship occurred, in part, because of the prohibitions placed on church members, which conflicted with Showalter's sometimes-longing to experience the world.

Those prohibitions, Showalter said, were often grounded in an understanding of sin. And, although she heard a lot about the seven deadly sins during her childhood, she heard little about gluttony, a sin the Mennonites often overlooked.

Still, Showalter says, gathering around the table in community seems a holy experience, a replication of the first supper.

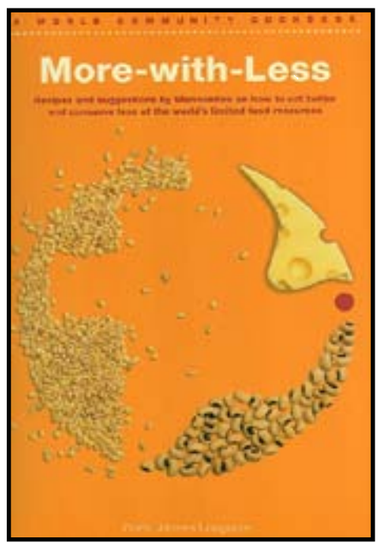
"We are each other's bread and wine," she said, adding that it

was easy to imagine Jesus sitting down with his disciples when we gather at the dinner table with our own community.

There is yet "sour" among the sweetness of the church, including the sometimes insular nature of Mennonites, their willingness to exclude some from the table if they did not follow the rules established by the Mennonite church.

Like most people groups, then, Mennonites have their own sweetness and sourness. Showalter ended her video presentation by claiming that what brings people together best is food, an element of culture around which a people can form their identities.

Jerry Barkman, current president of the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society, presented next. Barkman provided an excellent historical foundation for understanding why Mennonites in the Russian tradition eat some of the food they do: mostly because of necessity, more than because of aesthetics or taste (though, of course, many meals looked and tasted good, too).



According to Barkman, Mennonites in Russia relied on the ingredients readily available to them to make what we now know to be their trademark foods. For example sausage, used in so many Mennonite dishes, reflected the abundance of pork raised by rural Mennonites; pig farming was more economical (and also more efficient) than trying to nurture a herd of cattle into adulthood.

Additionally, while one might conclude that Russian Mennonites have an inclination toward dough-based recipes. As Barkman explained, though, this inclination reflects the Russian farmers' skill at raising winter wheat, which was churned into abundant flour used to create Russian-Mennonite dishes like Zwieback and Veriniky.

Delicacies like Borscht and Pluma Moos also relied on Mennonite resourcefulness: beets and plums were plentiful in the Ukraine, and could easily be turned into beet-based soup, and into a plum-based dessert.

Barkman's detailed presentation reminded us that those dishes many Mennonites now consider traditional were, at one time, created out of necessity, and that in understanding the history of Mennonites—as well as their movement through Europe and to the United States—we can understand their food choices as well.

For both Showalter and Barkman, food reflects their Mennonite ethnicities, their culture, and thus their histories as Mennonites coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s, when the *Mennonite Community Cookbook*, family recipes, and even congregational cookbooks reflected the more insular and separatist nature of Mennonites, the deep denominational roots with a European past.

As Mennonites moved into the latter part of the 20th century, however, the denomination began to change. Mennonites were losing their primarily rural identities. They were moving into cities, and dispersing from the insular communities in which they were raised. They were becoming more invested in the world around them. You can see this shift clearly in a cookbook like the quintessentially Mennonite *More-With-Less*, first published by Herald Press in 1976.

In many ways, Longacre's text marked a transformation occurring in the Mennonite church at large, the book's pages reflecting the denominational shifts rocking the church.

The *More-with-Less* also holds in tension the paradox facing Mennonites in the late 20th century. The cookbook reaches into the past, and into the deep roots of traditional Mennonite faith and practice, while also looking to the future, and to the assimilated identity many Mennonites were assuming.

Louise Newswanger, now a retired college librarian, was raising her children during the 1970s, when the *More-With-Less* was published. It became one of the books she used to feed her family, and although it offered some recipes for traditional Mennonite foods like Pluma Moos and Bierrock, it was ground-breaking for Mennonites because it included international cuisine and tips on how to cook healthy, low-cost meals, and thus provided a challenge to Mennonites to attend more to the world around them as a witness to their faith.

