

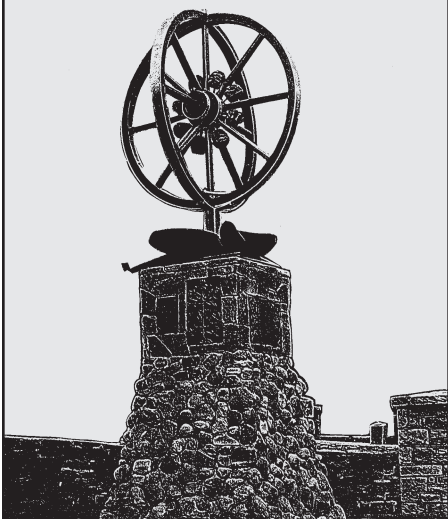
Ontario Mennonite History

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Johann Thiessen KGB file discovery: Discovery of Soviet Secret Police File reveals fate of Mennonite Farmer in Ukraine

By Harold Thiessen

My grandmother never really knew what happened to her husband, Johann Thiessen of the Mennonite village of Klippenfeld, in the northeast corner of the Ukrainian/South Russian Molotschna colony. My father and his younger sister were also unaware of his fate.

Johann was arrested by the Soviet secret police (the NKVD, later known as the KGB) in late December 1937 and never returned. Enquiries were made after the Second World War which resulted in the standard answer: Likely died in a Soviet labour camp, no details.

The Thiessens had lived in Klippenfeld since its founding in 1865. According to my grandmother, in an interview I conducted with her in 1980, my great-great-grandfather dug a hole, put a roof over it and started farming his granted 65 dessiatines (about 175 acres) of land. The farmyard property in the village sloped down to the Tokmak River.

My grandfather Johann was born in 1892, the eldest son of nine children. By all accounts he had a happy and prosperous childhood. The Thiessens were productive farmers (raising grains and sheep) but never expanded their land holdings beyond their original allotment. In 1917, Johann served in the *Forsteidiensst*, (forestry service) as an alternative to military service under the Russian Czar.

Klippenfeld suffered greatly through the revolution and civil war years from 1918 to 1920 and for a time was protected by the *Selbstschutz*, the controversial Mennonite self-defence force created to defend against the marauding Machnov anarchists. The Red Army eventually gained control, some stability returned, and Johann married my grandmother, Helena Penner, in 1920. They had four children from 1921 to 1926.

In 1922, they benefitted from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) famine relief efforts; my grandmother said they were saved by the “*Amerikanische Küche*,” the American kitchen. Life became more normal and there was



Johann Thiessen at about age 25 while in the Forestry Service around 1917.

hope that they could continue their lives under the new regime. Many, however, emigrated to Canada, including Johann’s younger brother J.J. Thiessen who settled in Saskatoon in 1926.

Johann chose to stay as his father did not want to leave “mother” Russia and Johann, as the oldest son, was responsible for the farm. However, according to my grandmother, they did consider getting out in the 1929 rush to Moscow, already selling some of their belongings. But when the Soviets cracked down on emigration, they gave up that plan.

Unfortunately, things got worse. The rise of Stalin to the Soviet leadership and his subsequent five-year economic plans made life more and more difficult. As the Soviets exerted their control, Mennonite clergy and others were arrested, taxes were raised, churches closed and farming was collectivized.

My grandmother recalled that in 1932, my grandfather heard that he was about to be arrested and fled immediately to Memrik, a larger Mennonite settlement



*The Thiessen family in Klippenfeld in 1925.
Johann is third from the right in the back row. In front of him is his wife
holding their son, Harold Thiessen's father, who was born in 1924.*

about 50 km to the north. He came back to fetch her and the two older boys while my father and his sister stayed with relatives in Klippenfeld. My grandparents spent six months of the winter of 1932/33 in Memrik, sharing one room with another family and mainly surviving on fish from a nearby river. My grandmother sold her remaining jewelry (at the government Torgsin stores) to buy food and they also received some money sent from relatives in Canada. The way my grandmother explained it, Johann then heard that he was no longer sought by the authorities and they returned to Klippenfeld soon after. Curiously, she never specifically mentioned the massive Ukrainian famine of 1932/33.

