

“Harley J. Stucky, July 26, 1920 – November 11, 2005”

Harley J. Stucky, a leading Swiss-Volynian activist for peace, historical memory, and other benevolent causes, died on November 11, 2005. That was an important date in our people's history. On November 11, 1918, the First World War ended. That same day a mob in Burrton, Kansas, beat and smeared with yellow paint John Schrag of the Hoffnungsfeld congregation for his refusal to buy war bonds. The experience of that war and of the Second World War set the stage for Harley's personal identity and mission. He knew his people had a distinctive history and calling in this world. He worked to preserve that history and to promote that mission.

Harley had a key role in the founding of the Swiss Mennonite Cultural and Historical Association. He had already been active in 1949 at the celebration of the 75th anniversary of migration of our people from Volhynia to America in 1874. Harley made a special effort to capture on tape (or on wire, the audio technology at that time) all of the major addresses. These were compiled in print along with other items of interest.

Harley helped to organize SMCHA in 1972 and 1973 as part of the preparations for the 100th anniversary of the migration. He worked with Dale Stucky, attorney in Wichita, to complete legal forms for incorporation. They both signed the document and filed it with the state of Kansas on February 14, 1973. Then Harley became the first president of SMCHA.

One of the first projects of the new corporation was the building of a memorial marker that had been proposed earlier. The centennial planners had studied options as early as 1972 and had approved the erection of a commemorative pillar with globe and cross. The board had extensive discussion about the size of the marker, its location, the materials, and symbolic significance. It took many meetings of fervent discussion to come to an agreement on the text that would appear on the marker.

Stanley Regier, architect, made a number of sketches to incorporate the board's ideas. Ground breaking was held in August 1973, with not many people in attendance. Harley brought his own tractor and loader, blade and hand tools. With the help of his son and his custom cutting crew the work got started. Harley later wrote, “The first few days we seemed to be alone so it required a lot of faith to believe that others would rally with financial support and volunteer labor.” Perseverance paid off and the building process moved forward. Without Harley's vision, planning and organizing, the project may not have gotten off the ground nor brought to completion.

Harley also contributed to our people's understanding of their culture and heritage by leading eight tours to Europe over a period of twenty-five years. With his gifts and background as a college history teacher, he delighted in teaching his tour groups about Catherine the Great and the Russian czars, and about the places where our people lived and moved. He provided a good guide for future Swiss-Volhynian tourists in an appendix to his 1999 edition of Martin Schrag's book, *The European History of the Swiss Mennonites from Volhynia*. On page 156 is a photo of Harley kissing the “holy ground” in Michelsdorf, Poland, where his ancestors lived.

For twelve years, beginning in 1948, Harley taught history and government at Bethel College, his alma mater. He quickly developed a reputation as an effective and passionate teacher. Among the many special events he helped to organize was a 1956 “Conference on Education and Responsibility,” attended by Mennonite pastors, civic leaders from Newton, as well as Bethel students. Harley’s excellent presentation at that conference, “Should Mennonites Participate in Government?” was published as an article in *Mennonite Life*, January 1959. One of his lasting legacies in teaching was as a founding father of the Social Science Seminar—an institution that developed a reputation for academic excellence that continues to this day.

Harley’s academic research and writing interests focused on Mennonite history and on issues related to the Mennonite peace witness. One of his significant contributions was an essay titled “The German Element in Kansas,” published as chapter fourteen (pp. 329-54) in a book edited by John D. Bright, *Kansas: The First Century* (1956).

In his retirement years, Harley continued his interest and involvement in historical and educational concerns. He made a great effort to preserve the Bernhard Warkentin farm and mill in Halstead against the encroachments of the Army Corps of Engineers. For decades he taught a Sunday School class at Bethel College Mennonite Church. He attended special lectures at Bethel College and engaged speakers with challenging questions. In the year 2000, for example, he confronted Menno Simons lecturer Mark Noll of Wheaton College, who offered a non-pacifist evangelical interpretation of the Christian gospel. After the lectures, Harley sent Dr. Noll some of his own peace writings to continue the dialogue. Throughout his life, Harley Stucky was a passionately engaged person of historical and educational achievement.

By James Juhnke and Delbert Goering