



Interior view in Turner's Mill

Mill preservation plans drafted

A committee chaired by Vernon Mast, a retired civil engineer living near Broadway, Va., has hired a professional millwright, Derek Ogden, of Madison, Virginia, to develop a plan to preserve Turner's Mill in its near-original condition (circa 1804).

The committee met on December 9 with Ogden, a native of England and a millwright who has overseen the restoration of dozens of mills in England and the U.S., to hear his counsel on restoring the mill along Brenneman's Church Road.

According to Mast, Ogden recommended that "we not 'dress up' the mill, but that it be cleaned of extraneous debris, with the historic flavor retained."

Ogden will develop a set of recommendations for the committee to consider this spring during another on-site visit, when he will "read the walls" to capture the flavor of the mill. He plans to complete his recommendations by early summer, with work expected to begin after August 1.

Among the scores of mills Mr. Ogden has restored in England is the historic Chesterton Windmill at Warwickshire, built in 1632. In 1975 he took a commission in Virginia to build the state's Flowerdew Post Windmill, commemorating the 1619 construction of the first English windmill built in North America. He and his wife then decided to make Virginia their home, restoring dozens of mills in this country.

According to Mast, the primary need now is for resources to assist in restoring the mill, which was one of the few to survive General Sheridan's burning of the Valley in the fall of 1864.

The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation is giving a \$10,000 matching grant to preserve the mill. To contribute matching funds, see the coupon below.

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Valuing people as the heart of our heritage, we sketch below the life of John S. Coffman, a Valley pioneer in church music, education, outreach, and mission. His story nurtures another aspect of the Brethren-Mennonite legacy – evangelism.

john s. coffman a journey into mission

When John S. Coffman was born near Mole Hill west of Harrisonburg, Va., on October 16, 1848, evangelism was hardly a hallmark of the Mennonite community, but he was destined to change that.

Mennonites then were more concerned about keeping themselves unspotted from the world than getting into the spotty business of mission. But young John loved God's world, fed his inquisitive mind and honed an interest in education.

His learning, however, would come more from his own study than from formal higher education. Fortunately, his father supported education, but growing up on a farm in a large family left little time - or money - for school. When the Civil War boiled over during his teen years, he traveled to Cumberland County, Pa., with other 16-year-olds to avoid being drafted into the southern army.

After the war he returned to Virginia in 1865, married Elizabeth Heatwole in 1869, and farmed 30 acres at the foot of Mole Hill. Dr. Bucher of the Bridgewater Normal School loaned him books without charge to enhance his study, sometimes done while he rested his team in the field.

On July 18, 1875, he was ordained to "go and preach the gospel to every creature," a calling he nurtured by prayer and fasting. His preaching broke new ground, for he outlined his discourses (as opposed to "depending on the Lord for what to say") and spoke in a normal tone of voice. When his peers viewed his outlines with suspicion, he began memorizing them.

His firm belief that the church should be engaged in mission was based on Scripture (e.g., Matt 28:18-20). On May 14, 1877, he and Gabriel Heatwole began a three-week tour to Pendleton County, W. Va, to graft trees. In the evenings Coffman preached two or three nights in a schoolhouse or other meeting place before moving to another location. A longer series of evangelistic meetings was forbidden in those days. He also taught school and organized singing schools in the late 1870s.



John S. Coffman

Photo courtesy Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Photograph Collection, Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen, Indiana

May event to focus on Civil War stories

The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, in cooperation with CrossRoads and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society, is sponsoring a symposium May 21-22 at Bridgewater College to tell Civil War stories unique to Rockingham County.

Using the theme, "Smoke and Sorrow: Shenandoah Valley 1864," the symposium will offer speakers and tours to educate participants on the impact of the war on the local population.

The featured dinner speaker on Friday evening, May 21, 7 PM, will be John Heatwole, author of *The Burning*. Jeff Wert, author of *1864: The Shenandoah Valley and the Transformation of War*, will speak following dinner Saturday evening, May 22, 7 PM.

Three tours will be available on Saturday: 1) Twin Battles: Cross Keys and Port Republic. 2) Tears and Ashes and War, and 3) People in Peril. Each tour will have its own bus, guide and boxed lunches. Call (540) 438-1275 or check the web site.

When editor John F. Funk invited him to become assistant editor of *Herald of Truth*, the official voice of the Mennonite Church, he and his family left the Valley on June 17, 1879, settling in Elkhart, Ind. This move launched him into a larger teaching and evangelistic ministry across the United States and Canada. During the 1880s, he began holding a longer series of evangelistic meetings at one location, breaking new ground in the Mennonite Church, but not without controversy.

His interest in home mission work grew, and, in addition to his own itinerant evangelistic ministry, he soon cast a vision for mission boards that would send ministers to start new churches in prime locations. "This was planning things ahead of the times," writes biographer M.S. Steiner.

"His untiring efforts served to awaken and establish the church, shielding her from indifference, vanity, foolishness, money-making and skepticism," Steiner notes in *John S. Coffman: Mennonite Evangelist*. In his travels far and wide as a teacher and evangelist, people from other denominations came to hear him. "He lived his preaching," people said.

In addition to his itinerant evangelistic work, he encouraged the formation of young people's meetings, held Sunday school conferences, prepared study helps for Sunday school teachers, and laid the foundation for church schools and the work of later evangelists and educators like George R. Brunk, Tillman Erb and J. B. Smith. An innovator, John challenged the church to look beyond itself.

say it with a note card!

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