I have very little information on the next few years, however, my grandmother did report that Johann worked in the *Kolkoz* (collective farm) in charge of the farm animals while she was the head of the milking station. She also reported that he was arrested by the Soviet authorities a number of times but each time he was released again, until his final arrest in December 1937. She alleged that one Mennonite villager, a Johann Dick, had informed on her husband resulting in this final arrest.

In 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union and as the German Wehrmacht approached, my father's two older

brothers, Johann and Jacob, were rounded up with all the other young Mennonite men and marched east, in an effort by the Soviets to eliminate potential supporters of a German conquest. They were never heard from again.

My father escaped this fate as he was digging defensive tank trenches for the Soviets on the west side of the Dnieper River and was not able to cross back before the German forces arrived and thus was saved. He made it back to Klippenfeld about five or six weeks later, after the Dnieper bridges were repaired. He had a sweet reunion with his mother and sister which was mixed with despair that his two brothers were gone.

As the war turned in favour of the Soviets in the fall of 1943, my grandmother and my aunt joined the Great Trek to German-occupied Poland and eventually made it to a village in northern Germany. After a stint in the German military and capture by the Americans including a year of near starvation in a Prisoner-of-war camp, my father was reunited with his mother and sister. In the next few years, they all made it to Canada.

My grandmother left Ukraine not knowing what had become of her husband or her two elder sons. Even up to her death in 1988 she never knew Johann Thiessen's fate. Similarly, my

father died in 2003, not ever knowing the fate of his father. However, in 2018 I was able to retrieve Johann Thiessen's arrest record from the Ukrainian state archive in Zaporizhia, Ukraine. This archive discovery provided a picture of the final days of Johann Thiessen and the circumstances and time of his death.

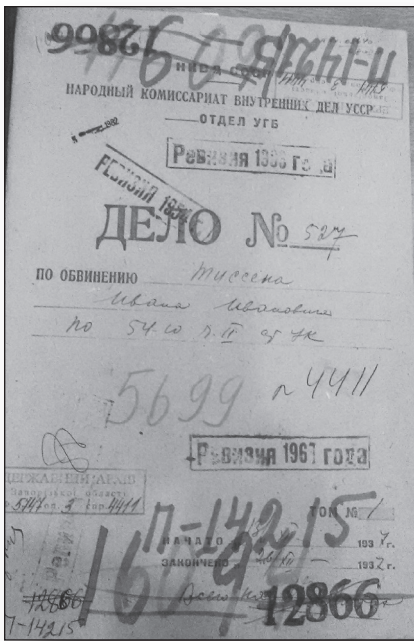
Ukrainian State Archive Arrest Documents

In the early publicity for the 2018 Mennonite Heritage Cruise on the Dnieper River, it was made known that cruise participants would be permitted to visit the State Archive in Zaporizhia. After submitting the name, birthdate, place of birth and marriage date of my grandfather to the archive, I was told that they had a file on Johann Thiessen and that I could retrieve/review it. I registered for the cruise.

On July 28, 2018, I was indeed able to access the file, with the help of a translator, and took photos of each page of the 30-page Johann Thiessen file. I later had the file contents fully translated to English. There were two other families on the cruise who were also allowed access to files of their loved ones.

The file contained the record of the arrest and charges against my grandfather, witness "statements" from neighbours and a signed "confession." In summary, the charges involved: carrying out anti-soviet activities and agitation, recruitment of insurgents to foment an armed struggle against the Soviets and praising the German fascist system. The arrest date was shown as December 20, 1937. He was held in a prison in Melitopol, about 60 km away to the south. The evidence found in the file was passed to a "troika" in Dnipropetrovsk (a larger city further up the Dnieper River). A guilty sentence, dated December 26, 1937, was pronounced along with the punishment: Execution. Another subsequent document confirmed that the sentence was carried out, indicating that Johann Thiessen was executed on January 11, 1938, likely shot in Melitopol and buried there.

