

The Delaware Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter



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Lelia May Judy, A Woman of Noble Character

by Vernon Zehr

"How many brothers and sisters were in your family?" Lelia was asked this past January at age 105. Her reply was loud, clear, and complete,

"Fannie Grace, Carrie Carolyn, Lelia May, (that's me), Harvey Milton, Henry Leland, and Homer."

It was Henry, who in 1930, built the house on the hill nearby, where Lelia's son, Roy Judy Jr. and his wife Jean now reside. This is the house

20th and 21st. She will be 106 years old at the end of June. Lelia May Fike was born in Eglon, Preston County, West Virginia, June 30, 1899. When she was eleven years old, in West Virginia, Lelia recalls seeing a brand new red car as she walked along the dirt road near her home, A car was unusual in 1910 and it conjured up the rural myth, propagated by some, that it

"suspicious" vehicle she saw as a child.

Lelia taught school in West Virginia when she was seventeen, riding to school each morning with the family horse and buggy. Missing school because of the weather was almost as unheard of as missing church.

Lelia was a skilled seamstress and made many prayer veilings (coverings) and bonnets for the women of the Church of the Brethren where their family were members and loyal supporters.

"Hats were banned. They were of the devil." Lelia said with the hint of a smile. "That's what the church leaders said. Once I got tired of the same old bonnet pattern so I gave it a curve to follow the contour of my face. My father disapproved but finally allowed me to wear it."

"Did you make it and wear it because you wanted to rebel at the rules?" I asked.

"No," Lelia said with surprise. "I just liked it. It looked good and I felt good when I wore it."

And she did look good.

Her daughter Barbara and her son Roy, Jr., both praise her as the "saint" her name suggests. She was kind and supportive, She cared for the sick in the community, loved her husband and served her family well. Lelia worked as a nurse in at the Milford Memorial Hospital for



Lelia, age 20

where the Ernest Swartzentruber family lived until 1952.

Lelia (pronounced Lee la) still lives in the house, which her father-in-law purchased in 1917. With the supervision of her son, Roy Judy, Jr. and her daughter Barbara, she still resides there in good health. Her life has spanned one full century and touched two others —the 19th,

was probably a man looking to kidnap young girls.

"When the car stopped and the driver asked if I wanted a ride, I said, 'No!' When he turned around and came back I just hightailed it across the field."

Fifteen years later Lelia would own a car, fancier than that first

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much of her adult life. As needs arose she provided care for patients at their homes in evening and

so they were covered with a large blanket during the service.

Roy's grandfather, Jacob, moved from West Virginia to Delaware in 1917. His twin sons, Ray and Roy

they felt it was paradise—flat farmland without stones—only to discover like others before them, that while the land was easy to till it was low in quality and production was slim. Lelia's husband, Roy, Sr., continued operating the farm and later owned and operated a school bus serving the Greenwood Public School District. He died in 1989.

The Church of the Brethren in Farmington, practices baptism by immersion, the love feast and foot washing. Lelia remembers the love feast preparation. Her mother started cooking the meat on Saturday morning. The meeting started early with a foot washing service and concluded with a meal called the love feast. Lelia recalled that the foot washing service bothered her because the same basins of water were used throughout the service and those who came last were confronted with water that was quite dirty. Her training as a nurse caused her to pause, She always made sure she sat in a front seat



Lelia's Childhood family 1910

Back row Left to right Henry, Harvey Fannie **Front Row** Carrie, Silas (seated), Homer, Matilda (seated), Lelia

weekend shifts. She followed the model of Proverbs 31, providing for her family, cooperatively making family decisions, having the full confidence of her husband who died ten years earlier.

Church life was important to her family.

Leila usually invited the minister home for dinner each Sunday serving fresh chicken or canned pork sirloin with a variety of her prize canned vegetables for which she was well known. Leila canned anything that grew in her garden.

