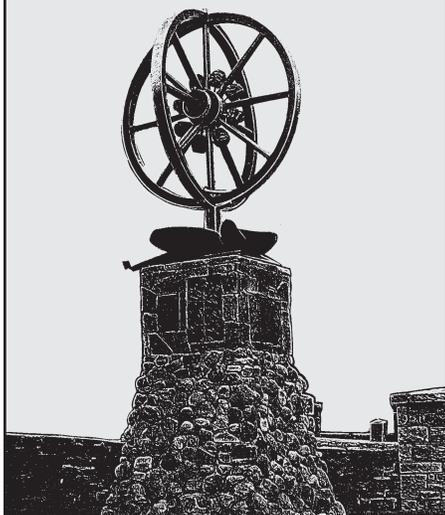


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Celebrating 70 years of Mennonite Archives of Ontario

by Maurice Martin and Laureen Harder-Gissing

On Sunday December 4, 2011 a celebration at Conrad Grebel celebrated three milestones with respect to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. MAO was established in 1941, when the “Mennonite Box,” largely containing materials collected by Mennonite historian Lewis J. Burkholder, was removed from the Archives of Ontario (Toronto) and installed in the newly-built Mennonite-owned-and-operated Golden Rule Bookstore in Kitchener. The materials were placed under the supervision of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario Historian, Joseph C. Fretz.

In 1959 the growing Archives was moved to the (Conference-owned) Rockway Mennonite School. The Conference appointed its first

archivist, Dorothy Swartzentruber. At some point during those years the Archives was listed as the “Mennonite Archives of Ontario with the Public Archives of Canada.”

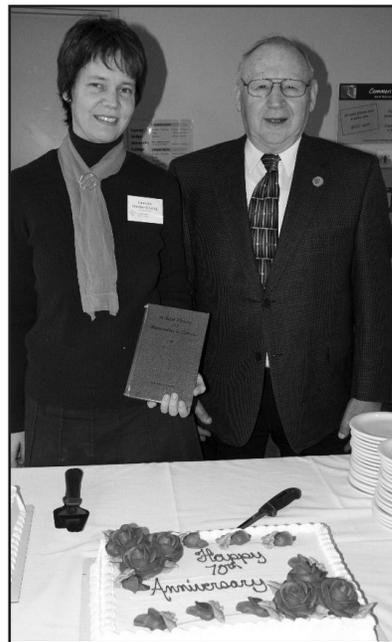
In 1963, Conrad Grebel College (CGUC) initiated plans to establish an Ontario Mennonite archives. The committee appointed by the College’s Board of Governors included Dorothy Swartzentruber and College president J. Winfield Fretz. A specific invitation was sent to Grebel’s constituent conferences to deposit their archival materials at the College. Later this invitation was extended to other Mennonite groups in Ontario. The transfer of archival material

from the Rockway site took place December 13, 1965 and has been under CGUC administration since then.

That was also the year the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario was formed,

with the stated purpose of “the preservation of Mennonite historical materials, including centralizing materials at Conrad Grebel College’s historical library and archives.

In 1975 an agreement between Conrad Grebel College, Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Mennonite Brethren Bible College stated: “It is agreed that the three archives shall each be the primary depository for original materials relating to its own conference or regional constituency.” It was also agreed to be of service to those Mennonite churches and groups which are



Laureen Harder-Gissing and Ralph Shantz participated in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. (CGUC photo by Jen Konkle)

not part of the immediate conference constituencies.

On Feb. 22, 1977 the Mennonite Conference of Ontario affirmed its longstanding relationship with the Archives by formally making MAC the permanent trustee of their archival collection. The successor body, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada continues this relationship.

On May 26, 1983 Mennonite Central Committee Ontario formalized its agreement with MAO, deeming the Archives to be the official depository for its records.

~ Continued on page 2 ~

Drama tells story of young Sam Steiner

The play, *Gadfly: Sam Steiner Dodges the Draft*, was performed at the Conrad Centre for the Arts in Kitchener on April 20-21. The house was full for each of the three performances.

This fundraiser was the brainchild of Fred W. Martin, Development Director of Conrad Grebel University College. At Fred's suggestion, the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario donated money toward the writing of a play that would feature part of Sam Steiner's story. During Sam's 34 years as librarian and archivist he worked very closely with the historical society.

Gadfly was written by Rebecca Steiner, a graduating drama student at the University of Waterloo and a part of the Grebel community. Rebecca also directed and played various roles in the drama.

Accompanying the story was a series of "Country Rock" songs played by a live band including Fred W. Martin, Daniel Kramer, Darrel Martin, Marcia Shantz, Jonathan Sauder, Laura Dyck, and Steve Wood with Larry Shantz running the sound board. Fred wrote in the program that, "A strong impetus for dramatizing

Sam's story came to me from the music of Gram Parsons."

The play is not a biography, but the vignettes are set in the Mennonite experience of the late 1960s as a young Sam Steiner wrestled with his faith tradition. When he was forced to leave Goshen College he lost his student exemption from military service and eventually made his way to Canada. Through these difficult years, Sue Clemmer stood by him and followed him to Canada where they were later married.

The play was well received by the audience, especially those who remember the Mennonite world of the 1960s. It was a celebration, not only of Sam's story, but also of a local Mennonite drama and music production.

Although Sam and Rebecca have the same surname they are not closely related—Sam calculates that they are seventh cousins twice removed.



John Wideman (left) playing Sam, and Kimberlee Walker (right) playing Sue, take a bow with Sam and Sue after the Friday evening performance. (CGUC photo by Jen Konkle)



Benjamin Wert (left) as a government official, exchanges letters with Samuel J. Steiner (played by John Wideman) about whether or not he can claim conscientious objector status on philosophical rather than religious grounds. Rebecca Steiner operates the typewriter.

Celebrating 70 years...

