

The Christian J. and Susanna ('Beachy') Swartzentruber Family

PART I

by Eldon Swartzentruber

SETTLING IN A NEW LOCATION WAS nothing new for my grandpa Christian J. Swartzentruber's family, when they arrived at Kempsville, Virginia, in the fall of 1913. Shortly after he married Susanna Beachy in 1890, the couple moved from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, to the new Amish settlement at Midland, in Fauquier County, Virginia. Around the turn of the century, they left there for Plain City, Ohio, where my dad, Jonas, was born in 1908.

Three years later, in 1911, the Swartzentrubers were off to southwest Texas—Dimmit County, near the village of Palm. That venture lasted a bit over two years, before the family gave up in despair. While the irrigated

land there produced excellent crops of onions, cabbage, and potatoes shipping and commissions charges to northern markets amounted to more than the produce brought.

Probably several reasons contributed to my grandparents choosing to move to Princess Anne County—now Virginia Beach—however, primary was the freedom to quit school after seventh grade. Ohio, and several other states were beginning to pass laws requiring school attendance until age sixteen. Grandma's brother Daniel Beachy's family was also living here, which undoubtedly played a role in the move to Tidewater Virginia.

Grandpa's bought land south of Kempsville and farmed until his death in October 1933. Grandma sold the farm at auction to John B. Yoder in 1939. Grandma died in June 1944, and both are buried in the Kempsville Mennonite Church cemetery off Parliament Drive.

The John Yoders later sold the place to the Levi Kauffman family, who farmed it until their move to Montezuma, Georgia, in the summer of 1953. Rock Church stands on the property today, although the farm buildings were farther east than the present church site.

Jonas Swartzentruber's children, circa 1955. Back row, left to right: Lloyd, Catherine, Susan, and Norman. Middle row: Ray, Daniel, and Bertha. Front row: Noah, Eldon, and Merlin. Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber



Grandpa Christian was ordained minister while living in Fauquier County, Virginia, and served faithfully in that office until his death. That his interest went well beyond preaching the Word on Sundays was plainly evident in the old church building on Parliament Drive. Built around 1914, the wood-boarded interior remained unpainted until the 1950s. The material, from Kramer Brothers Lumber in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, had been shipped by rail to Kempsville. Addressed to Grandpa, each bundle was stenciled "C. J. Swartzentruber." The labeled boards were scattered about the walls and were readable until covered with paint.

After the church property was sold during the early 1980s, I went there while the building was being renovated. To my good fortune, I managed to retrieve one of the stenciled boards that had been turned out and escaped being painted. I am happy to have it in my possession to this day.

My Dad, Jonas, and Mom, Anna, were married in 1929. Her parents were Jonas C. and Catherine (Yonas and Kettie) Miller. Dad was ordained deacon at the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church in 1946. I am the oldest of ten children—nine still living. Neither parent is living today. Mom died February 7, 1970, and Dad on Christmas Day, 1980.

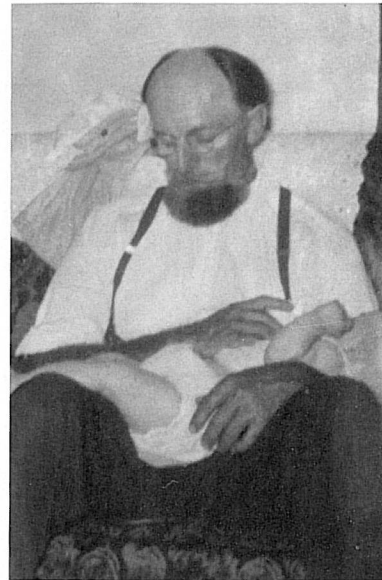
Mom's death came on the morning of the day my youngest brother, Merlin, married Katie Ann Chupp. For the first time in five years all of our

family were planning to be together. Needless to say, the event turned out far less joyful than we had anticipated.

We were living in Kempsville at the time. Mom and Dad had come from Montezuma, Georgia, since the Chupp family also lived in Virginia. Dads were staying overnight at my sister Catherine's, the Joe Troyers. Mom had a heart attack towards morning. As I was a member of the Kempsville Rescue Squad, Dad called me to bring the ambulance. Having worked hundreds of emergencies over the years, I saw at once this was extremely serious. I must say it was the most difficult ambulance run I ever made. Mom died before we reached the hospital.