In her presentation, Louise shared about her experience growing up on a small 60 acre farm in southeastern Pennsylvania, where she and her siblings helped with planting, harvesting, and preserving the fruits of their family's labors.

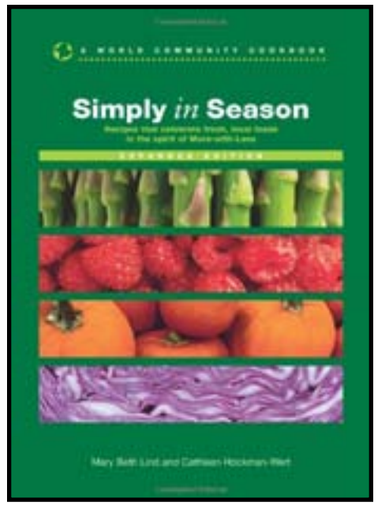
She described some of the foods her family enjoyed from their own farm: the pot of fresh string beans and potatoes from the garden cooked with bits of ham; fresh tomato sandwiches and corn on the cob; strawberries; apple butter; chopped beef potpourri. Her mother, Newswanger said, was doing "more with less" cooking before there was a *More-With-Less* cookbook.

"The More-with-Less Cookbook codified many of the practices that our parents were already following," Newswanger said. "[It] reinforced for us the importance of continuing these practices at a time when our generation would be tempted to evaluate and discard much of the culture we grew up with."

Newswanger heard about the *More-with-Less* Cookbook when Longacre spoke to a women's group at the Mennonite Church of Normal in Illinois in 1975; she purchased her first copy in 1976, an edition she still has.

"This was the first cookbook where I recall reading large portions about nutrition and good stewardship of the earth," Newswanger said. "This cookbook was promoting green before being green was the in thing.

"This cookbook emphasized the effects of our consumption on other parts of the world,"



Newswanger continued. "*More-with-Less* encouraged our family to consume less animal protein and we cooked more dishes with brown rice, beans and lentils."

Newswanger mentioned other "family favorites," including Skillet Cabbage, Honey Baked Chicken, and Pumpkin Custard. The Mashed Potato Casserole (with Spinach) was a company favorite company dish because she could make it a day ahead and heat it right before serving.

Newswanger said both her daughter and daughter-in-law have followed in her footsteps, are good cooks, and have gardens, suggesting that although the traditions of Mennonite food may have continued to change, the fundamental values of eating healthy, wholesome, and local foods are being transmitted through the generations.

This idea--that our values

are reflected in our food choices--was echoed in the meeting's third speaker, Cathleen Hockman-Wert of Corvallis.

In the years after Longacre's wildly successful book, other world community cookbooks, published through Mennonite Central Committee and marketed primarily to Mennonites, also emerged, continuing and expanding the ideology presented by *More-With-Less*.

Notice the echo in its title alone: from the *Mennonite Community Cookbook* of the 1950s to a much broader, World Community reach. These cookbooks reflected the widening scope of Mennonites—their intensified longing to be working in the world, connecting with people of many different cultures.

But these world cookbooks also reflected the expanded reach of Mennonitism. Mennonites are no longer just European descendants, dining on Borscht and Veriniky. Mennonites are Vietnamese eating Pho for breakfast; and Ghanans enjoying Groundnut Stew; and Colombians, serving black beans to their families.

Hockman-Wert is intimately familiar with the World Community Cookbooks, serving as editor for *Simply in Season,* a cookbook first published in 2005. *Simply in Season* is described as "a community cookbook about good food: foods that are fresh, nutritious, tasty, and in rhythm with the seasons." The *Simply in Season* book provides recipes that encourage readers to use in-season and local ingredients, and also examines the complex processes that bring food to our table.

In her talk, Hockman-Wert expressed the need for Mennonites to live out their values through their food choices, something increasingly difficult in a culture that provides an overwhelming amount of choices.

Modern corporate farming and relatively easy transportation has changed our relationship to the places we get our food: we can eat fruits and vegetables shipped from other countries year-round, and rarely blanch at eating something not in season locally. We also rarely think about the impact our food choices make on the environment, nor on people living in other parts of the world, raising the products we enjoy.