~ Continued from page 1 ~

In a meeting on December 4, 2009 CGUC, MCCO, MCEC and MHSO affirmed their historic relationship to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, as outlined above, entering into an agreement that reaffirms a permanent and perpetual relationship. This agreement was enacted as the fund-raising campaign for a major building project at CGUC was put into place, with largely expanded archives.

The second milestone that was celebrated on December 4, 2012 was the completion of cataloguing the Frank Epp files. Linda Huebert Hecht contributed countless hours in sorting out the contents of 22 four-drawer filing cabinets, plus a number of boxes! The newly-enlarged facilities will finally give these files a safe and permanent home.

The third milestone celebrated on December 4 was a new collection of Lorna Bergey's research and writing published by the Pennsylvania Folklore Society of Ontario. Representatives from the Epp and Bergey families were present at this event and brought greetings.



A groundbreaking ceremony on March 16, 2012 began the expansion project that will include new archive space at Conrad Grebel University College. Participating were (from left): Paul Penner, director of operations; Fred Redekop, board member; Susan Taves, board chair; Susan Schultz Huxman, president; Julie Reimer, student; Lynn Jantzi, board and building committee member; Clare Schlegel, board and building committee member. (Conrad Grebel University College photo)

Gender and the Emergence of Plain Mennonite Parochial School Teachers

By Shane Martin and Maxie Bai (with sincere thanks to those who were interviewed)

On an afternoon drive around the cornfields north of Waterloo, Ontario, a visitor may see Plain Mennonite¹ children walking down rural roads with large lunch pails or playing around small schoolhouses. Once ubiquitous to the rural Canadian landscape before 1965, today this scene remains unique to the farming areas within Waterloo Region and Wellington County.

Prior to the 1960s, Plain Mennonite children were educated in one and two-room rural public schools. However in 1964, the provincial government passed legislation to consolidate small rural school boards into township boards, initiating the closure of most school houses. Fearing that their children would be exposed to worldly influences, some Plain Mennonites within the Old Order, Markham-Waterloo and Orthodox church communities refused to allow their children to be bussed to new centralized schools that were usually located in towns or villages.

In 1966, the three Plain communities cooperated to launch their own parochial school system based around the rural schoolhouse.² Enrolment was voluntary and initially many within the Old Order and Markham-Waterloo churches continued to send their children to public schools due to doubts that parochial schools would provide an adequate standard of education. It was only by the late 1970s that the vast majority of Plain children were attending the system. By the school year of 1979-80, parochial

enrolment had risen to 828 and the number of schools had expanded from 7 to 27, including schools in the new Old Order Mennonite settlement near Mount Forest, Ontario. Today, attending a small one or two-room school is a common childhood experience for virtually all Plain Mennonites in Ontario and as of 2002, the communities continued to operate 50 schools with over 1500 students enrolled³ from grades one through eight, the extent of formal studies for the majority of Plain children.

Launching the parochial system required teachers willing to work outside the Ontario public system and with less pay and benefits. The schools have mainly recruited “uncertified” teachers from within their own communities, which has provided the opportunity (especially for women) to explore an occupation previously closed to Plain Mennonites.

Questions about the history of parochial schooling among Plain Mennonites grew into a Master’s research paper that Shane Martin defended in 2011. Abridged, this article is a snapshot of a longer investigation of how Plain women and men teachers negotiated this new occupational opportunity within communities where concepts of work were highly gendered. Interviews and research revealed that Plain gender conventions served to prevent married women and discourage men from full-time teaching, while at the same time opening the new occupation to single women.

Marlene Epp in her invaluable monograph, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* acknowledges that the experiences of women from “the most conservative, non-conformist groups [the Plain Mennonites]” received minimal attention. This article strives to give a voice to the experiences of Plain Mennonite teachers with respect to gender and is largely indebted to interviews graciously granted by veteran or retired Plain Mennonite teachers conducted during the spring and summer of 2010.

The Plain Mennonites of Ontario

Three Plain Mennonite communities participated in parochial schooling in Ontario: the Old Order Mennonites, Markham-Waterloo Conference Mennonites and the Orthodox Mennonite Church. Although separate denominations with distinct memberships, these churches share common origins in Waterloo Region that extend back to the 19th century.

The most populous and longstanding of the three groups, the Old Order Church, had an approximate membership of 1200 when the schools opened in 1966 and 2600 in 2002. They are popularly known for using horse-and-buggy transportation, but have also embraced the use of electricity, telephones and small tractors on their farms. The Markham-Waterloo Conference, with a membership of roughly 700 in 1966 and 1,332 according to a census in 2001, has been the most receptive to using modern

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technology and allows members to use black cars and the latest farm equipment while rejecting technology unrelated to work such as radio and television. The smallest church, the Orthodox, which had less than 100 members in the late 1960s and numbered around 125 families in 2002, has adopted the most plain lifestyle, eschewing electricity, telephones, and automobiles, while relying on horses for transportation and field work.⁴

Though each church group has developed different codes of conduct regarding the use of technology, they share many core beliefs and practices. The Plain churches share an emphasis on interrelated concepts including separation from the outside world, plainness or simplicity, and submission to the church community. Emphasizing the will of the community over that of the individual is sometimes described by insiders as “yieldedness.” Sociologist John F. Peters explains that the Plain concept of community involves “abandoning... personal and worldly pleasures and desires and submission to the community which, in effect, means to God.”⁵ Used to describe individual submission to the detailed rules of the church including those of dress and the use of technology (assembled over time by the ministry through input from the laity), “yieldedness” also means taking care of one another in times of need. This spirit has been expressed in the Plain Mennonites’ rejection of social programs including old age pensions and private insurance plans, which are areas believed to be the responsibility of the community, not the government or private enterprise.

