Our Family History

Mennonite Bishop Henry Rhodes (1747-1827) of Rockingham County, VA
A Biographical Sketch, including His Last Will and Testament, Dated March 8, 1826

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Signature of Heinrich Roth (Henry Rhodes), as it appeared on his will, dated 1826

(Henry's surname is spelled variously as Rhoad, Roth, Rhode, Rode and Rhodes.)

Henry Rhodes (Heinrich Roth) was born on November 3, 1747 in York County, PA, the eldest son of Anthony and Magdalene Roth. Henry's name appears in tax records of York County Pennsylvania in 1782 (Pennsylvania Archives; 3rd ser. XXI, 499). Shortly afterward, Henry moved south to Rockingham County, Virginia and settled on a farm located some two and one-half miles south of Broadway. In 1784, Henry Rhodes' name appears on a petition to the General Assembly of Virginia signed by Mennonites and Dunkards of Rockingham County. Various other records indicate that Henry's mother, Modlene (by then a widow), along with his siblings Anthony Jr., Frederick, Elizabeth, Magdalene Culp, and, perhaps, Frainey Priniman (Brenneman), also settled in Rockingham County, Virginia. Henry Rhodes became a bishop in the Virginia Mennonite Conference, along with Henry Shank. They were the first Mennonite bishops in Rockingham and Augusta counties. It is not known whether Henry was ordained bishop before or after the move to Rockingham County. Grace Showalter observes that Henry Rhodes, his brother Frederick (an ordained Mennonite minister), and Henry Shank were involved in a schism of the Virginia Mennonite Church which centered on the issue of whether to replace worship in homes with worship in meeting houses constructed for that purpose. Henry associated himself with the Trissels Mennonite Church. Showalter's information on the schism is based on the history provided by Margaret Burkholder Blosser (1804-1895), daughter of Peter Burkholder, who followed Henry Shank (Heinrick Schenck) and Henry Rhodes

Rockingham County countryside as viewed from the Singers Glen Cemetery (Photo by SAM 2010)
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Henry Rhodes and his siblings were not the first Rhodes families to settle in Virginia. There was a Mennonite preacher living in Page County, Virginia by the name of John Rhodes (Roads). He was massacred by Indians in 1764, along with his wife Eve and six of their thirteen children. To date, there is no established connection between the children of Anthony Rhodes and other Rhodes who settled in Virginia. (Source: Showalter, Grace I. "The Virginia Mennonite Rhodes Families". Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage. Volume III, Number 2. April, 1980.)

In his "History of Rockingham County", John Wayland also notes that Henry Rhodes, along with Henry Shank and Henry Funk (the father-in-law of Henry Rhodes’ daughter Elizabeth), were the first ministers of the Trissels Mennonite Church. The first house of worship for this congregation was built in 1822 and was located four miles west of Broadway. It was the first Mennonite Church built in Rockingham County. Prior to this date, Mennonites met in private homes. (Source: Wayland, John W. PhD. A History of Rockingham County. Published 1912. Available online through the Rockingham County, Virginia: VAGenWeb Project)

Henry Rode must also have been a fairly prosperous landowner in Rockingham County, VA in the early years of the 19th century. In 1809, Henry Rode sold 112 acres of land to his son-in-law, Joseph Funk. This land included a spring near which Joseph built his home and printing business. (Source: MacAllister, Dale E. Donovan Memorial Church in the Singers Glen Community: An Historical Sketch 1875-1975 Coffman Printing and Photography. p. 53)

Henry died on March 18, 1827 and was buried in the Rhodes Family Cemetery near Broadway in Rockingham County. (Source: Swank, J. Robert. Record of Burial Places Rockingham County, Western section Volume 2. Singers Glen. 1967)

In the will of Henry Rhoad, dated March 8, 1826, Henry listed his wife Elizabeth and his children, "namely Henry Rhoad, Anna Showalter, Anthony Rhoad, Jacob Rhoad and Samuel Rhoad." His son Christian is listed as deceased. His daughter Elizabeth Rhodes Funk had also died by this time. Henry lists his grandchildren Jonathan, Elizabeth, and Barbara Funk (children of Elizabeth) and Elizabeth and Frany Road (children of Christian). The grandchildren were each to receive $400 from their grandfather.

The grandchildren's inheritance is also noted in the 1861 will of Joseph Funk (Henry Rhode's son-in-law). In Joseph's will, it is stated that that Jonathan, Elizabeth and Barbara Funk had each inherited four hundred dollars from their grandfather Road. (Source: Funk, Frances. Joseph Funk: A Biography, together with his lineage and all descendants of his youngest son, Benjamin. Hollywood, MD: St. Mary's Press. 1984)

On the next page is a transcription of Henry Rhodes’ will. The source of the transcription is unknown. This is followed by a photocopy of the will as it appears in Will Book 1, Pages 101 and 102 of the Rockingham County Will Books in the Harrisonburg County Courthouse, Harrisonburg Virginia. It is likely not the original, but a handwritten transcription of the will. Many of the Rockingham County court records were burned during the Civil War. As other
copies of the documents were received, they were transcribed into the Will Books. This appears to be the case with the will of Bishop Henry Rhodes. According to an article written in 1980 by Grace Showalter, Henry’s will was thought to have been destroyed. She states that indeed the recorded copy was burned; however, “in recent years the original copy was found stored away in a cupboard in the courthouse at Harrisonburg.” A photocopy of the handwritten original was inserted in Will Book A-2 at p. 281. (Source: Showalter, Grace I. "The Virginia Mennonite Rhodes Families". Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage. Volume III, Number 2. April, 1980.)
Copy of the will of Henry Rhodes, Rockingham Co. Court House.

In the Name of God Amen. I, Henry Rhodes, Son of the County of Rockingham, State of Virginia, being in perfect health and of sound mind, no memory yet falling to mind the moment of my body will be known that is appointed for all men, one to die do make this my Last Will and Testament as the following Manner. First I commend my soul to the Hands of Almighty God who gave it and my body to the earth whereon it came from as touching my worldly goods I dispose of the same as follows. And first I give and bequeath to my beloved wife Elizabeth to the marriage estate I now possess during her natural life and after her death to all the property the lease shall be sold and the money arising from such sale together with the money that may not have disposed of shall be equally divided among all my children namely Henry Rhodes, Anna Rhodes, Anthony Rhodes, Jacob Rhodes, and Susanna. Rhodes, I give and bequeath my lands to the use of my sons to wit, Anthony and Jacob, to them their heirs and assigns forever. Provided they think both Executors or Administrators shall the sum of Five Thousand Three hundred and thirty three dollars and thirty three cents as I have herein that is to say any part of this sum also remainder which may yet remain unpaid as part of the residue of the same lands shall be paid as follows as it becomes due from when I have to know obligations from time to time.
The bottom of the first page of the will is inserted below. (The will was on legal size paper.)

Rockingham County, Virginia was created in 1778 out of a portion of Augusta County. The photo at left shows the Rockingham County Courthouse, located in Harrisonburg, VA. (Photo by SAM, 2010)

The second (and last) page of the will appears on the following page.
Page two of Henry Rhodes’ will:

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