Hockman-Wert's presentation challenged Mennonites to live out their witness--their longing for peace and justice, their love for the God-created earth--in the kinds of food choices they make. In some ways, she redefined the idea of "Mennonite foods," implying that a Mennonite food may not be something connecting believers to their religious roots, but rather food that reflects the deep religious values Mennonites hold.

Hockman-Wert's approach to cooking and eating recalled what Barkman had said about Mennonites in Russia, making do with what they had in season--or what they could preserve for a later time. Russian-Mennonites making borscht from plentiful beets, or sausage from their large stock of pigs, reflected their attention to eating locally-grown goods, out of necessity rather than convenience.

So that while Hockman-Wert challenged Mennonites to rethink their eating choices, she also--unconsciously or not--called Mennonites to return to their heritage, and to the ways farmers living on slim means were able to make healthy and wholesome food, using locally-produced goods.

And, as we well know, conversations among Mennonites continue to revolve around what it means to be Mennonite in an ever-changing era, when church membership is growing fastest in the global south, when Mennonites are increasingly urban, and when many join the Mennonite church from other faith traditions.

What does it mean now to be Mennonite? And how do those who aren't connected to Mennonites by ethnicity—who can't play the Mennonite game well—still find their place at the table? The last speaker for the day's meeting was Don Bacher, sharing by proxy for Judy, his wife. Judy was raised Mennonite, but Don was not, and so their concept of Mennonite food was challenged by their sense that they were not "ethnic" Mennonites, and thus had to construct their own food traditions.

Judy Bacher was born into a Mennonite family, but did not recall eating anything that would be called Mennonite food, other than the roast beef, potatoes, and carrots that were cooked in the oven while the family was at church on Sunday mornings. Only as an adult did she learn about Zwieback, Rollkuchen, Shoo Fly Pie, Peppernuts, Vareniky, Whoopee Pies, Borscht, Faspa and other words that are an integral part of the Mennonite food vocabulary.

So what can those who haven't experienced ethnic Mennonite foods, but still believe themselves Mennonite, bring to a conversation about Mennonites in the kitchen?

Both Judy and Don expressed the ways they have learned to create new traditions around food, their Mennonite family traditions reshaping our concepts about what Mennonite food might look like, just as we are reshaping our concept of what Mennonites look like.

Don Bacher talked about working in Jamaica for MCC, and the foods they ate there, including rice and peas, which is now a traditional part of their family Christmas celebrations.

Judy Bacher mentioned the pecan coconut clusters she learned to make in Jamaica, where coconut was plentiful, and she was challenged to serve coconuts in many forms. Like her Russian Mennonite forebears, Judy Bacher was using what was plentiful in her culture to feed her family, and in the process, to create a tradition that has been carried down to her children and to her grandchildren.

Each one of the stories shared at the fall meeting reflected for the audience ways that personal experiences reflect larger historical and cultural movements, and reveal that the food we eat--what sustains us, what becomes tradition to us--serves as well as markers for our denomination through time.

Although many of us have complex relationships with food, and though our quickened society means we often eat meals on the go, in our cars or over the sink or at our work desks, there's something still about meals that ties us together, allowing us to fellowship together as friends, as family, as Mennonites, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In a manner of celebrating this fellowship around a table, the fall meeting ended in the church's fellowship hall, where those in attendance gathered to enjoy the food brought to share in a "faspa," which is a Mennonite tradition of a "small meal."

Dishes at the faspa included the Russian-Mennonite Zwieback and Shoo-Fly Pie, sausages and cheeses from local farmers, the Bachers' pecan coconut clusters, and kale chips, reflecting newer ways of preparing vegetables.

At a table nearby, people were invited to browse a selection of cookbooks, from the *Mennonite Community Cookbook* to *More-With-Less* to *Mennonite Girls Can Cook.*

The cookbooks, like the food served during faspa, like the presenters at the meeting reflected both the history of Mennonites, and also the transformation of a people, still rooted deeply in one common faith. ~

Have your own Mennonite food-related memories or thoughts you'd like to share? We'd love to hear from you, and might include your thoughts about Mennonite food in our next newsletter. Please email them to Melanie Springer Mock at mmock@georgefox.edu.