The distinct appearance of Plain Mennonite meetinghouses (churches) and clothing not only emphasize and naturalize the concept of separation from the outside world, but also the separation of the sexes. The white head coverings and long, dark hand-sewn dresses worn by Plain women can be seen to symbolize feminine modesty and plainness; principles intended to focus the attention of members on Godly or heavenly things rather than on frivolous, changing fashions common in the outside



South Woolwich Parochial School opened in 1966 and closed in 2011 as too few students lived that close to the city.

(Photo by Barb Draper)

world. Although from an insider’s perspective, levels of gendered plainness may vary in minutiae (for example, the size of head coverings vary by group), the groups share the complicated weaving of embodied practice of gender and faith. Simply put, the Plain church groups differ far less than they share with regard to prescribed gender conventions.

Masculinity through physical work

During the 1960s and 70s when the parochial schools were launched, the Plain masculine ideal was “primarily that of family provider through physical work.”⁶ Like their female counterparts, a young man in his teens and early twenties trained for future roles. A few apprenticed in welding or woodworking shops but the great majority of young men prepared to operate and manage a family farm.⁷

These Plain Mennonite masculine characteristics are typified in *Separate and Peculiar* (1979). Written by Isaac Horst, an Old Order from Ontario, the book is a fictional work summarizing the customs, beliefs and culture of the Old Order Mennonites for outsiders through an exemplar story of the life of Menno, who Horst described as a “conglomerate of all [Plain] Mennonites.” Menno leaves school at the age of 14, apprentices with his father on the farm, and describes “the feeling of being grownup, as he can now work all day in the fields, driving tractor or a team of horses.” The apprenticeship of Menno clearly defined masculinity as involving hard manual labour. In some ways, a man’s ability to work long days on a farm was also a specifically

masculine form of religious expression, since maintaining a Plain lifestyle required refusing to use many forms of technology that would reduce physical labour, such as mechanical stable-cleaners, silo-unloaders and combines.⁸

The apprenticeship period also served to prepare a young man for his future responsibility of being the main source of income for his family. In Horst’s narrative, it is only after Menno acquires a farm and the community rebuilds his barn to make the farm functional that Menno can marry and become the head of a household.

Masculinity was also associated with public leadership. Only men served as bishops, ministers and deacons within the church, responsibilities fulfilled without pay. Teaching was not a Plain male occupation before 1960 but some historical overlap existed as men occasionally took on unpaid leadership roles on local public school boards and a few taught informal German and music classes for the youth.

Horst also describes the masculine responsibility of leadership when his protagonist is ordained as a minister. Required to preach regularly, Menno finds himself “spend[ing] considerable time reading, as his German needs brushing up, [and] visit[ing] the sick” and “yet still manages to get his [farm] work done and survive.”⁹ As *Separate and Peculiar* illustrates, these less physical duties of leadership within the community in no way exempted men from their primary role as family provider.

The interviews with early male teachers in the parochial system revealed that some men in the 1960s and 1970s felt constrained by the strict gender boundaries and others who attempted to live outside the boundaries faced ridicule or misunderstanding. An early teacher, Lorne*(*indicates a pseudonym) who later became an Orthodox minister, recalled that “farming was never my thing” and that prior to the schools there were few options beyond farming for people like him. Though he enjoyed carpentry he laughed and remarked, “I was always a scholar” at heart. The communities approached these boys and men who enjoyed school and learning with ambiguity in part because these interests stood in contrast to the churches narratives about the proper masculine development of a boy into a strong man capable of labouring for long hours.

In *Separate and Peculiar*, Horst also describes Old Order students as divided into camps of boys who liked school and those who didn’t like school and it is not surprising that Menno falls into the latter category as “[h]is love of the outdoors is . . . too strong for him to enjoy being cooped up in a schoolhouse.”¹⁰ Henry,* a former teacher who attended parochial schools in the 1970s, suggested that most of his classmates were like Menno. Though he enjoyed school and excelled in his studies, he recalled that most of his peers wanted to be farmers and work with machinery and, “if you liked school you didn’t talk about it” out of the fear of being labelled a “sissy.” To be fair, Henry* pointed out that these attitudes varied somewhat from school to school.

Ironically, although devoted to portraying and defending the beliefs of his community in *Separate and Peculiar*, Isaac Horst was not a typical Plain Mennonite and in contrast to his main character, he pushed the boundaries of gender conventions. As a child, he was “unsuited for strenuous exercise” and spent his spare time reading. As an adult he struggled to fulfil his masculine role of providing for his family, lacked interest in agriculture and “teetered between unsuccessful farming and off-the-farm jobs.”¹¹ When the schools

opened, he became one of the first Old Order teachers in 1966, motivated by his appetite for learning. In the following decade he again broke new ground by becoming one of the first Old Orders to write and publish for outsiders.

This highly unusual pursuit turned Horst into a “laughing stock” among some segments of the Plain communities who claimed he was more interested in writing than working. Although Horst was highly respected by those with similar interests within the communities (particularly among teachers interviewed), his life demonstrates the limits or rigidity of gendered constructions of work within the Plain communities when the schools began and the potential difficulties and resistance men could face if they did not fulfil expectations.