In general, the file indicated that my grandfather was a *Kulak*, (a capitalist owner of land). The file showed that he owned 65 dessiatina of land and had farm equipment which he "donated" to the collective farm (the *Kolkoz*) in 1932.



Cover page of the NKVD file
for Johann Thiessen

The gist of the charges against him was that he advocated for a German takeover to subvert the Soviet system. These were common charges in the time of the Stalinist Purges/Terror of 1937-1938. A summary of the documents is shown below:

The Documents

The file begins with a document indicating that a proceeding should be initiated against Johann Thiessen (Ivan Ivanovich Thiessen—Johann, son of Johann) under Article 54-10 of the Ukrainian criminal code, for “systematic counter-revolutionary activity and spreading nationalistic propaganda among the population and winning over supporters for fascist Germany.”

Then an **Arrest Warrant** follows indicating that a “Comrade Sawatsky” was to carry out the search and arrest

of Johann Thiessen and declares that “all organs of the Soviet Government must render legitimate assistance to the bearer of this warrant.” This is followed by a **Search Record**, indicating that the Thiessen premises was searched but no property seized, and that Johann Thiessen was detained in Melitopol prison.

In the **Questionnaire of the Accused**, dated December 21, 1937, there is a list of 18 questions for Johann Thiessen. Specific items include: birthyear; place of birth; place of work (the *Kolkhoz*); social and political background (he is named as a *Kulak*, and it is noted that he was de-kulakized meaning that his land and possessions were taken and given to the collective farm in 1933 and that he was subject to exile outside the village); party membership (not a member); property status (poor person); physical condition (healthy); criminal record (none); list of family members (wife, Elena Yakovlevna or Helena daughter of Jacob, 37 years old and four children including two of school age). This document was signed by my grandfather.

The **Statement of Medical Certification** indicates my grandfather was healthy and ominously includes that, “He is in condition to be transported as a prisoner and to live in the North.”

The **Certificate from the Village Council** was provided, confirming his status as a *Kulak*, because his father had 65 dessiatins of land and owned agricultural machinery. It is also noted that he was de-kulakized in 1933 and was subject to exile but he escaped from the village (a reference to the Memrik episode). It was signed by the chairman of the Village Council. The **Letter of Reference** (from the Collective Farm Chairman), had similar information and added that “his attitude toward work was hostile.”

State Security Agency Record of Interrogation

This is a 20-item document, dated December 21, 1937, with much of the same information as the previous documents but it also certified that: he had not been subject to previous repressions (convictions and arrests); he had not been granted any awards; he was not on the military register; he had not served in the Red Army; he had not served in the White or any other workers or peasants armies; and had not participated in bands, workers and peasant organizations and/or uprisings.

Witness Statements (from three fellow Klippenfeld Villagers)

Dated December 21, 1937, these handwritten statements provided the evidence of three Klippenfeld villagers who testified with regard to Johann Thiessen’s anti-Soviet activities. Three signed statements are included. **J. Dick, J. Franz and G. Fast** are asked essentially the same question: What do you know about anti-Soviet activity of Ivan Ivanovich Thiessen?

They all reply in a similar vein:

- Ivan Ivanovich Thiessen was carrying out anti-Soviet propaganda among the German population, saying that soon Germany will conquer Ukraine and restore a fascist dictatorship, under which we, the Germans, would do very well.
- He said we would need to help the Germans and need to organize insurgent units to fight against the Soviet power. He said he would personally hang communists whom he had been hating for a long time and in case of war, he would not show mercy.
- He praised German fascism saying that people in Germany live well

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and lack nothing; he said we should also seek for restoration of private property similar to what they have in Germany.