Growing up in old Princess Anne County during the 1930s and 1940s was, overall, a pleasant experience. Though life on a dairy farm kept us busy, there was also time for trips to the ocean beaches and fishing on Chesapeake Bay. As a young fellow, I particularly enjoyed the party boat trips out from Harrison's at Ocean View. Sometimes, after a good catch of croakers or spot our church youth group would top off the day with a fish fry.

Farm boys are often looking for ways to make spending money. My brothers and I were no exception. Because a number of the Kempsville Mennonite families attended Norfolk City Market, there was a ready outlet for whatever saleable goods we could find. Our specialty was squabs—young pigeons. We put nesting boxes in the hayloft to attract wild pigeons. Just before the



Jonas C. Swartzentruber, circa 1968.
Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller



Anna (Miller) Swartzentruber, circa 1968. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller

The Jonas Swartzentruber residence was on the site of the present Kempsville High School. Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber



young birds were ready to fly, we'd catch and dress them for market. There were no federal meat inspections to be concerned with at the time. The handful of young pigeon could not have competed with a plump chicken, but customers thought squab a real delicacy. For us, that was what mattered.

In my late teens, I began working at Yoder Dairies, first in the plant and later as a milk delivery man. The dairy, founded in 1929, by the brothers, Elmer and Eli, furnished employment for a lot of persons over the past sixty-five years. A number of marriages resulted when fellows in the plant or delivery routes fell in love with girls from the office staff. Some made a lifetime career of "working at the Dairy." I came close with thirty-five years there.

The Kempsville Amish-Mennonite community has seeded a good number of other congregations: In the early 1940s, a number of families left for Stuarts Draft, Virginia; the Providence (Conservative) Church was formed in 1952; upwards of two dozen families moved to Montezuma, Georgia, after 1953. During the 1960s and 1970s

others settled at Franklin, Kentucky; Farmville, Virginia; and Abbeville, South Carolina.

As a point of reference for younger readers and others who may not know, I'll give a bit of information on present-day Swartzentruber family connections. Laura, my first wife, died in 1988. Leora, formerly Overholt, and I were married in 1993 and are presently living at Abbeville, South Carolina. My brothers, Norman, Ray, and Merlin, also live here in South Carolina. Lloyd and Daniel live at Montezuma, Georgia. Noah lived at Fort Wayne, Indiana, at the time of his death in 1980. Sister Catherine, Mrs. Joe Troyer, lives at Farmville, Virginia; Susan, Mrs. Daniel Yoder, in Costa Rica; and Bertha, Mrs. Allen Yoder, in Missouri.

It is my sincere desire that past residents of the Kempsville community reading this will recall their own fond memories, and join me in saying, "It was good to have been there."

PART 2
by Lloyd Swartzentruber

I WAS BORN SEPTEMBER 24, 1931, at Kempsville. Our parents were living on what was then known as the Noah Lee farm. Among other Amish-Mennonite families who lived there later were John Beilers, Simon L. Yoders, Elmer V. Millers, Joas B. "J. B." Millers, and Isaac Planks.

Dad was a dairyman, as were most of the Kempsville Amish farmers, and

after moving onto the farm just south of the village, Dad enlarged the cow barn to twenty-eight stalls. As the milking was done by hand until 1950, we older children learned this chore at a young age. That changed, however, after Dad purchased a DeLaval milking machine with two buckets at an auction. He brought the equipment home and unloaded it at the barn. The following day, he went off to Norfolk on business. Returning in the evening, much to his surprise, we boys had installed the machine and were using it.

Kempsville was a typical country village until commercial and residential development began to bring changes after 1950. Huge oak trees shaded a dozen or more well-kept homes. Watson Kedras' hardware store stood between Pleasant Hall—presently Kellum Funeral Home—and the Niles Wolfe home on the northwest corner of Princess Anne and Bonney Roads. There were two general stores, Edgar Herrick's was directly across Bonney from the Wolfe residence. Later, Albert Bonney Sr. owned the store after Mr. Herrick's retirement.