Femininity and Domesticity

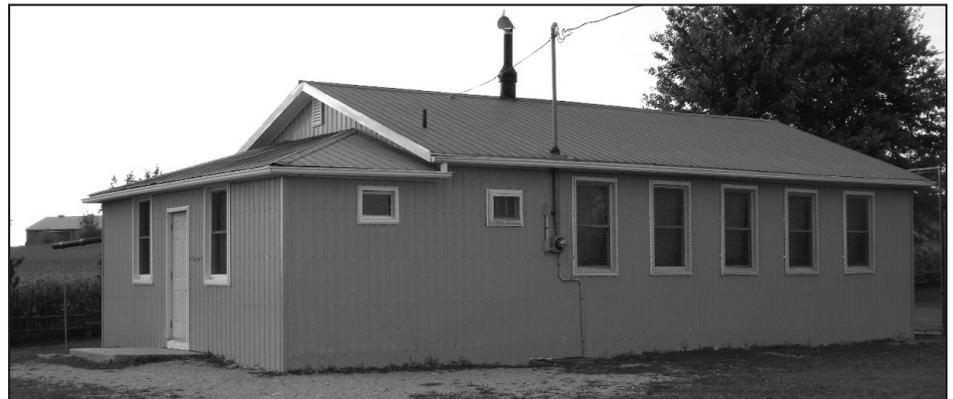
According to John Peters, gender roles amongst the Plain Mennonites in the 1960s-70s when the parochial system began were “clearly defined leaving little opportunity for ambiguity.” A woman’s role was ultimately to “bear and nurture . . . children in wedlock,” and her basic duties included, “tending to the daily needs of the household and submitting to her husband. Her dress may be neat and tidy but never extravagant, glamorous, or seductive.”¹²

The lives of young women between their early teens (when students graduated from school) and early twenties were primarily organized as a domestic apprenticeship that involved

working under the guidance of married women while learning about household tasks such as quilting, sewing dresses, gardening, preserving, and cooking large family meals. These labour-intensive tasks provided women with the tools to both contribute to the economic survival of their future families and properly express their church community’s beliefs in remaining plain. Many women, including most of the teachers interviewed, worked for a period of time as a “maid” or “hired girl,” often in the homes of young mothers with children, to presumably prepare women for their future role as nurturing mothers.

In *Separate and Peculiar*, Menno courts a young woman named Grace, a typical Plain woman, who he describes as appealing for her “meek” and “humble” appearance and her “demure” character.¹³ An idealized figure of femininity, who is described as “no prettier than many another girl,” Grace is a moral, submissive, and hardworking supporter of Menno. As such, Grace works diligently in the home and on the farm to contribute to the household economy but she never takes a job outside of the home as working out was, and still is, an unacceptable practice for married women.

For Plain Mennonite women living prior to the establishment of parochial schools, few opportunities existed outside the home. Leadership within the church was considered a masculine characteristic and female roles were quite limited as Plain Mennonites did not have Sunday Schools or send missionaries abroad,



*Winterbourne Parochial School opened in 1966.
(Photo by Barb Draper)*

two areas where 20th century women from other Protestant denominations and “progressive” Mennonite churches participated extensively. Plain women, however, did have some voice and were valued by the male church leadership as providers of advice and wisdom regarding church policy.

The vast majority of Plain women fulfilled feminine ideals and became wives and mothers but women who remained single beyond their mid-twenties were shifted to the margins of the community.¹⁴ Rachel,* an Old Order school teacher who began teaching in her late twenties, said that there were few options for older single girls before the schools beyond working as a “maid.” Employers could rarely offer maids more than a small salary plus room and board so ultimately working as a maid was considered more of a community service than an occupation that would bring financial independence.

Today, Rachel* observed, although some older single women still serve as household helpers, most single women have more options than in the past such as working in a store, market garden or teaching, all of which involve higher wages and greater financial independence.

Unlike Rachel’s* ambivalence, Catherine* (another teacher who began a long career during her mid-twenties in the late 1960s) expressed overt dissatisfaction with working as a household helper. She noted that the job usually involved carrying out instructions given by the female head of the home so helpers were not involved in day-to-day decision-making, a difficult situation for Catherine* who later would excel in a position of leadership as a teacher. She did not find her time as a maid very interesting or challenging, stating it was “like taking grade one over and over.”

Some plain women also desired lives outside, or in addition to, domesticity. This point was apparent in the interviews with parochial teachers who recalled their lives prior to the opening of the schools. Miriam*(who taught full-time briefly before marriage) observed that she, like many other women who became



Floradale Parochial school opened in 1972.

(Photo by Barb Draper)

teachers, did not find “housework [to be her] first love” and preferred to work outdoors. Miriam* recalled thinking as a child: “teaching was always my dream [even though] I didn’t dream it would ever become available to me.” Catherine* also described imagining herself teaching as a young woman before the parochial schools existed sitting in church looking at the children and wondering what it would be like to guide them within a classroom.

When the schools began, a firm convention of femininity and domestic female work existed and most women within the community lived up to these ideals by becoming wives and mothers. For the significant minority of women who were not married, parochial schools offered a new opportunity to work outside the domestic space without departing greatly from the Plain feminine paradigm. These single women, some who would later marry and some who would not, became the most important and largest group among teachers in the Ontario parochial school system.

Gender and the Parochial Teachers

When members of the Plain communities launched the first parochial schools in 1966, this new full-time occupation of teaching did not easily fit into either normative mode of masculinity or femininity. Not surprisingly, few men and virtually no married women became teachers. Instead, the position fell mainly to single women as the role came to be

understood, in part, as another acceptable form of training for their future role as mothers. Since then, older single women have come to form the influential veteran core of the teaching staff and teaching has remained a primarily single woman’s vocation.

Before parochial schools, the Plain Mennonite communities were familiar with the pre-consolidation situation whereby married female teachers comprised over forty percent of the teaching staff within the public school system.¹⁵ The founders of the parochial schools were also aware of married women who taught within a few Plain Amish private systems in the United States, which were loosely associated with the Waterloo parochial school system through the *Blackboard Bulletin* (a widely read magazine launched in 1957 to serve the promotion of Plain Mennonite and Amish parochial schooling in North America) but when the parochial schools opened, married Plain Mennonite women were not welcome to work.

The ties between married feminine duty and the home seemed too strong. During the interviews, the exclusion of married women from full-time teaching was considered an obvious and foregone conclusion. When asked “why,” Elizabeth,* a long-serving retired teacher could only remark, “it’s just not done.” Rachel* could not think of any married Plain Mennonite women who taught full-time within the system and

explicitly disagreed with the practice among some Plain communities in America, commenting “I don’t see how that works,” implying that married women who try to balance their domestic and teaching duties were bound to fail. James Bauman, former supervisor of the parochial schools from 1976 to 1996, recalled that married full-time teachers were extremely rare and exceptions only occurred when a teacher married during the school year and chose to stay in her position until the end of the term.

