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Review of: *Phebe's Home: A Woman's Life in the Warwick River Mennonite Colony*—Jo Anne Kraus

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Review of: **Kraus, Jo Anne. 2021. *Phebe's Home: A Woman's Life in the Warwick River Mennonite Colony*. Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press. Pp. 411. \$16.00.**

By Kathryn R. Swartz
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Phebe's Home is the story of Phebe Shenk Kraus's life, researched and written by her granddaughter, incorporating Phebe's and others' handwritten letters and diaries. It is also the broader story of the Denbigh Mennonite farm colony in Tidewater, VA, from its beginning in the early 1900s until it became a neighborhood within the sprawling city of Newport News.

At first glance, I thought the main audience for this book would be Phebe's family and those who lived in or visited the Denbigh community. After reading the book, I would say the audience is anyone who would enjoy reading about a strong woman who rose above a difficult childhood, who made the most of her limited education, became a lifelong learner, and who contributed her best in the ways she was taught and suited to give. This book is for anyone who wants to read about the era when Phebe and her contemporaries within the Mennonite church were first faced with the increasing availability of radio, television, and Christian higher education.

Many details of community life about other families both in Denbigh, and also in the Harrisonburg, Virginia area, are included in this book. George R. Brunk lived in Denbigh, and from there tried hard to push back against the changes in the Mennonite Church during the early part of the 20th century, when more and more Mennonites accepted radio and television into their homes. George encouraged Phebe in her writing pursuits.

Phebe's father, Abe Shenk (missing one arm from an accident), moved his family to Denbigh when the settlement was new. Phebe was born four years later, in 1902. They struggled to earn a living. After Phebe's mother died, her father married Samantha Showalter from Harrisonburg, Virginia. Phebe remained very close to her sib-

lings throughout her life; the sisters kept a circle letter going most of the time they were adults.

Clyde Kraus and Phebe went to Washington D.C. and married without telling anyone. Possibly due to its abrupt start, Phebe's marriage had its difficulties. Her husband was not as well-educated as she was and did not really support or even appreciate her writing interests. In mid-life, due to physical problems, he switched from working construction jobs to diagnosing illnesses with a Radioclast machine and selling supplements. (The FDA attempted to remove such machines from use due to their unproven claims to help.) Clyde's work involved a lot of travel. Sometimes Phebe traveled with him. His charm and confidence, along with what must have been his intuition, caused patients to flock to him for his services.



Phebe raised three sons (a daughter died in infancy due to cleft palate complications). She efficiently fulfilled housekeeping and gardening duties and also opened her home to others. During World War II, many people of the Denbigh colony, including Clyde and Phebe, rented rooms or apartments to soldiers or their families from the nearby military base.

Perhaps one of the biggest contributions of Phebe's life, besides influencing her sons for the Lord, was to help launch and edit the *Warwick River Tide* (1945-1967), a small church community paper that Phebe and a friend, Eva Carper, edited and mailed 25 times a year. Phebe resigned as its editor in 1961 as pressures from her husband and his deteriorating mental equilibrium made it difficult for her to continue. But until her sudden death in 1967, she continued to be involved, offering editing support to the *Tide* staff.

Phebe died 56 years ago. I am left to ponder the sort of legacy my life will leave, if, more than 50 years after my death, someone would publish a book about how my life influenced others.

Kathryn Swartz lives in Rockingham, Virginia, and in reading this book, discovered her husband James is the son of Jo Anne Kraus's third cousin.

Order from Masthof (masthof.com / 610-286-0258 / 219 Mill Road, Morgantown, PA 19543).