New Mennonite Literaure Offerings For Spring Reading

In January, Shirley Showalter's new memoir, *Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World*, was named one of the top 50 spiritual books of 2013. The award, given by the Spirituality and Practice website, honors writers who "explore the quest for meaning and purpose, wholeness and healing, commitment and community, contemplation and social activism."

Showalter's book joins a number of new voices in Mennonite literature, and her success will no doubt open the door to other excellent Mennonite memoirs, novels, and poetry collections.

Blush traces Showalter's upbringing in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the early and mid-60s. The well-written memoir explores the tensions Showalter felt as a conservative Mennonite girl intrigued by the "glittering world" outside her small community.

Although the memoir is about Showalter's life, it also provides an interesting glimpse into the culture of Lancaster County Mennonites at the time: into their customs and rituals, their thought and practice. And while Showalter longs in many ways for the world beyond her Mennonite community, her narrative celebrates the many elements of that community that keep her grounded: her church and her faith, and fundamentally her family.

Showalter is clearly a student of the memoir, and *Blush* reflects her deep study of the genre, of the ways to craft a story so that the individual experience has universal application. (You can read more about Showalter's *Blush* on page 5 of this newsletter.)

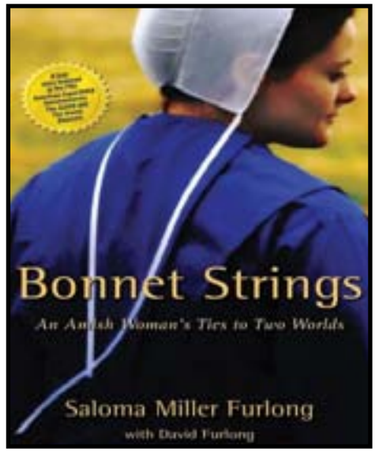
Another memoir just out from Herald Press is Saloma Miller Furlong's *Bonnet Strings: An Amish Woman's Ties to Two Worlds*, a sequel to Furlong's *Why I Left the Amish*. Furlong's story of leaving her Amish community in Ohio, and settling as a "Yankee" in Vermont, was featured in an 2012 American Experience documentary on PBS and was part of a new PBS documentary, "The Amish: Shunned," first aired on February 4.

Furlong's *Bonnet Strings* traces the author's decision to leave the Amish when she was 20 years old. Through narrating her story, Furlong does an excellent job of exploring the tension she feels between the pull of her community and her heritage, and the independence offered by the outside world.

Recognizing she cannot have both her community and freedom, her religious heritage and the opportunity to be all God means for her to be, Furlong must make a heart-rending choice, covered in the memoir's final chapters.

Showalter and Furlong join a growing number of Mennonite women sharing their stories, in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. A new novel published last summer, *Shaken in the Water*, uses magic realism to narrate the experiences of a Mennonite family spanning three generations and the entire 20th century.

In magic realism, scenes, characters, and even plot lines that seem real are infused with magical elements, leading readers to question what is real (and reality), and what is not.



Such is the case in Jessica Penner's novel, where Mennonite life in a Midwest farming town seems entirely real, until one character is swept up into a tornado, then safely placed down on the ground without injury; the only casualty is a lost covering, which convinces the woman, Huldah, that God would rather her hair uncovered unpinned.

Huldah's revelation, voices speaking out of nothing, legends of a tiger roaming: these all unsettle the reader, but also call us to deeper meaning, deeper understanding, of our own call and the choices we make.

Penner's work is not sentimental in the least, and the novel's characters are complex. But it is through this complexity that readers may find themselves: in their brokenness; their longing to love others (and their oft-times inability to do so); and in their fidelity to their community of likewise broken believers. Although *Shaken in the Water* might be challenging in places, but rewarding as well.

In the next year, you should anticipate more good writing by Mennonites, including John Ruth's memoir, *Branches*; new poetry and essay collections from Jeff Gundy; and a memoir by Rachel Springer Gerber. ~

Celebrating the Life of Lester Kropf

Les Kropf, a long-time supporter of the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society, died on January 19. His memorial service was at the Albany Mennonite Church on January 26.

He was born to Chauncey and Lomie Detweiler Kropf in Hubbard. Les grew up on the farm where his chores included milking cows by hand and plowing with horses. As a conscientious objector in World War II, he did his civilian public service at Cascade Locks and in California.