As always, some exceptions occurred to allow a few married women to teach under specific circumstances. For example, a small number of married women were able to carve out part-time positions teaching specialty music or German classes a few times a week if a regular teacher was uncomfortable with these subjects. This allowed these women to pursue their passion for teaching and spend a portion of their lives outside of a married woman’s traditional role as a homemaker and mother.

Normative gender roles also inhibited the participation of men in the schools even though a few aspects of conventional masculinity among the Plain communities related to teaching such as serving as preachers or teaching informal music and German classes for youth. A few teachers interviewed also pointed out that men were, and are, commonly perceived within the communities as having a greater ability than women to control the behaviour of children and command their respect. Irene* who began teaching in the early 1980s, said “[there was a] tendency to think that if it was a problem school, a male teacher would make it better” even though she personally disagreed. She remarked that from her experience male teachers might initially be respected more as “authority figures” by students, but if the teacher failed to gain the respect of the pupils he could “lose it” just as easily as a female teacher.

Throughout the history of parochial schools in the Waterloo regions, Plain men comprised less than ten percent of the teaching staff.¹⁶ Some segments of the community, particularly the church

leadership and those involved with the schools, encouraged both young men and women to teach and in 1966, when the school first opened, three of the seven original teachers were Plain men. In contrast to the experiences of married women, gender constructions only discouraged male access to full-time teaching. When the matter of male teachers within the Plain communities was discussed during the interviews, all indicated that they personally supported men pursuing teaching careers but some revealed that outside of teacher circles, particularly among male youth, teaching was commonly considered an “unmanly” pursuit. When Elizabeth* was asked about how male teachers have been viewed by the Old Order community she responded somewhat hesitantly, “[they] are not looked down upon . . . but maybe teenagers look at it as not for boys.” Laura,* whose career has spanned decades, was more forthright: “I think it is safe to say that many consider[ed] it a sissy job.” Though she personally disagreed with this view, she attributed it to Plain Mennonites being a “rural people,” suggesting that working on a farm was perceived as a superior vocation for males.

Another, more financial, hurdle also existed for men. Since the Plain communities were required by law to continue their payment of public school taxes while also bearing the costs of operating their own parochial system,

there was not a great deal of funding available for teacher salaries. Low salaries served to jeopardize married men from economically providing for large families, which made teaching an unrealistic option for married men. Jim Maurer, a non-Mennonite who taught for four years in parochial schools in the late 1960s, recalled that women were paid roughly \$1000 a year and men \$2000.¹⁷ Teaching wages were higher for men in large part because they presumably supplied the income for their families. Fulfilling the role of family provider with an income lower than that of a recent high school graduate would not have been easy. Salaries have continued to remain low; a recent estimation placed teacher salaries in the late 1990s at an average of \$5,930 for starting teachers and \$22,000 for teachers with twenty years experience, but they also stated there was “no way of knowing exactly” since a teacher’s salary is “whatever the teacher and local school board agree upon.”¹⁸ That said, despite barriers to male participation in teaching roles, a small group of men have been able to sidestep gender conventions and carve out long-term teaching careers.

Accordingly, teaching in parochial schools is now primarily the domain of single women and, since the schools opened, these women have come to comprise nearly 90 percent of the staff. Of these single women, short-term teachers (who taught for a few



*Elmira North Parochial school opened in 2001.
(Photo by Barb Draper)*

years before marriage) formed the least influential but largest segment of the teaching staff. In a memoir James Bauman, who was responsible for overseeing teacher training until the mid-1990s, described the phenomena as understandable but he argued this was a weakness of the school system since the rapid turnover rate required “a high expenditure of human efforts and resources” with little long-term gain.

Teaching for a brief period was and is common among young single women largely because working for a few years with children in the classroom and learning how to multitask and handle stress became an acceptable alternative to prepare young women for their future roles as household managers and mothers. However, as Catherine,* one of the first teachers recalled, in the early years young women were hesitant to teach due to the large proportion of early teachers who were older single women. She recalled that many young Old Order women were hesitant to teach because they feared it would damage their marriage prospects by signalling to young men that they “planned to become ‘old maids.’” Catherine* credits young Markham-Waterloo Conference women, who taught during the early years and later married, for changing perceptions in the Old Order community.

The view that teaching was a useful training period for woman in married life remains common even in hindsight. In a letter to the *Blackboard Bulletin* (Oct. 1984:14), Eva Weber, a former teacher who taught in the 1970s, wrote that though she regretted some mistakes she made as a teacher, in hindsight the experience assisted her as a parent by giving her “a better idea of what [would] help children to be better prepared for school” noting that each night before bedtime, her children were “given a drill with flash cards” to improve their English vocabulary. English was a second language for most Plain children and help within the home would have been a boon. Miriam,* who taught full-time for a few years before marriage echoed this point, viewing teaching as a valuable learning experience for motherhood. After

having children she recalled thinking her experiences as a mother would have made her a better full-time teacher but her ambivalence was clear as, “however,” she argued, “it doesn’t quite work this way. One gives you a good experience for the next but which comes first? It’s easier to teach before you have children.”

