

Roy Wenger interview in 1985 by his grandson Kent Kauffman, son of Ruth Marie Wenger Kauffman.

I was born near Stuarts Draft in Augusta County, Virginia...Shenandoah Valley... on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March, 1900. My father's name was Timothy J. Wenger and my mother's name was Mary Powell Wenger.

I had 8 sisters and one brother. I had six sisters older than me and two sisters and one brother younger than me.

I saw my first automobile about a year or two before we left there. We left there in about 1908, December the 18<sup>th</sup>, 1908, moved down beyond Norfolk. We were at church and the horses were tied around the church yard and this little automobile forded the creek at the bottom of the hill, came up over the hill, a little red automobile, and the horses in the church yard plunged and rared and acted like it was something terrible until the thing was past. And after it passed there was one horse with a saddle, tied to a tree and he kept raring and raring after the automobile had gone by. He was scared.

I don't remember the name of the school but the school yard was next to Springdale Mennonite Church between Waynesboro and Stuarts Draft in the Shenandoah Valley. I think it was called Hall's School, but won't say for sure, but it was the Springdale Church and the children played in the church yard more, I think, than they did in the school yard. The school yard was rather small and on the hillside; more room in the church yard to play. *(Note: The church is located on Hall's School Rd, Waynesboro, Va)*

They played baseball, snowball.

Well, I was quite small when we lived there. I was only in the third grade when we lived there so I can't tell you too much about the school. It was a two room school.

Moving from Augusta County, the Shenandoah Valley, down to Norfolk was a pretty big event. There was no such thing as moving vans like there are today. We had a public sale, kept what we wanted to take along. We sold a lot of things before we left at the public sale. It took several days to haul this car load of stuff down seven miles to Waynesboro to load the car but it only took us...we left home one evening and got down to where we were going the next evening. Father rented a railroad freight car and we loaded belongings in that and shipped it. We had three horses, two cows, a few chickens in the freight car, box car, and we went down on the passenger train to Newport News and took the steamer across to Norfolk.

A friend of fathers', Bishop A.P. Heatwole,, went along in the freight train and fed and watered the animals

My uncle (*A.D. Wenger, Sr.*) with his two seated carriage and a neighbor with a two horse farm wagon was in to meet us and my mother and some of the older girls rode in the carriage with my

uncle and my father and the smaller children, except the real small ones, rode in the wagon. We had about 17 miles to drive out there. We passed the school house, which happened to be at recess, children playing outside, and when they saw us pass on the wagon, it was about a week before Christmas, and one of the boys hollered "Christmas is coming" as we went by.

Our belongings came to Fentress then on freight car, sent across the water on a barge and came on out to Fentress on the railroad and we hauled everything with horses.

When we went to school down beyond Norfolk we had some nice teachers. We had one teacher who was very strict...to the grouchy point. She told you something you'd better do it.

In the spring of 1909 there was a large whale, a dead whale, out on the seashore. The seashore was only about 16 or 18 miles from us. The whale was on the shore between Virginia Beach and Cape Henry. It had washed ashore somewhere, and a boat had brought it to the beach along where the trolley ran from Norfolk to Cape Henry, then to Virginia Beach and back to Norfolk, made a loop, so people could come out on the trolley cars to see the whale. We were supposed to pay a dime to see the whale.

The whale was 65 feet long, I don't know what kind, didn't know there was more than one kind of whale then, I know now, but didn't know then. The tail span of 25 or 26 feet and the measurement of the mouth from one corner to the other was 25 or 26 feet, and was 10 feet through. I think if you propped his mouth open you coulda backed a horse cart in it.

Uncle Amos Wenger, he lived right near us, only had one child that was big enough to go along so he took that child along, in a two seated carriage, one horse. We left home in the morning, the roads were most of em just dirt roads at the time and we had to cross a swamp about 7 miles from home, oh probably, 3/4 of a mile, and the road was made up of poles laid crosswise in the road with dirt piled on, what they called a corduroy road. *(Note: this would have been what is now Mt Pleasant Rd through the swamp, leading to the North Landing Bridge)* and went across there and went on out to the beach, and went down the beach behind the sand dunes, saw the whale.