- He had a hostile attitude toward the Soviet Power. He said he would be the first person to take up arms and start shooting all enemies as he could not tolerate any more victimization as it had been lasting already for several years.

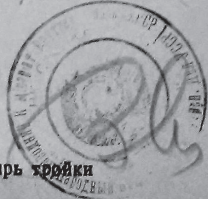
Testimony of Johann Thiessen, December 21, 1937

In this hand-written document, my grandfather confesses to various charges and signs under each one. He pleads guilty to carrying out counter-revolutionary activity. He says that he:

“Got angry with the Soviet Power for being de-kulakized and got on the path of struggle with the Soviet Power. I developed hatred toward the Soviet Power and Soviet activists and communists who de-kulakized me. I could not become reconciled with the existing Soviet system. I carried out anti-Soviet agitation among the population against collective farms and said that private property will be restored. I was spreading provocative rumours about the war of Germany against the Soviet Union and that the Soviet Power will be defeated and a fascist dictatorship restored. I urged the German population to pull together and in case of war, to come out together against the Soviet Power in armed action. I used to say that in case of the war, I will take arms and take an active part in the struggle against the existing Soviet system and will ruthlessly crackdown locally on communists and village activists.” He signed his name.

On the question of who recruited him for counter revolutionary work, he said: “Nobody recruited me. The reason I got to the path of struggle against the Soviet Power was my anger over being de-kulakized. I have nothing else to add. The above is an accurate account of my statement. I have read it and put my signature.” Then he signs his name.

This confession is followed by a **Conclusion to Indict** where it is stated that Johann Thiessen “is carrying out

Выписка из протокола № <u>68</u> 16	
заседания тройки при Днепропетровском Облуправлении НКВД—УССР	
От <u>26 декабря</u> 193 <u>7</u> г.	
СЛУШАЛИ	ПОСТАНОВИЛИ
<p>106. Дело Ротфронтовского РО НКВД по обвинению ТИССЕНА Ивана Ивановича 1892 г. рожд., б/кулака, раскулаченного том, что до дня ареста проводил вербовку повстанческих кадров среди немецкого населения для вооруженной борьбы с Советской властью, а также проводил контр агитацию и восхвалял фашистский строй.</p>	<p>ТИССЕНА Ивана Ивановича РАССТРЕЛИТЬ Все, лично ему принадлежащее, имущественно конфисковать.</p>
	
Верно: Секретарь тройки	

The sentence and punishment page of the NKVD file for Johann Thiessen

counter-revolutionary insurgent activity in favour of fascist Germany. He has a hostile attitude toward the existing Soviet system, carried out counter-revolutionary work among the local German population for preparation and recruitment of insurgents for armed uprising against the Soviet system in case of a war between Germany and the USSR. He propagandized ideas of the German fascism, praising life and order in Germany. Alongside with this he expressed terroristic intentions in case of war between Germany and the USSR, saying: ‘I will mercilessly do away with village activists and communists inside the country.’

“The counter-revolutionary activity of the accused Ivan Ivanovich Thiessen has been confirmed by witness testimonies and personal confession of the accused himself.”

The document concludes indicating that this case is to be sent for the consideration of the Special Troika and notes that the accused is incarcerated in the Melitopol prison.

Then there is a **Ruling by the Dnepropetrovsk NKVD Agency Troika**, dated December 26, 1937, which indicates that his case had been heard and pronounces the punishment:

“106. The case of Rot-Front Rayon Office of the NKVD on accusation of Ivan Ivanovich THIESEN, born in 1892, former kulak, de-kulakized. Prior to his arrest he carried out recruitment of insurgents among the German population with a purpose of armed struggle against the Soviet Power, and also carried out agitation and praised the fascist system.”

A Ruling is shown:

“Ivan Ivan THIESEN
TO BE SHOT

All belongings owned privately by him are subject to confiscation.”