Short-term teachers who did not enjoy the classroom may have been happy to leave their positions behind for marriage; however articles published by former teachers in the *Blackboard Bulletin* indicate that for others this was not an easy transition. One former teacher, Mrs. Harvey Bowman, could not hide how much she missed the classroom in her description of a day when she served as a substitute teacher. In the article she recalled having left her position for marriage eight years prior after only a year in the classroom and wrote, “[t]he whole day brought back precious memories for me . . . [I] made many mistakes [while teaching], but I loved working with children.” (*Blackboard Bulletin*, May 1983:12)

By 1999, older single women comprised roughly thirty percent of the teaching staff who had taught eight years or more and of these about twelve percent had taught more than fifteen years.¹⁹ Though fewer in number than short-term teachers, these veteran women teachers (along with a few male teachers) have been most involved in determining the direction of the parochial schools through developing curriculum and training new teachers. When James Bauman evaluated the development of the parochial school system from 1966 to 1996, the long-serving former supervisor did not hesitate to acknowledge older single women teachers as the “core of committed experienced teachers” in the system. He praised this group, stating they “have poured their energies into attempting to provide quality education for children in [their] church communities.” Bauman argued that the quality of education offered by the system grew largely as a result of the accumulation of knowledge and experience among this core group of teachers and as a result, Plain Mennonite “pupils were exposed to instructional

programs that were more comprehensive and effective.”²⁰

The central role that older single women have occupied in the schools is perhaps ironic considering the marginalized position of these women prior to the schools, but this phenomenon highlights what Marlene Epp termed, “the situational nature of socially created gender norms,” in her study of the history of Mennonite women in Canada. As a result of conventional gender roles that prevented or discouraged men or married women, single women were able to pursue careers that involved high levels of responsibility and community leadership.

Another important “situational” condition that influenced the access of both long-term and short-term single women to full-time teaching, was the separation of religion and school. Single women were entrusted with a significant role in raising future church members, but from the beginning the schools were not conceived of as places to explicitly teach church doctrine or heavily emphasize Bible education. Teachers were mainly conceived of as moral guides for the students, rather than religious educators. Jacob,* a veteran teacher explained, “[the school system] does not emphasize overt Christian teachings but there is an emphasis on living the faith.” Likewise, Rachel,* a teacher from the early years stated, “[w]e didn’t want to teach religion at school” instead teachers were “to live it” so the children could learn by example. These higher responsibilities of teaching religious doctrine remained the role of the church and parents meaning, at least officially, that teachers—and single women—were ranked as subordinate to parents and the male church leadership.

Conclusion

A clear boundary, then, was established from the formation of the parochial system that ensured the traditional roles of male religious leaders and parents as the main source of doctrinal and Bible education would not be usurped by single women teachers. Albeit a quick snapshot of a complicated history, we have attempted to shed light on how Plain

gender conventions influenced the new occupation of teaching.

Single women could freely participate in teaching as long as their role, at least officially, did not dramatically upset existing gender

conventions. Launching the schools inadvertently opened new spaces for many older single women, who were previously marginalized, to take on leadership roles within their church communities without upsetting traditional

masculine and feminine roles. On the other hand, gender conventions meant virtually no married women and only a small group of men have been able to become full-time teachers.

1 “Plain Mennonites” refers to three groups in southern Ontario: the Old Order Mennonites, Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference and the Orthodox Mennonites. The term “Plain” is sometimes used as a self-identifying term and more meaningful than Old Order or conservative because it highlights the concept of plain living.

2 The Plain Amish from Wilmot and Wellesley townships cooperated with the Plain Mennonite groups to launch their own parochial schools but have for the most part have operated a separate system. For more on the formation of the parochial school system see: Winfield Fretz, *The Waterloo Mennonites: A Community in Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), 149-54; T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 225-227; Isaac R Horst, “The Establishment of Old Order Parochial Schools in Ontario,” *Journal of the Center for Pennsylvania German Studies* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2000), 9-11.

3 Amsey Martin, “Education Among the Plain Peoples of Waterloo, Wellington and Perth Counties,” *Ontario Mennonite History*, 10, no. 1 (May 2002), 8.

4 Donald Martin, *Old Order Mennonites of Ontario: Gelassenheit, Discipleship, Brotherhood* (Pandora Press, 2003), 179-185. John F. Peters, “The Ontario Old Order Mennonites as Canadian Citizens,” *Ontario Mennonite History*, 10, no.1 (May 2002), 2

5 Peters, “Ontario,” 3

6 John F. Peters, “Socialization Among the Old Order Mennonites,” in *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 28 (1987): 214.

7 According to a 1972 census, nearly 90 percent of Old Order Menn. over age 20, and almost 70 percent among the Markham-Waterloo, were farmers. Winfield Fretz, “Waterloo County History Project,” Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Hist.Miss.1.24, Series 1, Vol. 1 (1972): #58-65, #51-55.

8 The Markham-Waterloo Conference, unlike the Old Orders and Orthodox, did not have technical restrictions related to agriculture. Isaac R Horst, *Separate and Peculiar* (Self Published, 1979), 3,6, 23, 29.

9 Isaac R Horst, *Separate and Peculiar*, 66.

10 Isaac R Horst, *Separate and Peculiar*, 9.

11 Isaac R Horst, *A Separate People*, 261.

12 Peters, “Socialization” 214.

13 Isaac R Horst, *Separate and Peculiar*, 44.

14 Fretz, “Waterloo County,” #58-65, #51-55.

15 Sheila Cavanagh, “Female-Teacher Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Ontario,” in *History is Hers: Women Educators in Twentieth Century Ontario*, ed. Rebecca Prigert Coulter and Helen Harper (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 2005), 115, 117.

16 A few parochial school teachers were not Plain Mennonites (often from “progressive” Mennonite churches), particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.

17 In contrast, in the late 1960s the average salary of public elementary teachers in Ontario was \$5,736 for women and \$7,094 for men. W.G. Fleming, *The Expansion of the Education System*, Vol 1 of *Ontario’s Educative Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 281.

18 “Overview of Old Order Mennonite Schools of Ontario: a presentation to the Annual Michigan-Ontario Amish School Meeting,” 1999.

19 “Overview of Old Order Mennonite Schools of Ontario,” 4.

