If these trees could talk

By Eunice Geil Showalter

For decades a grove of oak trees has perched high on a hilltop in northwestern Rockingham County. Standing silently through the seasons, the trees overlook Cedar Run as it wanders past and flows toward Linville Creek. A small cemetery containing the loved ones of early families that settled the Cedar Run community – the Trissels and the Burkholders – caps the hilltop.

What if these trees could talk? The stories they might tell. The history their branches have sheltered. Tradition says Trissels Mennonite Church, 11246 Hisers Lane, Broadway, Va., dates from 1822. For the sum of $15, Abraham Neff and his wife Catherine sold one acre of land including a graveyard to the said fraternity of the Mennonite Church on 31 May 1823.

Unpainted, this log building measured 20' by 25'. After the church was weather boarded, it turned very dark. C. E. Nair writes in the *History of Cedar Run Community* (1948), "From a distance the edifice seemed to be squatting there on the hill under the tall old oaks."

In 1850 it was enlarged to 30' by 40' and contained a small ell for use by mothers with young children. It also sheltered women's riding skirts and their saddles. The main room was divided by a railing into men and women's sides. The preacher stood on a stand enclosed with a banister and was two steps higher than the congregation. Benches were made of a single board seat with a narrow backboard.

Those attending Trissels from the community walked, but from farther away they rode horses or arrived in wagons and carriages. They tied their reins to horseshoes nailed to the oak trees to the north and the south of the church. John Geil told that when it became necessary to remove one of the oaks because of storm damage in recent times, the sawmill broke its blade when it hit a horseshoe embedded inside the tree. It was hidden from view because the tree had grown around the shoe over the years.

Early valley Mennonite families were sparsely scattered across the district. Population was not large enough to support regular attendance each Sunday. Trissels, New Dale in the Marsh (3 miles east of Broadway), Brennemans, Mt. Carmel (after 1881) and Plains (northeast of Timberville) were early local

churches. Post Civil War attendance rotated between the Mennonite churches on a monthly basis. On the first Sunday of each month the service was held at Trissels.

In 1900 Trissels constructed a second church on a new location. Timothy Showalter removed the first board when they torn down the original church. Most of the materials were sold at auction, but they used the foundation stones for the second building. Trissels' regular first Sunday of the month meeting was held at Cedar Run Church of the Brethren during construction.

Virginia Moyers Martin tells of attending Trissels as a child in the 1920s and 1930s. "We didn't have Sunday school rooms like we have now. There were two small anterooms on each side of the pulpit. I can remember going into these small rooms and sitting on small wooden chairs. The congregation was about 50-60. Some of the community people would come. Finally, the churches decided to have services at both Trissels and Zion every Sunday. They drew a line at Route 42. People who lived on the Zion side went to Zion and those on the Trissels side went to Trissels. But they didn't hold people to that if they had a preference."

In 1950 Trissels decided to build a new church. They needed more space to hold district events. A fellowship hall (1964) and front entryway (1993) were added.

Like the oak grove deeply rooted in the land, so is Trissels. It is anchored to withstand storms and turmoil. Slow to change, today it holds the same convictions of faith as those congregations that have gone before it. Giving comfort to those who are in need, offering support to the weak, helping the community, the congregation at Trissels seeks to move toward Jesus, being transformed into his likeness, so that God's grace, healing, and hope flows through them to the world.

Another article giving more historical information