The last document is a statement dated January 11, 1938, which indicates that on this date the sentence was carried out—**Capital Punishment by Shooting**—by decision of the Troika of the NKVD Directorate in the Dnepropetrovsk Oblast on December 26, 1937. It also indicates that his body was committed to earth.

This concluding document is signed by a Senior NKVD agent named Turbovsky. Later investigation has revealed that Noam Turbovsky was a senior NKVD agent, noted for personally executing over 2100 prisoners in the late 1930s.

1989 Exoneration

One additional document, dated June 26, 1989, was added to this file. It summarizes the overall case against Johann Thiessen and then indicates:

“I.I. Thiessen comes within the provisions of Article 1 of the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR of January 16, 1989: ‘On additional measures to restore justice in regards of victims of repressions that took place during 1930 - 1940s and early 1950s.’”

This is signed by the Deputy Prosecutor of the Zaporozhye Oblast [Province] V.A. NESTERENKO and the Head of Investigatory Department of the KGB Agency in the Zaporozhye oblast, Lieutenant Colonel Yu. P. KOBETS.

And so, presumably, the name of Johann Thiessen is cleared in the eyes of the Soviet government and security agencies. He was in retrospect, found innocent.

Concluding Comments

With regard to the signed confession of Johann Thiessen, he was, no doubt, tortured under interrogation to sign those confessions. However, surprisingly, his signature on all documents is bold, strong and definitive. Could this be seen as an act of defiance as in “they will not break me” or of resignation, hoping that a clean confession would result in a lesser sentence?

With regard to the three signed witness statements incriminating my grandfather, these men were likely

also tortured and encouraged to “name names” to alleviate their discomfort or to save their own lives. My grandmother knew that one of the men (J. Dick), the one she felt was responsible, did make it to Canada after the war. Did he survive because he “named names”?

On the other hand, there have been numerous reports of Mennonites in these times who ingratiated themselves with the local Soviet leadership for personal gain (for example, policeman Sawatsky). Could this be the case for Mr. Dick and the others?

One major encouraging factor was that the records clearly show that my grandfather did not name anyone else. He wrote, “Nobody recruited me.” Would this be a primary reason for his execution and if he had named others would he have survived as at least one of his fellow villagers did?

My grandmother reported that her husband was arrested a number of times in the early to mid-1930s. I was hoping that this file would contain evidence of these arrests as well, but they did not. I still wonder if there are other files, yet to be uncovered, that would have recorded these arrests and interrogations.

With regard to the charges of my grandfather’s anti-Soviet activity and encouraging a German fascist take-over: While these charges were levied against almost all Mennonites arrested (due to their German background), these sentiments were likely exactly what Johann thought at that time after experiencing life in the Soviet system. The de-kulakization process, creation of collective farms, and the loss of his independence and the police-state he found himself in, likely did not please him.

Another question would be: How much did the Mennonites of Ukraine even know about Germany and whether German rule presented a viable or desired option? Propaganda from the Soviets would have been very negative toward Germany in these pre-war years.

So, in the end, these Ukrainian archive documents provide a definitive story of the arrest and death of Johann Thiessen. It is unfortunate that my grandmother and father had passed way before access was provided to these files. However, it is also fairly miraculous that these records have survived and been released after all these years. Also astonishing is how detailed and well-ordered the files were.

Luckily my Tante Leni was still alive last year when I returned with these records and she came to know her father’s fate. It gave her a great sense of closure before her death in early 2019 at the age of 93.

Harold Thiessen is a retired civil servant living in Toronto, who has developed an intense interest in the history of his family in the Molotschna and their experience of the Russian Revolution, the consolidation of Soviet power, collectivization, repression and purges, World War 2 and the Great Trek, Mennonite military service with the Germans, and their eventual post-war immigration to Canada.

