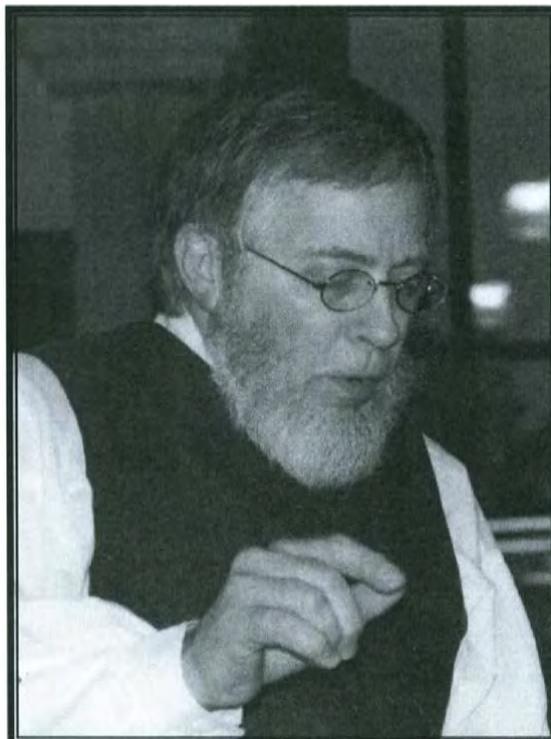


Notes & Comments

In Memoriam: K. Varden Leasa, 1948-2009

On February 12, 2008, an e-mail arrived in my inbox from a "K. Varden Leasa." He was inquiring as to whether those of us at the Quarterly would be interested in seeing an article he'd written about his family's farm. At the time, my co-editors and I were a few months into the job, with our biggest concerns being, "Will we have enough material to publish?" and "Who will write it?" This was a copy editor's dream come true.

"Yes," I quickly replied, and so began a wonderful journey. Two more articles followed in quick succession. It seemed there was no end to Varden's interests and enthusiasm. Over the next six months, we published three pieces, with another in the wings. Varden's material was thoroughly researched, well documented, and, best of all, personal. The more questions I asked, the more details he provided. His footnotes were as interesting as the research itself. He was a font of information about East Whiteland Township and about the Brackbill, Haldeman, and Malin families, some of the earliest to settle in East Whiteland. (See "A Great Valley Legend – Where Did Washington Really Sleep?", *Quarterly* Vol. 45, No.2.)



K. Varden Leasa, courtesy of his wife, Marie.

Sadly, Varden's passion for life was sidelined when he fell ill in August of 2008. He never fully recovered and on August 4th of this year, he passed away. In the meantime, he and his family had been lovingly cared for and supported by their extended family, and by their Mennonite congregation. With deep sorrow and a heavy heart I attended his services on August 8th. During the eulogy and the fellowship afterwards, I came to know a person other than Varden the author and historian.

His life began quietly enough in the hamlet of Frazer. He grew up on the family compound with his grandparents and other resident relatives, in addition to his parents and a brother and sister. It was a prosperous working farm (see "Brackbill Farm Markets," *Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 3), which had been in the family for three generations. As a boy, he was active and inquisitive, two qualities that never changed throughout his life. According to his family, "he loved acting and devising clever, amusing pranks." In the summer, he and his cousins would set up tents to re-enact camp revivals. Varden often campaigned for the part of the preacher, causing much dissension among the players. Once, when his cousins were smarting from a rare (for them) spanking, he proudly told them that he had been spanked by Grandpa Haldeman many times.

I had been puzzled by the fact that Varden graduated from Great Valley High School until I learned that Great Valley was a fallback option after he was expelled from Eastern Mennonite High School. An unfortunate episode involving Varden's verboten Beatles albums and the wheels of a teacher's

van (Varden, in a retaliatory move, attempted to demonstrate just how the confiscation of personal property felt) led to his exit from the school, and later separation from his two accomplices by parental order.