We came back and it was getting toward evening before we got to the swamp and Uncle stopped and asked a farmer for some pine wood to make torches out of, so he split up an old board and gave us a whole bunch of sticks to light so when we got to the swamp each one of us carried a pine torch, lit, and we walked along the road beside the carriage. One rode in the carriage to drive the horse and the rest all walked along the side. That was through the swamp. We did a lot of walking out there on the sand too. Several miles we walked. The whole trip must have been about 25 or 28 miles from home. We got home about 2 or 4 o'clock in the morning. It was worth it. We walked for miles I tell ya, we walked through the swamp and then walked through the sand on the beach.

We lived on a farm, a few cattle, a few chickens, horses. In Augusta County where we moved from they had what was modern machinery for that time, it was horse drawn of course. But when we got down there it was farmed mostly with little one horse plows, 6" bottom plows. And for

wagons they mostly used carts, to haul hay and to haul anything else and people even used a lot of 'em to ride in to church, to the store and so forth. Of course down there the machinery is modern now but back then it was very backward. There was nothing motor powered.

In free time we played around under the trees and when we got a little older we had bicycles and a little older yet I rode the colts. I don't think I rode them until I was 16 or 18. I mean the colts were unbroken, not used to being ridden.

I was 15 years old when we had our first car, a Model T Ford. I drove it the first year, didn't even have to have a license then. Went around by horse and carriage or bicycle or walked before then. Transportation was horse drawn when I was small. First cars were built about 1890 or so, We lived out in the country, dirt roads. We didn't see cars out in the country.

I saw my first airplane on my way home from school. We had four and a half to five miles to school and we drove, my sister and I, a buggy. And on the way home we stopped to let out a passenger who rode with us, another school scholar, and we heard a big noise, looked around and saw this thing flying and it flew down the country and scared all the chickens, chickens run under the buildings. We knew about airplanes but we were impressed.

I started learning the carpenter trade at 35 cents an hour. Farm help got 10 cents an hour

I got married in 1927 to Marion Rosenberger. She was 21 and I was 27. We met by accident in a way, I was riding with somebody else and stopped to see her brother and saw her but I didn't go see her till about a year later. I simply wrote her for a date. I had a little Chevrolet coupe I courted her in. *(Note: Roy was then working as a carpenter in the Washington D.C. area with other Mennonite tradesmen and was visiting Pennsylvania with a friend when he met Marion)*

I farmed part of the time. I farmed father's farm and I farmed another farm and I bought a tract of woodland off the other farm that I rented and built our house in this 10 acres of woodland. *(Note: This is now the Smithson's residence at 1757 Mt Pleasant Rd, Chesapeake)*

The depression came about the 1930's, really started a little before the 30's. We were married in '27 and the Depression had started then already. They talk about the Depression in the '30's but it started before that. Couldn't hardly get a job, a steady job. Wages were low. Food was cheap. They didn't live like they do now.

*(In WWI)* Norfolk was a port where a lot of men, Norfolk and Newport News, a lot of war material was shipped from. Men, mules, they used a lot of mules over there.

WWII it was jeeps and trucks and things like that. We didn't feel very good about it of course, at least the first part of the war when the Germans were conquering one country after another but later on it turned. The Germans ran out of food and materials and the other countries drove them back.

I don't know as I like the past better than the present. The attitudes of people and the higher

standards of living and the low standards of morals and so forth as we have now, we didn't have then. It wasn't near as bad back then.

I'm retired now. I build little furniture as a hobby. I've built 33 grandfather clocks. Life is alright, it gets a little boring because I can't work very long. I work anywhere from a half hour to an hour a day, still making pieces of furniture. Don't have any other hobbies, don't have a car anymore, can't see well enough to drive a car anymore.