J. Winfield Fretz Publication Fund in Ontario Mennonite Studies Sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

Dr. J. Winfield Fretz was the first president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.
This fund is named in his honour.

The fund is available to any individual or charitable, church or community-based organization that requires financial support for the publication of research as a book, film or other form of media.

Projects should illuminate the experience of Mennonites in Ontario.

Normally up to \$2,000 is available per project. Applications are accepted twice yearly, May 1 and December 1.
More information: mhso.org/content/fretz-publication-fund

The Elmira Life and Work Skills program

An innovative collaboration between public secondary schooling and conservative Mennonites

By Barb Draper

The Elmira Life and Work School (ELAWS) has been an innovative way for a public school board and a religious minority to work together in a mutually beneficial way, explained Janice Harper as she addressed the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario on June 22, 2019 at Elmira Mennonite Church. She completed her Master of Arts Degree in History in June 2019 which wrapped up her research of the ELAWS program. She had personal experience, having worked with the ELAWS program for nine years.

In the 1960s, when small rural schools were being consolidated into larger schools, some Conservative Mennonite groups began their own parochial schools. William Davis was Minister of Education in Ontario at the time and a compromise was reached with these Conservative Mennonites that a child of 14 could be excused from further education if the child was needed on their parents' farm. This "understanding" has continued as many children of Old Order, Markham-Waterloo, Independent Old Order (David Martin) and some other groups do not educate their children beyond grade eight. These young teenagers are understood to be apprentices, learning from their parents.

By the 1990s, enrolment at public schools was declining. Local school officials were concerned because the number of traditionalist Mennonites not attending high school gave Waterloo Region a higher drop-out rate. There was also concern about the school attendance of some Low German Mennonite children whose parents had migrated from Mexico and other Latin American countries. Their parents usually did not live on farms.

Meanwhile, traditionalist Mennonites looked at the future and saw that their young people could not enter professional trades without high school diplomas. And so, in 2004, a meeting was held at the private school at Countryside Mennonite Fellowship near Hawkesville. Among those invited to attend the meeting were representatives from the high school and parents of conservative Mennonites who had attended public schools. About 100 people attended the meeting.

The representatives from Elmira District Secondary School were ready to be accommodating, partly to raise their enrolment but also to see better educated young people. Meanwhile Mennonite parents were interested in an emphasis on practical skills and a way to get ready for trade schools.

The Elmira Life and Work Skills program began with segregated classes where students spent one or two days a week at the school and three or four days in which they worked either for a family member or for someone from their church. Classes were held in the Lions Hall about a block from the regular campus for the first few years, but later moved into a portable on the school campus. One of the reasons for the move was to have better access to the shop tools and family studies facilities in the school.

Segregation from the rest of the school can be an issue, but a polite debate has allowed this segregation. In spite of changes in leadership at the school, the program has survived and flourished. Harper described success of the program as "modest and fragile" because it has not led to an embracing of secondary schooling, but its value is recognized, both by the families and the school.

ELAWS teachers have always been encouraged to be understanding of their students and to respect their values. Most students are from Midwest Fellowship congregations or the Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference, although there are eight different groups involved.

Some of Harper's former students attended the meeting in June and were very positive about the opportunities that the program gave them. One now works in Early Childhood Education, another is an electrician. Jeff Martin, the current coordinator of ELAWS, commented that finding work placements is not too much of a problem. When asked how they can do all the homework if they only attend school a couple days a week, the students replied that they work hard.



The Elmira Life and Work Skills website



The Mennonite Story celebrates 40 years



The Mennonite Story celebrated its 40th anniversary with a breakfast on Sept. 28, 2019 at Waterloo North Mennonite Church. As well as reminiscences by John Ruth, one of the original visionaries for this project, the celebration recognized Del Gingrich, who served as the manager for the past 20 years and retired at the end of 2019.

