

## **The Amish Bicentennial 1822-2022**

Join us as we REMEMBER and THANK GOD for the coming of our Amish Mennonite ancestors to Canada.

In 1822 Christian Nafziger, an Amishman from Bavaria, sailed from Europe to the New World. He landed in New Orleans and traveled north to Canada where he eventually climbed the Baden Hill to check out the suitability of land for the landless Amish of Europe.

With the help of Mennonites from Ebytown (Kitchener), Nafziger negotiated a land deal with the Government of Upper Canada to open Wilmot Township for settlement. By 1823 the Brenneman, Kropf and Schwartztruber families were the first settlers to arrive. Soon other Amish families also came—Albrecht, Boshart, Bender, Beller, Erb, Gascho, Gerber, Gingerich, Goldschmidt, Jantzi, Honderich, Kuepfer, Lichti, Litwiller, Leis, Miller, Moyer, Nafziger, Oesch, Ropp, Roth, Schultz, Sommers, Steinmann, Wagler, Zehr—directly from Alsace, Lorraine, Germany and Switzerland.

The first Amish Congregation was organized in 1824 by Bishop John Stoltzfus from Lancaster, PA. The corner of Wilmot Township contained the Wellesley Amish Settlement. As families grew and more land was needed, Amish settlers moved to nearby areas and additional congregations were established--East Zorra (1837), Zurich (1848), Wellesley (1859) and Poole (1874).

Resistance by those opposed to the building of meeting houses resulted in the formation of the Old Order Amish which split from Maple View and Poole in the late 1880s. Through the years other divisions created the Beachy Amish (1903), Conservative Mennonites (1956) and Faith Mennonite (1987). Most of the congregations which once formed the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference are now members of the Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada or the Mennonite Brethren Conference. One common element among all these groups is the Amish Mennonite Fire and Storm Aid Union which since 1872 has provided mutual aid for fire and storm losses to its members.

On the Bicentennial of Christian Nafziger's land scouting trip to America, we thank God for the courage and vision of our ancestors to bring us to Canada, a bountiful land of freedom and peace.

You are invited to PARTICIPATE in events which are planned to REMEMBER and THANK GOD!

## **The Amish and Their “New” Neighbours** (Article #2 of 5 for the Amish Bicentennial)

When the Amish settlers arrived in the German Block, they did not come to an empty land, or “virgin wilderness”. The land was populated by and had been used by indigenous peoples for many, many years. The land we now call Wilmot Township had likely been at least partly cleared and farmed by the Chonnonton, part of the Neutral Nation. These were an Iroquoian People growing corn, beans, squash, sunflowers and other crops in a highly organized communal fashion. A cluster of their village sites dating to around 1400, have been excavated on the eastern edge of the township with other possible village sites near Baden.

After European arrival in North America in the 1500s, Indigenous populations were devastated by European diseases, upheaval and warfare. By 1701, a series of peace and sharing treaties largely ended warfare in Southwestern Ontario. The Neutral Nation declined and were largely absorbed by the Seneca, one of the Six Nations of the Grand.

The Mississauga, one of the Anishnaabeg Nations, now took control of a large swath of Southern Ontario. They used the land differently, moving seasonally to locations of seasonal abundance and resource harvesting, often also farming and gardening at those locations. The area to the southeast of Baden Hill, and close to Hoffstetter and Spongy Lakes was a known seasonal village site for the harvest of wild crops. Seasonal fishing stations were also of vital importance and there were several on “Smith’s Creek” as the Nith River was first named. One such fishing station was the rapids, which were dammed for a mill site at New Hamburg.

The Mennonite, Amish and British settlers profoundly misunderstood, or discounted, the Mississauga’s and other Indigenous Nations’ connections to the land. Indeed, viewing the 100 years of re-grown forests since the days of the Chonnonton farmers, they assumed the land to be “virgin wilderness”. The Amish and Mennonites have always cared deeply for land and have been very thankful for the opportunity to come to this place. They have a deep sense of stewardship of land and passing it on better than one found it. Nevertheless, Europeans view land as a commodity which one owns, is bought and can be sold. The Mississauga and other Indigenous Nations rather viewed land in a more spiritual sense. They saw their relationship to land as a deep connection, as to family. To the Mississauga,