As members of the Church of the Brethren, going to church was always a given. Like the mail, neither snow, rain, sleet nor storm kept them from Sunday morning worship. In snow they went by bobsled drawn by two horses. The church had no shelter for the horses

were brought along to till the farm. This house and barn are of the same construction and age of the Bender house. When they first saw the farm



The Judy family 1962

Back row left to right Roy Judy, Jr. (Baby on lap) Tim Judy, Jean Judy, Roy Judy, Sr., Lelia Judy, Barbara (Judy) Taylor, Lemuel Taylor, IV **Front Row Left to right** Virginia Judy, Valerie Judy, Steve Judy, Linda Judy, Lemuel Taylor, V., Terry Taylor



Carrie Fike, Leila Fike, Fannie Fike

and washed feet early when the water was clean.

Leila remembers entering nurses training around 1920 in Easton, Maryland. She then dropped out and went to the General Hospital in Philadelphia to continue her training. Her training was interrupted again when she contracted diphtheria. For a period of time she was in a precarious balance between life and death. God had a plan for her life and she lived to complete her training in New York in 1923 where she worked for a year before moving to Delaware to marry Roy Sr. in 1924. They set up housekeeping in Roy's childhood home, which still stands by the side of route 16 near Tressler's Church at Owens Station. Leila remembers the first car she bought after graduating from nurses training—a 1924 Buick Roadster. She had no driver's license and the salesman had to teach her to drive. Leila and the car were sharp numbers—both beauties.

Later Leila worked at The Milford Memorial Hospital as a nurse for most of her adult life. For a long time she worked 12-hour days for \$4.00 a day. Leila was called on frequently by friends and neighbors

to assist with the sick in the community. She rarely received any payment for this service of the heart.

She often provided private care for patients in their homes in addition to her regular shift at the Milford Memorial Hospital. Leila remembers Lucy (Bender) Schrock. She often gave Aunt Lucy rides to and from the hospital where they both worked.

Mrs. Judy is a woman of service. She faithfully served her husband, her God, the church and the community. Leila's life is described in Proverbs 31, a woman of noble character, worth far more than rubies and her family, her church and her community have been blessed by a woman who loves life and fears God.

Leila is that kind of woman. As she nears 106 she takes no prescription or over the counter drugs. Her telephone alert monitor is pinned to her blouse more as a decorative piece of jewelry, a symbol of concern and love by her son and daughter, her 7 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren, and 6 great-great grandchildren. That monitor has never been needed. Visiting nurses and an aide assist her during the day and Roy, Jr, her only son lives a few miles away and looks in on her every day. Several members from local churches also spend regular shifts assisting in her care. Leila's only daughter Barbara, married to Lemuel Taylor, drives from Annapolis, Maryland every Wednesday to be with her mother, providing physical care, compan-

ionship and fellowship. Barbara has two children, a son and a daughter. She worked for four years as a Social Worker before her children were born and then worked in the public library system of Anne Arundel County for 26 years before retiring.

As she nears age 106, Leila surely takes great comfort in the presence of her family and friends and would be quick to say that her passion has been her family and the church. After her husband died, Leila has found solace walking through the field and in the woods behind the house singing all the stanzas of Amazing Grace. Her other favorite is a Charles Wesley hymn that must be ringing through her being now as her body and mind are slowing down to enter her eternal reward:

“Jesus lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Savior, hide, till the storm of life is past,
Safe into the haven guide, O receive my soul at last.



Leila age 105

Together in the Faith

Vernon Zehr

Without announcement or fanfare, members of the Mennonite Church and Church of the Brethren arrived in Delaware in the second decade of the 20th century. The William Tressler family came first, from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, followed by the Valentine Bender family who moved from Springs, Pennsylvania. Joseph D. Miller from Ohio and Lewis Eichorn came soon after, providing spiritual leadership.

Shortly after the arrival of these Amish Mennonites, several Church of the Brethren families from came from West Virginia. They came too, seeking better opportunities. The Jacob Judy family and the Seymor Hampstead family came from the Eglon, West Virginia area. The Speichers, and the Selders came from Accident, Maryland in the Grantsville, Maryland vicinity, just a few miles from Springs, Pennsylvania.