After high school, his life path led him to California, where he earned two degrees and met and married his beloved wife, Marie. Six years later, he returned to Pennsylvania with Marie and their two daughters, Jen and Adrienne. Varden tried different lines of work. Eventually, he landed at Clews and Strawbridge in Frazer, in the Parts Department. There he took great pleasure in selecting the music for the listening pleasure of his co-workers. He played everything from rock to jazz, gospel, rhythm and blues, show tunes, folk, and more. Along the way, he picked up an additional degree.

But that was not enough for this restless spirit. His family says that “running and cycling were interests of Varden’s for many years. He completed the Philadelphia Independence Marathon in 1983. Beginning in 1982, he began commuting to work on his bicycle 25 miles a day. For several years this commute was done on a recumbent bicycle. In 1989, Varden rode his bicycle from San Diego, Calif., to Frazer on a 30-day solo bicycle trip. Ever industrious, he stopped at select cemeteries and graveyards to take rubbings from the tombstones of ancestors and others of interest.”

“Varden was gifted with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and was a lifelong student of history, political science, and languages, including Spanish, Russian, German, and Pennsylvania Dutch. He had attended several universities. He taught classes in Pennsylvania Dutch for the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society. He was involved with the singing groups, the Foresingers and the Table Singers. He had planned to enter graduate study at Millersville University in 2008.”

Varden was passionate, serious, and playful. He was a man of God and of family. One of his life tenets was to “know oneself in order to better know each other.” Through his outreach to family and community, he succeeded in joining them together to honor their shared history and legacy in East Whiteland and its environs. (See “21 M to P: A Milestone Event,” *Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 4.) An example of the kind of thing Varden enjoyed was taking his aunts on an out-of-state road trip, just for the fun of it. Back home, he would create pamphlets with pictures, stories, and an itinerary, as a memento of the trip. He exhaustively compiled a family genealogy and was writing a book about the family history.

At Varden’s Life Celebration, one person after another spoke about how knowing Varden had enriched their lives. I am blessed to have encountered him for an exciting, albeit fleeting period of time. Working with him was always a pleasure. This memorial is but a passing glance at the vibrant life of a gentle man with a fascinating mind and a kind heart; an “old soul,” a dear friend. He is missed.

Bonnie Haughey

Washington’s Headquarters Renovation

The National Park Service has completed renovations on the Washington’s Headquarters complex. In addition to extensive interior repairs, the large parking lot has been removed and the landscape has been restored. The large lot was built to handle the influx of visitors during the bicentennial events of 1976. The nearby Reading Railroad station has also been restored, and will serve as the staging point for tours of the Headquarters complex.

Department of Amplification

Clarissa Dillon has provided some additional detail to expand on her "Eighteenth Century Housewifery" article in the last issue of the Quarterly.

Samuel Johnson's dictionary defined salad as "Food of raw herbs." Herbs were any plants that were not trees. Although some "sallets" contained parboiled ingredients, many more were made by pouring salted, spiced vinegar over them. These, called pickles today, were used to supplement the winter meals when the garden was not producing. (p. 56)

Hartshorn, in the 18th century, was literally deer antler. It was used to set or gel puddings and jellies. The other gelling agents available at that time were calves feet and isinglass, the cleaned, dried, shredded lining of the air-bladders of certain freshwater fish, like sturgeon. (p. 56)

In the 19th century, leavenings were developed to assist in the baking process. First came baking soda and by the end of the century, baking powder as we know it was available. Today, there is an additive, sometimes called for in northern European cookies, like gingerbread, that can be called hartshorn. This is for baked goods and would not set or gel a pudding. (p.56)

Brimstone was another name for sulfur. It could be purchased in powdered form, known as flower or flour of brimstone. This powder was used, commonly with lard, to make a salve for skin problems. When burned in a room, it was used to kill bedbugs and other vermin; directions make it very clear that unless it was used with great caution and understanding, it could kill the user. (p.57)



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