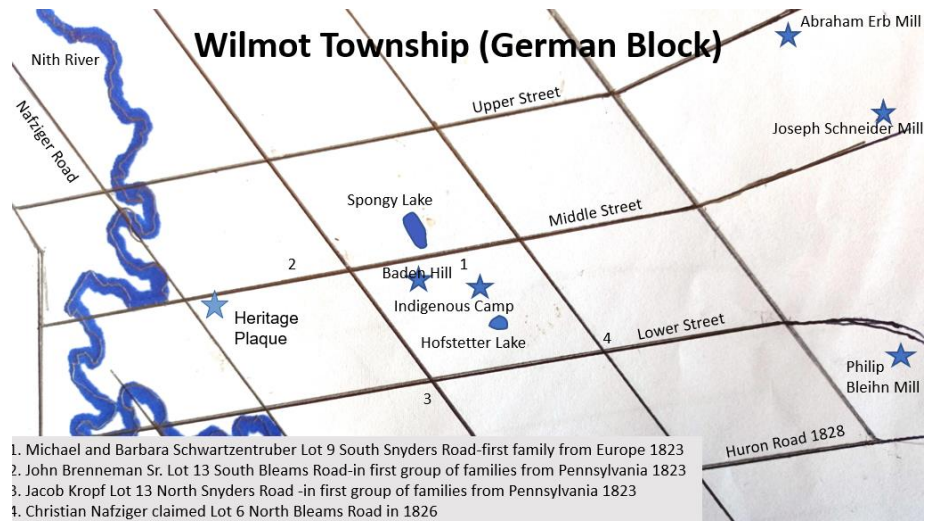
land was to be shared with, and for the benefit of all. One could no more sell land, than one could sell a family member.

Consequently, when the British, in 1784, negotiated Treaty #3, the “Between the Lakes Treaty”, covering all of the land from Long Point to Dundalk to the Niagara River, they saw it purely as a land purchase. In the words of British negotiator, Colonel John Butler, this land could be secured from the Mississauga for “a very trifling consideration”. The Mississauga, on the other hand saw this and other treaties as relationship building and sharing agreements for a spiritual and sustaining resource. Wabakinine, of the Mississauga, likely disputing the land sale concept of the British, stated in negotiations that, “we are not the owners of all of that land...” Consequently, the Mississauga fully expected to continue to harvest and share the land side by side with the newcomers.

In 1822, when the Amish began moving into the German Block in Wilmot, they met the Mississauga, still using their traditional harvest locations. There are several accounts of their interactions. They traded in staples with the Mississauga and apparently sometimes shared food and meals. Relations with their new neighbors were initially good and friendly. But as more land was quickly cleared and fenced, and rivers dammed for mills, the Indigenous people were pushed from the land and were no longer able to share in the resource. The Mississauga’s economy essentially went into collapse. With poverty and further settlement pressures, they abandoned their homes on the Grand and at the Head of Lake Ontario near Toronto and the Credit River. Some moved to the Chippewa reserves in the Saugeen (Bruce) Peninsula and on Manitoulin Island. A large group moved to the “official” New Credit Mississauga Reserve near Hagersville.

At New Credit, the Mississauga still continue as a Nation, united in the Three Fires Confederacy, together with the Odawa, Potawatomi and the Chippewa. But it is important to note that they have never given up their spiritual connection and rights to share in the resources of the land in this part of Ontario.

Writer: David G. Neufeld



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Christian Nafziger, the Amish Land Scout  
(Article #3 of 5 for the Amish Bicentennial)

Two hundred years ago life in German speaking Europe was difficult. Most farmers were too poor to own their own land and could only sharecrop land which was owned by nobles. Many wars were fought and although some countries permitted non-resistant Christians to buy exemptions from military service, many Mennonites and Amish moved to America where they enjoyed religious freedom and a better life.

Christian and Maria Nafziger were Amish Mennonites who lived near Munich in the Kingdom of Bavaria. They dreamed of a better life for their family and decided that Christian should visit America to search for farm land for themselves and other Amish families. With little more than a walking stick in hand and faith in God, Christian walked to Amsterdam in the fall of 1821. He told his story to a wealthy, Dutch Mennonite businessman named von Eegen who gave Christian a ticket on a sailing ship bound for America and \$10 extra. Although Christian's destination was Lancaster, Pennsylvania, his free ride took him to New Orleans where it landed on March 2, 1822. There another generous man, Vincent Nolte, also gave him \$10 for his travelling expenses.

New Orleans was more than 2,000 km. south of his destination. So how did Christian get to Pennsylvania? He walked. When Christian arrived in Lancaster in May, he was disappointed to learn that the good farm land was already taken or too expensive to buy. His friends told him to check out Canada. He had already travelled 9,000 km by ship and 2,700 km on foot so what was another 800 km? Especially since his friends gave him an "old horse" to ride.