Les married Viola Burck on Sept. 3, 1944, at her parents' home in Albany. In 1946 he went to work as an apprentice carpenter for Buerge Construction. He worked there for 40 years and was president of the company when he retired.

In 1954 Les and Vi took their four children to Texas, where they spent one year in voluntary service under the Mennonite Mission Board. A longtime member of Albany Mennonite Church, he served there in many capacities, including chairman of the building committee in 1950.

Les served on a number of boards. He was instrumental in building Drift Creek Camp near Lincoln City and served on its board. In 1987 he helped build a church in Haiti and was pleased to learn in 2010 that it had survived the earthquake.

Les and Vi traveled frequently to visit family and friends and explore the country, and were hiking and camping into their retirement years. Les enjoyed golfing, winning at Scrabble, helping his children with building projects, and doing woodworking with walnut from the orchard he tended for 40 years.

Vi died in 1997. Les married Ruth Yordy on Nov. 7, 1998. She survives. For 12 years they divided their time between her home in Ontario, Canada, and his home at the Mennonite Village. Since then they have lived fulltime in Albany.

He is also survived by a sister, a son, two daughters, a son-in-law, two stepsons seven grandchildren, three stepgrandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. His youngest child, Rosemary Kropf Allen of Seattle, died Dec. 21, 2013. He was also preceded in death by a sister and two brothers, Floyd and Ellis.

PNMHS is grateful for Les's support and his presence at our semi-annual meetings. Memorial contributions can be made to Drift Creek Camp or the Evergreen Samaritan Hospice. (Obituary reprinted from the Albany Democrat Herald.)

History Happens, Even When You're Away At Camp

Over 25 years have passed since I last went to Drift Creek Camp, taking the long and winding gravel road up into the coastal range, feeling slightly nauseous by the church van's sway around each curve, then swooping down the last glorious hill to land in front of the lodge.

Even a quarter century later, though, I can still recall the smell of that lodge, and the taste of the always-wonderful food served by the kitchen staff. I can hear the creak and slap of the cabin door early every morning, and feel the damp chill we had to endure after getting out of sleeping bags.

Every year in high school, I went to camp for a week, then worked there for the rest of the summer. Although I hated the cold, found the woods a bit frightening, and got too little sleep, Drift Creek was heaven to me.

The campgrounds were not luxurious—not by a long shot—but I loved the people who worked there, giving up their summers to hang out with in the woods with a bunch of kids they didn't know well, at least initially. By the summer's end, we were fast friends, and saying good-bye before getting in the green church van one last time was always a painful affair.

My first experience at Drift Creek Camp was so formative that I decided to be baptized there several months later, in the camp chapel. My dad, the minister at Albany Mennonite, performed the service during our church retreat. Baptism itself holds a good deal of symbolic power, and for me, there is the added significance that I publicly pronounced my Christian faith in a place that had made me long for life in Christ.

I wonder for how many people Drift Creek served a similar purpose? Children have been attending Drift Creek camp for over fifty years now. Churches retreat to the woods for a weekend; quilters gather in the lodge every fall to practice their craft and to visit with old friends. So many people have driven that curvy road to a place where Jesus's presence can be felt in the people gathered there, and where God's creation is evident everywhere.

So many people, and so many stories. We all have our stories that help define what Drift Creek means to us. I know I have mine: of late night raids on boys' cabins, and fierce Capture the Flag games, and quiet worship huddled around a blazing campfire. Those who have been to Drift Creek a hundred times—or, perhaps, only once—have their own stories, too, shaping and reflecting what the Mennonite camp means to them.

Together, these stories tell the history of Drift Creek Camp itself. They narrate the camp's humble beginnings, its many years of service to children in the summer time, and the ways the camp has transformed itself to meet the changes of broader culture; its popular surf camp, for example, reflects the camp's important efforts to meet a new constituency.

At the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical meeting this spring, we want to celebrate the history of Drift Creek Camp by hearing the stories that might be told about the camp: about its beginnings, about its development over the last 50 years, about the ways it shaped—and continues to shape—the spiritual lives of many young people. We hope you'll join us on March 30 to celebrate God's good work at this small plot of paradise in the costal range.~

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