These families shared a rich spiritual heritage. Both the Amish Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren took seriously their relationship to God. They taught their children a way of love and peace. They demonstrated a life of simplicity and sharing.

In the early days of the settlement of the Amish Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren, the families shared in worship and activities for the youth. The Amish Mennonite youth often attended the Church of the Brethren Sunday evening activities since the Mennonites had no evening services. Leila Judy taught Sunday School and was involved with the youth in a variety of activi-

ties. The youth took part in frequent singings, occasional box socials and taffy pulls. Betty (Schrock) Sharp also remembers pictures of beach trips in those early days. Occasionally the combined church youth would plan an all day outing by horse team and wagon to one of the closest beaches. Ruth (Wisseman) Embleton remembers pictures of the youth group in those early days going to the beach in early spring. Ruth is the daughter of Laura (Yoder) Wisseman and Cortas Wisseman. Cort and his brothers Clayton, Marshall and Dorsey would have been a part of the youth group. Dwight Warnick remembers an annual Easter Monday trip to a beach in the area.

The families shared advice and resources as needed. They valued honest and authentic relationships and were particularly drawn to a partnership that shared their values of peace, simplicity and hard work. The Greenwood Mennonite Church property was purchased in the fall of 1918 to provide a cemetery for Sarah Schrock, wife of Christian Schrock. She died of the Spanish flu that swept the country at that time. Paul Dodd, pastor of Bethany Church of the Brethren in Farmington indicated that their congregation acquired their first church in 1919 in Farmington, Delaware. Lelia and Roy Sr. were members of Bethany along with their children, Barbara and Roy, Jr. Later Roy Jr. was called from Bethany to minister to the Ridgely Church of the Brethren in Maryland, where he served for 40 years. Lelia and Roy Sr. maintained their membership at Bethany in Farmington and is still a member there.

The Mennonites trace their roots back to Menno Simons in 1525. The Church of the Brethren trace their roots back to Alexander Mack in 1723 about 200 years later. It is well known that Mack was significantly influenced by the Anabaptist movement of Zwingli, and embraced by Conrad Grebel and Menno Simons. To this day the Church of the Brethren, like their Mennonite brothers and sisters in the faith, embrace the elements of peace and simplicity. The Church of the Brethren, mission statement is three words: Peacefully, Simply, Together. The Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren continue to stand firm in their historic position of peace. ■

Flags of Summer: Flags of Love

Reminiscences from Freda's Journal, 1990

It was the lovely irises, blue flags, my mother always called them, waving in the hot June sun, growing by the picket fence in the yard that suddenly brought my past into my present. I was eagerly introducing my new daughter-in-law to the haunts of my childhood, and we were slowly driving past the old home place, owned now by strangers. Her enthusiasm and interest had made the pilgrimage a joy for me. It was all so very low-key and light hearted that I was unprepared for the wash of emotion that swept over me at the sight of those blooming blue flags. I could see Mama stoop to pull out a few stubborn weeds that persisted in spite of her diligence at gardening.

And then my thoughts raced on to other memories of other flags in my past that seemed somehow connected to Mama and her nurturing qualities. I remember another hot June day, many years ago, a day when the Lauver clan, my mother's

family, all gathered for that joyous annual reunion and a scene from the past rushes into the present.

The long table has been carried out from the house and is set up in the back yard. The table is filled with the bounty that my mother and her four sisters so capably provided. Uncle Nevin Bender is asking the blessing. It seems like a long blessing to a little girl whose stomach was so empty.

I squint my eyes open just a bit and I see Aunt Lura Slabaugh sitting with baby Ruth on her lap. Her head is bowed and her eyes are shut, but her arm is raised, and a white table napkin is being waved back and forth over the food. Then as I become a bit bolder and look further, I discover that my mother and all my aunts are doing the same thing, with bowed heads, waving those white cloths, protecting the food from all the flies!

I find my thoughts wandering far away from Uncle Nevin's prayerful voice as I struggle to keep from laughing. It is a funny sight to me—all those white flags waving from arms stretched out beyond bowed heads.