In August 1822 Christian arrived in the Mennonite settlement along the Grand River. Then it was named "Ebytown" and today it's called "Kitchener." The Mennonites who had moved from Pennsylvania to Canada beginning in 1800 gave him a warm welcome and showed him the Crown Reserve to the west (Wilmot Township). Perhaps they met up with some Mississaugas, the Indigenous people who sometimes camped south-east of the Baden Hill and hunted, fished and farmed in

this area. Along with some Mennonites, Christian visited the British ruler of Upper Canada, Lieutenant Governor Maitland. He agreed to open Wilmot Township to settlers and promised to give 50 acres free to any family which built a cabin, cleared a road allowance and stayed at least 7 years. Christian returned to Europe via London where he stopped to confirm the land deal with the King of England. The King confirmed the deal, pressed some coins into Christian's hand and wished him well. After more than a year of travel, Christian returned to his wife and children in January 1823. Because they had no money to make the move, Mennonites in Ebytown helped Christian and his family move to Canada in 1826. They settled on Lot 6 North Bleams Road. Beginning in 1823 many Amish Mennonite families began settling in Wilmot. A few came from Pennsylvania but most came directly from Alsace, Lorraine, Germany and Switzerland. The first Amish Mennonite Church in Canada was organized here in 1824. Later it was organized into 2 congregations which today are called the Steinmann Mennonite Church and the St. Agatha Mennonite Church.

Christian's obituary says that "he took possession of his gift of land in Wilmot, cleared some of it, and built himself a home but before he was completely finished, he had to experience that our home here is not a lasting one, when his wife was taken to another Eternal and better one, to which he now, as just reported has followed her." He died in 1836 at the age of 60.

On the Bicentennial of his land scouting trip, we thank God for the courage and faith of Christian Nafziger who helped open Wilmot Township and encouraged many Amish Mennonites from Europe to come to Canada. We thank God for the Indigenous peoples who shared the land with Europeans. We thank God that Canada is still a nation which welcomes newcomers seeking peace, freedom and economic opportunity. "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt." (Leviticus 19:33-34)

Writer: Fred Lichti

## Daily Life For Early Amish Mennonite Settlers

(Article #4 of 5 for the Amish Bicentennial)

Have you ever gazed across the rolling landscapes around Baden and Wellesley and wondered what it was like before acres of forest gave way to the sprawling farmland we see now? What we can only imagine was in fact a lived reality for the Amish Mennonite settlers who came to chop and hew new lives out of the forested hills of the German Block in Wilmot.

The early days of settlement involved quite literally cutting a farmstead out of the forest. Amish Mennonite settlers were granted 50 acres of land provided they completed “settlement duties” within 18 months: these included building a log cabin, clearing a certain amount of farmland, and clearing and maintaining a road allowance along the front of those 50 acres. Male family members often left their wives and children with Mennonite settlers in Waterloo and went to work building a cabin on their plots in The German Block. Apparently they often slept in tree-houses so they could stay in the woods for several days at a time and minimize nighttime contact with bears and wolves. Clearing land to farm and building a cabin involved one key activity: chopping trees. The ample supply of maple, beech, hickory, oak and white ash had to be felled by hand and dragged into location; beams and sills and flooring planks were hewn and split by hand until the first sawmills were erected; logs were notched and dove-tailed as needed. Once the cabin was built, more forest needed to be chopped and cleared to make room for crops to sustain farm life. The woods must have been punctuated with the sound of axes and wedges ringing, saws barking, and trees crashing to the ground.

Although other industries developed over time, early settler life was built around the farmstead. Settling on forested land efficiently involved strategy. Planting robust crops like potatoes, corn, and turnips in the early stages provided food for animals and humans while more clearing was done to make space for grain and grass crops. Early tillage was done by hand using tools made from

wood, and harvest was equally laborious. Scythes and cradles were used to cut crops which were bound, threshed, and winnowed by hand. Even then there was more work, as sometimes men had to carry bags of wheat up to 20 miles to have it ground into flour. Some forestry and tillage was done with the help of animals. Oxen were reportedly more common than horses, as they were more patient when implements were hung up on roots and were less likely to tear harnesses.