20 James Bauman, “Decades of Challenge,” *Journal of the Center for Pennsylvania German Studies* 7, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 8.

New GAMEO biographies

By Linda Huebert Hecht, Gameo Committee Chair

At its August 2011 meeting, the AMHSO Board expressed interest in knowing more about the latest biographies in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. The following report highlights the contributions of deceased men and women from various Amish and Mennonite groups in Ontario whose life stories were added recently.

Of those added in 2011, let me first mention Beland Honderich of Wilmot Township, the journalist and philanthropist with Amish roots. He managed the *Toronto Star* and its parent company, becoming a millionaire as a result.

Milo Shantz and David Hunsberger both worked in St. Jacobs, among other places, but left their mark in very different ways. The former was an entrepreneur, a visionary business leader and a churchman, the latter an outstanding photographer who “provided a unique lens on Waterloo County history and life.”

Milton Good, another entrepreneur and philanthropist, built up H. Boehmer and Co., a heating and building supply company. His success in business enabled him to support many church related institutions including Conrad Grebel University College where the library now bears his name. His older sister Viola received a B.A. at Goshen College and returned there following post-graduate studies to become Dean of Women and

Adviser to Students from Abroad.

Abram Wall of Vineland worked for 30 years as an immigration adviser, assisting hundreds, particularly Russian Mennonites, to settle in Ontario. For this Brock University granted him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in 1977. David Regier of St. Catharines used his gifts in special education and served on many different committees beyond his local church.

Iva Taves, wife of Harvey, a Mennonite Central Committee Director, made her own unique contribution as a physician specializing in pathology in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. For a time Alice Snyder assisted Harvey Taves in the MCC Ontario office. Her letters home—recently published—which she wrote during her MCC service abroad, contribute significantly to the history of volunteer relief work.

Aaron Klassen was a church lay leader, farmer and realtor. To name a few of his many roles, he was interim editor of *The Canadian Mennonite*, manager of the Kitchener Provident Bookstore and MCC Ontario board chair.

Ross Bender with Amish roots was a sensitive and creative leader. He served as a pastor and in administrative work at Rockway Mennonite School in Ontario and as seminary dean of the Goshen and Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.

Harold Groh, founding principal of Rockway Mennonite School was also a pastor. His wife Cora was the first in her

family to have a professional career as a teacher. During their studies in Toronto, both were active mission workers. For three years they managed the Mennonite Centre in London, England. Both were committed church workers.

Arnold Baerg had many important roles as a teacher, counselor and committee member both within and outside his Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church.

In 2010 biographies were written for Martin Boese, Valentin Sawatsky, Doreen Snyder and Janet Douglas Hall, a nineteenth century pioneer woman evangelist and pastor in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. Also, biographies of three Mennonite Brethren leaders, Isaac Henry Tiessen, Cornelius J. and Nicolas Fehderau, were written by Susan and Helmut Huebert of Winnipeg. The writers in Ontario were: Ferne Burkhardt, Erica Jantzen, Sam Steiner, Lucille Marr, Maria Klassen, Doug Snyder and Ron Rempel. The work of all these writers is appreciated.

All these biographies are available at www.gameo.org (search giving the surname first). If you have suggestions for persons we should write about or know someone who could write biographies, please contact any Gameo committee member: Fred Lichti, John Reimer, Sam Steiner, Peter Hamm, myself or the editor, Barb Draper.

Heritage Centre acquires Hespeler papers

The Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) in Winnipeg received papers from a great-grandson of William Hespeler in February, 2012. Hespeler, who grew up in what is now Waterloo Region, Ontario, served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Manitoba and was an immigration agent who encouraged thousands of Mennonites to emigrate from Russia to Manitoba

in the 1870s. Some of the documents had personal signatures from Queen Victoria and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Prussia.

“For me, the most important parts of the material are the documents that Hespeler took to Russia to convince the Mennonites to come to Canada,” says Alf Redekopp, director of the MHC. That material includes documentation

of the 1872 exchange between the Canadian Government and Russian Mennonites regarding potential rights and freedoms, including exemption from military service.

The town of Hespeler, now part of the city of Cambridge, was named after Jacob Hespeler, an older brother.
—from Mennonite Heritage Centre release

BOOK REVIEW:

By Levi M. Frey

In order to write this book, Barb Draper did a lot of digging amongst her roots. She performed an excellent job of searching out the reasons for some of the traditions and practices of the Mennonites of St. Jacobs and Elmira. Because she is a woman, a Mennonite, and locally-grown at that, she was able to add a flavour which is different from that of many writers of church history.

Draper uncovers the first roots in the Mennonite story in sixteenth century Europe during the Reformation. This is where it all began! She explains why the Mennonites became a separate people, persecuted for their faith. She tells us where we picked up the language which is still used in many homes today. She follows the path through several European countries and explains the split with the Amish. She gives us an idea of what life was like for Mennonites in seventeenth century Europe. Then the migration to Pennsylvania.

We are told who some of the early Pennsylvania settlers were, especially those whose descendants came to Ontario a hundred years later. Those were the days of hauling barrels containing gold coins, through hundreds of miles of wilderness to pay off mortgages on vast tracts of far-away, unseen territory.

The Mennonites of St. Jacobs and Elmira: Understanding the Variety

Barb Draper. Pandora Press, 2011, 378 pages.

Finally we come to Ontario and to Woolwich Township.

Draper spends some time exploring the history and the progression through most of the nineteenth century, where the Mennonite church was mostly one entity. She explains faith and community life in those pioneer times. She gives us good descriptions of common practices which developed in home and church life and explains how some of these practices came about. She is very thorough and sympathetic in explaining some of the more obscure traditions and has spent much time in researching these topics. I find it especially fascinating how she takes certain clothing articles and explains the progression from European peasant garb to present-day Old Order usage.