At this moment I see my little sister, Alma Jean, three years old, her blond head bowed low, her eyes squeezed tightly shut, but above her and out as far as her chubby, baby arms could reach is her flag waving, too. (I think it was at this precise moment that I received a firm nudge from Mama—snickering during prayer was not acceptable behavior!)

As I reflect on this memory, I see now how very symbolic this scene was of their lives. They were ever diligent in providing for the physical needs of the family,

whether it be preparing wholesome flavor-filled meals to nurture our growing bodies or carefully tending the colorful bursts of flowers to surround us with beauty.

Yet they were ever as diligent in the tending of our spiritual gardens and somehow combining these two with a finesse that was taught to them from the cradle. I see these white flags waving as the symbols of their undying devotion to God and their equally undying love and care for their families. Only two of these five sister flag-wavers remain today. Aunt Esther Bender went first, Aunt Lura Slabaugh a few

years later and now my own mother has joined them, but my prayer is that we whose lives were blessed by their influence may take a cue from little Alma Jean and wave our flags of love and devotion and in turn pass them on to our own children.

“Who can find a virtuous woman? She looketh well to the ways of her household—her children rise and call her blessed.”
Paraphrased from Proverbs 31. ■

Editor's Note:

There is still one of the sisters living in 2005, the youngest, Aunt Gladys Lauver, ninety seven years old, residing in a nursing home in Mifflin, Pa., in good mental and physical health.

Flag Wavers

Vernon Zehr

These five Lauver sisters from Juniata County, Pa are the flag wavers mentioned in Freda's journal entry. They are pictured from youngest to oldest from left to right. Gladys Lauver, Mary Lauver, Alma Lauver Wert, Lura Lauver Slabaugh, Esther Lauver Bender.

Of these five, three married and each leave numerous descendants to continue the faith. They had one brother, William who served many years in Mission work in Argentina.

Of these three, two have left a significant impact upon the landscape of Delaware's Mennonite History. Esther Lauver married Nevin Bender and had nine children. Nevin Bender was featured in the June 2003 Newsletter and is available on the web site at delawaremennonite.com. Alma Lauver married Michael Wert. Two of their daughters Alene and Gladys, married two of Dave Yoder's sons, Mark and Jesse. Vernon Zehr, Jr, married yet another daughter, Freda. These unions have resulted in



The Lauver sisters Left to right (youngest to oldest): Gladys Lauver, Mary Lauver, Alma Lauver Wert, Lura Lauver Slabaugh, Esther Lauver, Bender.

many children, grandchildren and great grandchildren who are scattered in many places of service and faith. The flags of summer will wave with each passing summer and the tapestry of time will continue to be intricately woven creating a history that brings glory to God. ■

Delaware Mennonite Churches

DMHS, in keeping with its mission statement intends to provide a vibrant and accurate presentation of Mennonites in Delaware. At present this includes the churches listed below. We intend to update

this list as we become aware of groups that are a part of the Mennonite history of Delaware and surrounding states who feel a kinship with us.

Greenwood Mennonite Church

Greenwood 1914

Cannon Mennonite Church

Bridgeville 1976

Laws Mennonite Church

Harrington 1953

Central Mennonite Church

Dover 1955

Maranatha Fellowship

Dover 1997

Tressler Mennonite Church

Greenwood 1935

First Mennonite Church

Wilmington 1959-1972.

(Closed in 1972)

Maranatha Fellowship

The Maranatha Fellowship is a vital link in the history of the Delaware Mennonite Churches. Maranatha began as a fellowship of 26 committed Christians meeting in a home near Dover, Delaware. John Mishler, from the Cannon Mennonite Church near Bridgeville, Delaware became Maranatha Fellowship's acting overseer. This new congregation was accepted into the Conservative Mennonite Conference in 1997 with Willis A. Gingerich as the senior pastor. Lyndon Byler became an associate pastor in 2004.