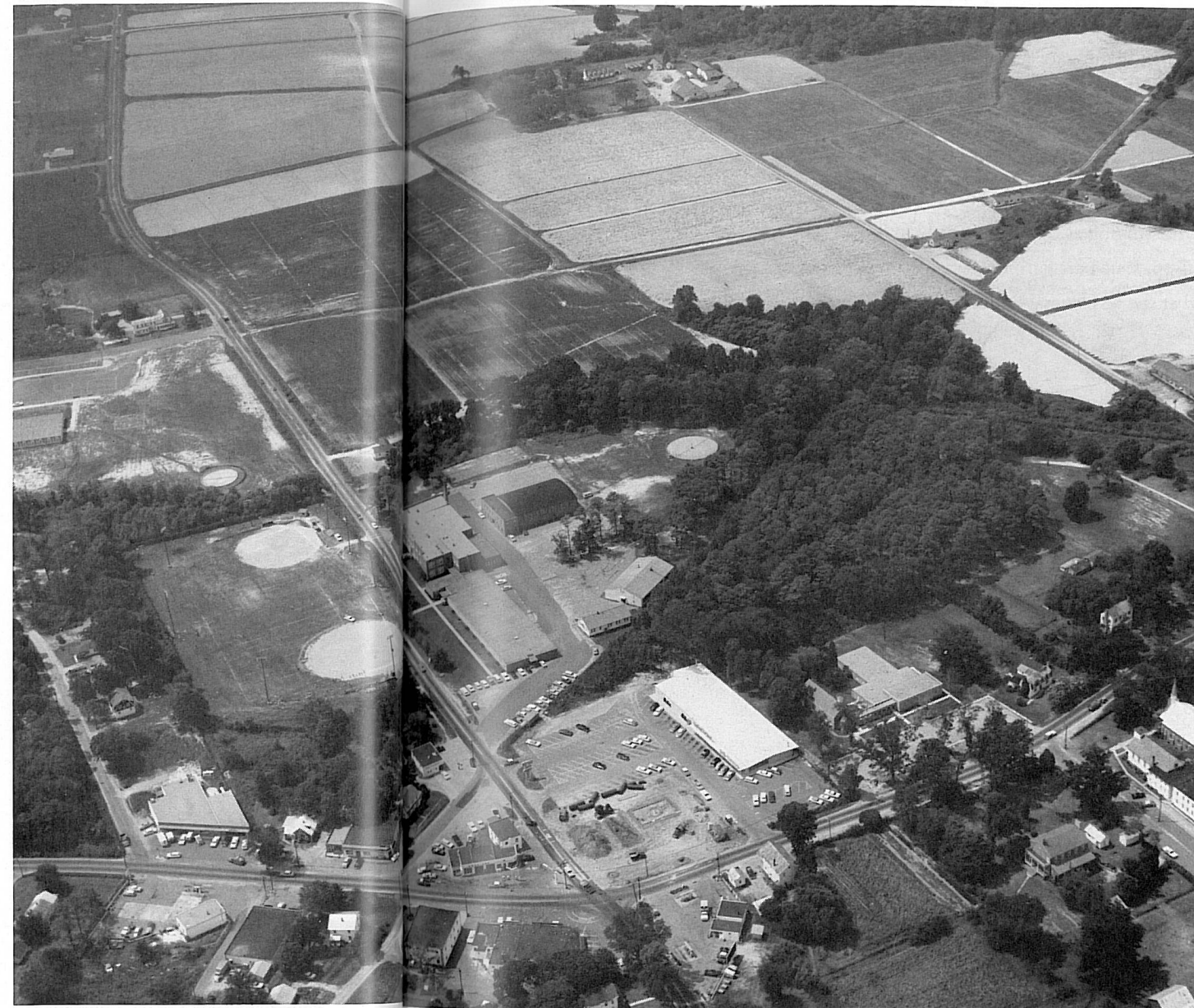
A hundred or so feet east of the intersection, the railroad cut diagonally across Princess Anne Road, and approximately the same distance south, the tracks bisected Kempsville Road. The second of the village's general stores, located just beyond the railroad was owned by George Denny and Jack Brinkley.

Mother sent me to Edgar Herrick's store one day to buy some groceries.

She gave me a nickel to spend for myself. A nickel then had value—it would buy a five-stick pack of chewing gum, twelve-ounce bottle of Pepsi or a candy bar. Those items may have tempted me sometimes, but this time I had something else in mind.