“Del has been gracious and generous with his time,” said Nelson Scheifele in his tribute to Gingrich. Scheifele pointed

out that because of the many years Gingrich served as principal at Linwood and Three Bridges Public Schools, where many of the students were from traditional Mennonite families, he gained knowledge and insight into their faith and practices.

In 2018, visitors from 90 different countries signed the guest book. Gingrich engaged many of these visitors in conversation.

“Twenty years is a long time for a volunteer commitment,” said Schiefele.

Reflections of a retired manager *By Del Gingrich*

It was a pleasure to serve as manager of The Mennonite Story, starting in 1999. Some years ago, a well-intentioned friend asked me if I ever considered retiring and doing something I really like. I replied that I was already doing that. Nevertheless, on the last day of 2019 it was time.

Part of the pleasure was sharing responsibilities with many volunteers, including those no longer with us: Isobel Bauman, Reta Martin, Marie Snider, Mabel and Louis Sauder, Aden Bauman, Mel Weber, Lloyd Martin, Myron Stevanus, and George Wallace. All were members of local Mennonite congregations. Their contributions were appreciated.

Our visitors included an international crowd from approximately 90 countries. Some lived in countries with an Anabaptist history, others had Mennonites moving into their areas in recent years. For many, “Amish” was a familiar term and the most frequently asked question was, “What’s the difference between Amish and Mennonites?”

As has always been the case, it was helpful to clarify that the family they may have seen travelling through St. Jacobs in a horse and buggy represented but one small Mennonite group among many groups.

Many of our guests were on family vacations that included a learning or experiential component. Others were foreign students in Canada to learn English or attend university. People found us to be a dependable source of information for school assignments, research papers and news articles. Representatives from Mennonite congregations came with faith exploration classes. We were on the itineraries of international school groups and conferences delegates.

A major change during my time was the complete redoing of the place, answering the question of whether we would continue with a new look or close the doors for good. When the project was completed it was well received and brought new energy. It also clearly indicated the commitment of key partners in moving forward with improved audio and visual displays. The redoing included making both levels of the building accessible.

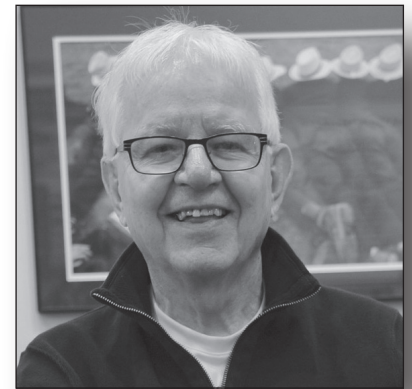
On many days, The Mennonite Story became an informal gathering place for people of many nationalities, races, ethnicities, and religions. At the end of the day our guest book had the names of dozens of people from around the world. It was remarkable.

“*Daedanhae*; it’s wonderful!” Due to the generosity of a local Mennonite family, visitors can listen to audio narrations throughout the museum, in nine languages, including Korean. *Ullneun gamsahaessda*, we were grateful.

We took seriously our responsibility to address misinformation about Mennonites in the media, as it was brought to our attention.

During my time at The Mennonite Story we started a step-on-guide service for bus excursions through local townships. We stopped for prearranged visits to the *dawdi-haus* of an Old Order Mennonite family. One visit included an informal “*dawdie-haus* concert” performed by a male choir from the Netherlands.

“*Stille Nacht, Hellige Nacht*,” sung by a soloist, sounded beautiful. It was a memorable occasion, one of many over twenty years at The Mennonite Story.



Del Gingrich (Photo courtesy of Woolwich Observer)

The Mennonite Story – Past and Present

Forty years ago, Milo and Laura Shantz along with other Mennonite church leaders had a dream. Tourists were coming to the area wanting to know more about the “plain people.” What if there was a place where their curiosity could be nourished, where we might help share the story of the Old Order Mennonites, the Amish, and the broader world-wide Mennonite family? In the summer of 1979, The Meeting Place opened its doors.