Maranatha Fellowship first met at a local senior center in 1997 and a year later moved to a larger leased and renovated building. As the charter group of 26

Fourth Annual DMHS Banquet a Century of Music of Faith, September 3 ,2003

The annual Delaware Mennonite Historical Society banquet this year will feature music in worship in the lives of Mennonites in Delaware for almost 100 years. We will gather at the Greenwood Mennonite School Saturday night, September 3, 2005. We will be singing the songs that touched the lives of our parents, grandparents, great grandparents and great-great grandparents. We will also be moved by special music that still inspires us after 93 years.

Merle Embleton will provide an anchor for us as our song leader in this fourth annual Banquet. The men's quartet that warmed our hearts at the first banquet along with other groups will inspire us with special music. Naomi and Robert Miller and their family from Central Mennonite in Dover will be singing. Jesse Bontrager's quartet from Laws will also be taking part.

Did you know that for the first two years the first families who moved to Delaware conducted their worship in German? The singing, Bible reading, preaching, praying and Sunday School were all conducted in German. It will all be there. Music through the years, hymns of meditation and reflection, gospel songs of devotion and dedication, along with songs of testimony and praise that stir and lift us. In addition while we catch our breath we will sit back and enjoy the special music provided by others whose talent and joy is serving in song.

As we have done since the first banquet, this banquet is paid for by donations from interested business leaders, and patrons from the community. You will be given an opportunity to make a donation to continue the work of the Delaware Mennonite Historical Society.

grew, the fellowship bought three acres of land and built a 4500 square foot building. The first service was held in the new building, February 9, 2003, and was debt free by 2004.

Attendance at Maranatha Fellowship ranges from 60 to 100. Maranatha Fellowship is committed to active involvement in the activities of the Conservative Mennonite Conference and takes part in a wide variety of its programs.

The church motto is: "The Lord Jesus Christ accepts you and is active in your life; we want to accept you as well."

The church mission statement is: "To commit ourselves and lead others to be disciples of Jesus Christ

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through study of His word, worship, and by building relationships through encouragement, fellowship, and serving the community".

While Maranatha Fellowship has not appeared on the list of Delaware churches their members have been active supporters of DMHS. This congregation is being added to the list of churches in Delaware actively involved in the preservation of its vital history. These six current active churches along with the one that closed in 1972, represent three Mennonite Conferences: Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC), Biblical Mennonite Alliance (BMA), and Allegheny Mennonite Conference (MC USA).

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Your Involvement 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 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.

I want to support the work of the Delaware Mennonite Historical Society

Please check one:

- \$ _____ Other Where most needed
- \$ 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.

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

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

Conservative Mennonite Conference To Convene at Greenwood, Delaware, August 4-7, 2005

The Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC) will be held at the Greenwood Mennonite School in Greenwood, Delaware, Thursday to Sunday, August 4-7, 2005. The hosting congregations are Cannon Mennonite Church at Bridgeville, Delaware, The Greenwood Mennonite Church at Greenwood and Maranatha Fellowship at Dover. The theme of the conference is "The Great Commandment." More than 1000 church leaders and interested lay members are expected to attend.

The Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC) is a Christian fellowship of more than 100

evangelical Anabaptist churches in North America. Churches are located in 21 states, one province, and Mexico. The conference also is related to church groups which grew from conference-related ministries in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Haiti, Kenya, and Nicaragua.

The roots of the Conservative Mennonite Conference go back to the 16th century Anabaptist movement in Switzerland and the influence of Menno Simons (1496-1561) of Holland and a movement among the Swiss-German Anabaptists of the late 17th century to which the name of Jacob

Ammon was attached. The more recent history is traced to a meeting in 1910 at Pigeon, Michigan, attended by five Amish Mennonite ministers who focused on the vision and concerns of the churches they represented. CMC was known then as the Conservative Amish Mennonite Conference and, since 1954, as the Conservative Mennonite Conference.

In addition to these three churches, Central Mennonite Church in Dover and Laws Church in Harrington belong to the BMA conference and Tressler Mennonite Church at Owens Station belongs to the Allegheny Conference. ■



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