

Naomi E. Lehman, 95, of Berne, Indiana passed away at 4:00 a.m. Saturday, February 21, 2009 in the Swiss Village Retirement Community in Berne, Indiana.

Naomi was born on January 6, 1914 in Berne, Indiana the daughter of David and Marie (Soldner) Neuenschwander, both deceased. She married Leslie Lehman on August 24, 1937 and he preceded her in death on January 22, 1994.

As a child growing up in Berne, Naomi enjoyed lining her dolls up the stair steps and teaching them Sunday School. She told people that if she were a boy she would be a preacher when she grew up. She had a gift for memorization and easily mastered a large repertoire of poems and biblical passages. Naomi excelled in recitation and debate contests in high school, and majored in English at Wheaton College before she and Les married and raised their family.

Having grown up loving literature, she turned to writing as her major avocation in the 1950s. She began to conduct serious research on the history of Berne and prepared an elaborate pageant for the community's 1952 centennial celebration. Her children remember the years as a time when the dining room table was stacked with documents and the sound of the typewriter was constant background music to the activities around the home. There was always, however, enough space left on the table for her to supervise her children's homework and the completion of Sunday School Quarterlies.

In 1956, Naomi began writing scripts for the "Songs of Praise" radio program which the First Mennonite Church produced for broadcast on WOWO, Fort Wayne. She found this ministry rewarding and wrote radio scripts for 21 years before moving on to the development and writing of the church newsletter, "Update".

After her children were grown, Naomi pursued a dream of many years, writing the history of Berne's First Mennonite Church. Taking leave of absence from her many years of teaching Sunday School, she plunged enthusiastically into church records, conducted oral interviews, and read widely in the history of the Anabaptist traditions. The product of her several years of writing and editing, "The Pilgrimage of a Congregation," was published and well received as an insightful and analytical example of congregation history.

Following the death of her husband several years after their move to Swiss Village in 1988, Naomi's eyesight began to deteriorate significantly and she fulfilled her love of reading by listening to books on tape. She also continued to pursue the joy of playing Scrabble with family members and a series of Swiss Village friends. The last years of her life continued to be enriched by her close contact with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She delighted in the annual Thanksgiving family gatherings at the Schug House and in the family hymn sings which were for her the high point of these celebrations.

Naomi is survived by a son, Thomas (Mary Jo) Lehman of Chapel Hill, North Carolina; a son, Neil (Edna) Lehman of Indiana, Pennsylvania; a son, George (Anita) Lehman of Bluffton, Ohio; and a daughter Mary Lehman (Michael) Yoder of Goshen, Indiana. Other survivors include a sister Agnes (Maurice) Burkholder of Boise, Idaho; a brother Kenneth (Anna Barbara) Neuenschwander of San Antonio, Texas; eleven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Naomi was preceded in death by a brother, Emerson Neuenschwande

A memorial service will be held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, February 28, 2009 in the First Mennonite Church in Berne, Indiana with the Rev. Anita Rediger and the Rev. Dennis Schmidt officiating. There will be a private graveside service at the M.R.E. Cemetery of rural Berne.

Family and friends will be received from 2:30 - 8:00 p.m. Friday, February 27, 2009 in the Swiss Village Auditorium. Preferred memorials are to Bluffton University or the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Yager-Kirchhofer Funeral Home online obits (accessed 1/25/2012)