There were usually several men loitering about the store, and on occasion I had seen them slip nickels into the slot machine, pull the lever and set the three wheels spinning. Sometimes upon stopping, a wheel would display an apple, a lemon, or other fruit. Though I didn't understand all the machine's workings, I knew it occasionally spit out several coins. It seemed like easy money to this nine-year-old and too tempting to pass up. Easing up to the machine, I carefully slipped my nickel in and pulled the lever. The wheels whirred, slowed and the first stopped on a cherry, the second did the same. The third coasted to a stop, also showing a cherry. I had hit the jackpot! Coins began dropping out of the machine, overflowing the small tray and rolling onto the floor. Panicked at this unexpected bonanza, I looked up to see the men all staring at me. I felt a rush of guilt—Amish-Mennonites were not supposed to gamble, I knew that and so did they. Without thought, I turned and ran for home fast as I could, forgetting in my haste to retrieve the nickel that really was mine.

By the time I reached my late teens, volunteer firefighting had become an important focal point in my life. At age



The Jonas Swartzentruber farm is on the left looking south in this 1963 aerial shot of Kempsville. Courtesy of Nobe Smith

seventeen, brother Eldon had joined the Davis Corner volunteers, and I followed soon as I was old enough. While there, I advanced to the rank of captain. After a couple years at Davis Corner, interest had grown for a department at Kempsville. A public meeting for interested persons was held at Yoder Dairies in 1950. Out of that came Kempsville Volunteer Fire Department.

Mr. Linwood Wright, Menno L. Yoder (my brother-in-law), and I drew up the first bylaws for the new department. We had a major boost for morale early on from William Hudgins, Princess Anne County clerk and a neighboring farmer of ours. Initially, our fledgling fire company planned to buy a used truck from salvor Sam Aks. However Mr. Hudgins offered to contribute \$1,000 toward a new Ford truck, providing we bought it from Bartee Motor Company at Princess Anne Courthouse (Virginia Beach City Hall). As a result, Kempsville Volunteer Fire Department began operations with a brand-new truck.

The Kempsville Mennonite community was well represented in the department. Among the members, besides myself, were my brothers, Eldon, Norman, and Ray Swartzentruber; Clark, Menno, Edwin, and Floyd Yoder; Paul and Solly Beiler; John H. Miller; Tommy Overholt; and Isaac Plank.

Church life was a vital part of my childhood and young adult years in the Kempsville community. Until the church split around 1940, Mom and Dad drove horse and buggy as did all the members. However, after the Beachy Church was organized (Elmer S. Yoder describes the events in chapter 11) our parents soon bought an automobile. Several things I particularly recall about the church grounds: the old horse barn with a hayloft overhead; a horse watering trough, replenished with the overflow from the pitcher

pump on the back porch of the church house. A concrete ramp that ran straight out from the porch steps allowed ladies and small children to step onto a waiting buggy, rather than climbing up from the ground.

For several years after the church divided, both congregations shared the meetinghouse. The practice then was for preaching services only every other Sunday. On Sundays when the Old Order group had forenoon church services, the Beachy (automobile) group would have afternoon Sunday school. The following Sunday they had the forenoon service. The sharing continued until around 1942, when most of the horse-and-buggy folks had moved to Stuarts Draft in the Shenandoah Valley.

Like nearly all Amish congregations where the German language is used during worship, the "Loblied" (Praise Hymn) was always sung as the second hymn in the Sunday morning church service. We used the more modern *Lieder Sammlung* (Hymns Collection) hymnbook, rather than the much older and thicker *Ausbund*.

Singing without instrumental music accompaniment has been a tenet of Amish-Mennonites since our sixteenth-century beginnings. We sing not only at church, but at social activities and at home. We boys often sang while going about our evening barn chores.

Since there were no evening services then at the Kempsville Church, the young people would gather at a church family's home for a Sunday evening

singing. We would open with several German hymns, then switch to English in the old Mennonite Church and Sunday School Hymnal. Hymns were announced by number and anyone brave enough to lead was free to do so. While singing at church was only in unison, four-part harmony was permitted at the less formal Sunday evening events. Singings usually lasted until 9:00–9:30 p.m. By then someone would announce a "parting hymn" number that signaled the end of the song service. Favorite hymns included, No. 399, "Blest Be the Tie"; No. 405, "God Be With You"; and No. 409, "Hail, Sweetest, Dearest Tie."

At age twenty-one on August 26, 1952, I married Viola, youngest daughter of Lloyd W. and Amelia Yoder. (Viola has written the William S. Yoder account in chapter 5.) We lived on in the Kempsville area until I was drafted into 1W alternative service in 1955. We lived two years in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, while I worked at a mental hospital. Following that we moved with Viola's dad and step-mother, Salome, to Montezuma, Georgia, where we still live today.