Over the past 40 years, more than 1 million visitors have come through the doors. The Meeting Place eventually became known as The Visitor Centre and then finally The Mennonite Story. The mission has remained the same, to creatively and respectfully share our history, culture and faith.

Thank you to those early visionaries, to the Shantz family for their moral and financial support and to the numerous dedicated managers and volunteers.

From the brochure celebrating the 40th anniversary of The Mennonite Story

New Amish Mennonite genealogical website

Bruce Jantzi has launched a new website providing genealogical information for Amish Mennonite families in Canada at <http://amishmennonitesofcanada.com>. The website has introductions and information for Amish Mennonite immigrants who settled or passed through Upper Canada (Ontario) in the 1800s. It builds on the extensive research done by Lorraine Roth. There are 128 family names on the site, but only about one third of them have information posted at this time. More family information will be posted as it is prepared.

Bruce has been researching his ancestors since he was 18 years old, and before Lorraine died in 2013, she passed on to Bruce a copy of her digital files and gave him permission to update and publish her work as new information was found. He is very interested in Amish Mennonite genealogy and the church roots in Europe.

Presently Bruce Jantzi is serving as pastor of a Mennonite Church in the village of Shipintsi, Chernovtsi Oblast in Ukraine. Bruce and his wife, Ruthann and their family have been involved in establishing Anabaptist churches in Ukraine since 1993.



New book on Mennonite history planned

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada is utilizing the resources of Mennonite universities in Canada to research and write an updated history book on the history of Mennonites in Canada from 1970-2020. They have invited Conrad Grebel University College Archivist-Librarian Laureen Harder-Gissing to co-author this book with Brian Froese, Associate Professor of History at Canadian Mennonite University. Laureen and Brian will collaborate on this project over the next few years.

“Some of us may find it hard to believe that the 1970s are now considered ‘history,’ while others will regard that decade as the ancient past,” reflected Laureen. “Many remarkable changes have occurred among Canadian Mennonite communities in the past 50 years. I look forward to hearing and telling these stories.”

“How should Mennonites negotiate change in everything from theology to technology to culture? How have concepts and

concerns regarding ‘worldliness’ changed? Or reading the Bible? Or the meaning of Mennonite?” asks Brian. “It will be exciting to sift through scores of accounts, reflections, and influences that have impacted Mennonite beliefs and practices over the decades.”

Conrad Grebel has a long tradition of partnering with the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. The first two volumes of MHSC’s “Mennonites in Canada” series (1786-1940) were authored by Frank H. Epp, who was researching the third volume at the time of his death. (The third volume, covering the period 1939-1970, was written by T.D. Regehr.) At the request of MHSC, Grebel history professor Marlene Epp wrote *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History*, in 2008. Several archival collections in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario were boosted by these projects.

From the Archives

The Mennonite Archives of Ontario closed for the first time in its 79-year history on March 17, 2020. However, there are still ways to access some of the resources the Archives has to offer.

- I can be contacted by telephone at **519-885-0220 x24238** or email at marchive@uwaterloo.ca.
Email is preferable for a quicker response.
- From our homepage at grebel.ca/mao, you can take a look at these links:
 - **Find genealogical resources**, including online resources
 - Check out our “**Help! I’m a congregational historian!**” page
 - Enjoy **Passing the Time with the Archives**, with colouring pages, online puzzles, etc.
 - Take a look at **Past Exhibits** on Ontario Mennonite conscientious objectors during the Second World War and Ontario Mennonites in the First World War
 - Wander through our **Ontario Mennonites and the First World War digital files**
- Find our photographs in the **Mennonite Archival Information Database**: archives.mhsc.ca
- Read **newsletters written by Mennonite conscientious objectors** in northern Ontario and British Columbia on our library website: <https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/milton-good-library/newsletters-alternative-service>

Stay well, and we hope to see you in person again soon.

Laureen Harder-Gissing

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