In further chapters Draper explains how outside pressures changed many things in the Mennonite church, and eventually various factions went their separate ways. She explores the current

theology, practices and other factors in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, the Old Order Mennonites, and a few other more or less conservative groups who co-exist in the St. Jacobs and Elmira

area. In a separate chapter for each one of these groups she goes into great detail to thoroughly explain current practices, linking them to past traditions. She obviously expended much effort in obtaining accurate inside information because her writing is much more accurate (and less judgmental) than that of most other writers. She has the true inside story.

All in all, Barb Draper has used her unique perspective to compile an accurate, readable, very balanced account on a subject which can be very confusing. While doing so, she has again proved that history can be interesting.

The writer is an Old Order Mennonite from the Mount Forest Community.



Erb Street church participating in Doors Open Waterloo Region

Erb Street Mennonite Church, at 131 Erb St. W Waterloo, will be one of the sites for Doors Open Waterloo Region (DOWR) 2012, to be held Saturday September 15, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Since its inception in 2003, Erb Street members Karl Kessler and Jane Snyder have been the coordinators of DOWR, an annual free architecture and heritage open-house event.

Several DOWR locations are marking anniversaries in 2012, DOWR's 10th year. The Waterloo Historical Society (WHS) was

established 100 years ago and will have a display and volunteers at Erb Street as part of its anniversary celebrations. Marion Roes, also an Erb Street member, is president of WHS and will wear two hats in organizing the event at the church. Visitors will be given a brochure with a brief church history, and there are plans for a concert by Erb Street musicians (including composer/pianist Joanne Bender), a quilting demonstration, historical displays, and a comforter set up so

that everyone can try their hand at knotting: one knot, or many.

A DOWR map/guide with details about all 30-plus DOWR sites will be available at museums, libraries and tourism offices from July through September, and will be included in the advertising section of The Waterloo Region Record on Saturday, September 8. Information is also available at www.regionofwaterloo.ca/doorsopen, or Google: "Doors Open Waterloo Region."

Discarded cemetery markers found

By Paul Gross

This is an excerpt of an article in the newsletter of the Waterloo Region Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society, Our Waterloo Kin, Vol. 11, Issue 4, Nov. 2011. Paul Gross, the cemetery co-ordinator, organizes volunteers to update transcriptions of Waterloo Region cemeteries, and prepares those transcriptions for publication.

In the summer of 2009 it was brought to my attention by Bruce Uttley, one of our cemetery volunteers, that photographs showing a pile of broken headstones had been discovered. The stones had been photographed by an unknown person, circa 2005, while he or she was out walking their dog on the hydro right-of-way lands on the west side of Waterloo, south of Erb Street.

A second field trip with Bruce Uttley resulted in the discovery of the stones. The site is in a swale and in August of 2009 it was quite swampy with grasses and other plants growing in excess of two meters in height making exploration somewhat arduous.

There appeared to be approximately, ten to twelve pieces of headstone.



*The undisturbed headstones.
(Paul Gross photo)*

The stones are located beneath the transmission lines of the most westerly set of lines, adjacent to the Waterloo Region's landfill operations. The Erb Street Mennonite church was contacted and I accompanied the property manager to the hydro lands to show him what had been discovered.

We returned to the church cemetery and compared the names on three of the broken stones to burials in the cemetery referring to the burial map, which showed that these individuals did not have markers. Given that the stones were not recorded in the first OGS transcription dated September 1989 it is safe to assume that they had been placed previous to 1989. Some of the footings and bases are included and one could conclude that a dump truck or trailer must have been used to dispose of the stones.

In the later part of August, Waterloo North Hydro checked the location and determined that it was on the Kitchener side of the city boundary line. A follow up with Kitchener-Wilmot Hydro revealed I would need to contact Hydro One, the provincial utility.

I was required to submit forms for an Entry Permit that described the nature and scope of the project. Approval was given the third week of September, 2011 and during the week of October 16 arrangements were made with the Waterloo Region Landfill administration to access the site from their property. Together with Bruce Uttley and another OGS volunteer John Wilson, we gained



*Paul Gross chalks the pieces.
(photo courtesy of Paul Gross)*

entry through a gate only some one hundred meters from the location of the monuments.

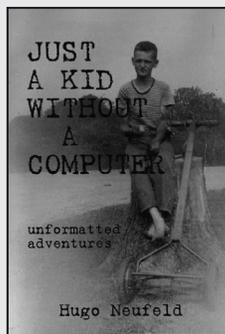
We started by trimming tree limbs and cutting out the brush at the site, which took 45-50 minutes. A ground sheet was placed and pieces of the stones were moved, brushed off, chalked and photographed. The cement slabs were moved aside with levers and muscle power. The three of us thought that the monument pieces were closer to the top of the pile but as we progressed more pieces were discovered under the footings and bases. Even though care was taken when extracting the pieces of markers, some of the stone was so degraded that it would break apart or crumble when touched. We counted a total of nineteen monument bases. An effort was made to determine how the cemetery stones ended up at this location but to date no explanations have been discovered.

Erb Street Mennonite Church is planning to recover the stones from the site.

New Books

Just a Kid Without a Computer: Unformatted Adventures. Hugo Neufeld. Millrise Publishing, 2011, 178 pages.

Neufeld tells a variety of stories about himself as an adventuresome child, growing up on a farm near St. Catharines. His stories give a glimpse of what life in the Mennonite community was like in the days before computers. Available at Millrise Publishing, 140 Millbank Close, Calgary, SW, AB T2Y 2E5.



Among the Ashes: In the Stalinkova Kolkhoz (Kontinusfeld) 1930-1935. Peter J. Rahn. Pandora Press, 2011, 300 pages.

The letters in this collection were sent by the Rahn family from southern Ukraine to relatives in Canada during the early 1930s, a very difficult time in the Soviet regime. The letters appear in both German and English and have lots of commentary to show what was happening in this village in the Molotschna colony.