Amish Mennonite women helped with outside work in addition to providing for family life inside the home. Days were filled with preparing food - tending garden, making butter and cheese, or canning for the winter - and making basic necessities: spinning flax and wool for clothes, making soap and candles, or processing maple sap to make sugar and vinegar. In those first log cabins, all cooking and baking was done in an open fireplace, which was also the main source of light once sunlight no longer came through the windows. On occasion, settler women had to go beyond the usual expectations of daily life. Orland Gingerich tells the story of a great-grandmother Gingerich who, with nothing more than a hickory stick, saved the year’s supply of pork by chasing a bear out of the pig pen. Another, Barbara Schwartzentruber, had to step in when her husband developed a heart condition and couldn’t continue the heavy work of clearing land. Barbara took over the work of yoking the oxen to the logs and guiding them into place, as well as hauling logs to the sawmill so they could be sawed into lumber for further building.

Amidst the heavy daily work, Amish Mennonite settlers found encouragement and fellowship among their faith community: bi-weekly worship services, visiting, singings, working bees, weddings and funerals were all occasions to gather and remind each other of God’s faithful provision. And in this we are not so different, gathering in the shadow of a world still marked by toil and struggle, telling the wonderful story of God’s great provision through Jesus Christ.

Writer: Kyle Gerber

## **Land Grants and Purchases by the Amish** (Article #5 of 5 for the Amish Bicentennial)

In 1822, Christian Nafziger, together with Mennonite investors resident in Block 2 of the Haldimand Tract, met with the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, Peregrine Maitland. In this meeting they secured a verbal promise of 50 acres "free" land available to the "destitute" European Amish settlers, if certain stipulations were met. These were: Clear and maintain the road allowance, clear 10 acres, erect a dwelling, and after 7 years, swear (or affirm) allegiance to the British Crown. Fulfil these stipulations and the 50 acres fronting the road would be granted free. For the Amish of Europe, who had not been allowed to own land due to their religious beliefs, this was a very enticing prospect.

Three roads and 200 acre lots were surveyed in the Crown lands to the west of Block 2 of the Haldimand Tract, (soon to be Waterloo Township) in what would become Wilmot Township. Three roads were surveyed which linked up with, and were eventually named for, the mills in Waterloo or Ebytown/ Berlin which served them: Oberstrasse became Erb Street for Abraham Erb's Mill, Mittelstrasse, Snyder Road for Joseph Schnieder's mill, and Unterstrasse or Bleams Road for Philip Bliehm's mill. This central area of Wilmot Township came to be known as the "German Block".

In addition to the free front 50 acres, Amish settlers would be able to lease the rear 150 acres of each 200 acre lot with the option to buy at the "going rate" after 21 years. (\$2.00 or 10 Shillings per acre) The first Amish settlers began arriving in 1823. This was prior to the actual surveys being completed by surveyor John Goessman. They also found immediately that they had to pay their share of the survey fee for the "free land grants". Many Amish, and other settlers, arrived in the German Block between 1823 and the early 1830s.

In 1828 however, the landlord and rules changed without warning. The government of Upper Canada wished to establish a provincial university- King's College, which later became the University of Toronto. To fund this endeavour, they deeded the back 150 acres of the lots in the German Block to King's College, such that all lease and sale payments would go for this purpose. King's College now asked exorbitant lease rates. Rent would be \$6 for the first 7 years, \$12 for second and \$18 for the last 7 years. Settlers could purchase

the 150 acre lots during the first 7 years outright for \$4.00 or 20 Shillings per acre. This was twice the original price.

This caused great anxiety for the Amish newcomers, many of whom had done substantial improvements on their lots, and as a result, some settlers left for Ohio and other parts of the United States where prices and terms appeared to be better.

However, after several petitions and intercession by surveyor, John Goessman with the Governor, the price was reduced by 1830 to closer to the "going rate" of 12s6p, 12 shillings and sixpence (\$2.50) per acre. (plus an additional 15s for the deed) There were also delays in issuing land deeds. The last deeds for the German Block were finally issued as late as the 1890's. The so-called "free land" turned out to have many hidden costs attached.

It is no surprise therefore that after 1828, when the Canada Company (a land development company) made land further west in the Huron Tract available at good prices, newly arrived Amish settlers, and the children of the first arrivals, often chose to settle there. Settlers in the 1830s began locating in North and South Easthope and East Zorra Townships. Here land was available at 7s6d, or 7 Shillings and Six Pence per acre, slightly more than half the price of the land in the German Block of Wilmot. In the Blake settlement in the Huron Tract, land could be secured in a "lease to own scheme" which attracted many settlers from the German Block.

As time went on, Amish settlers also took up land in Wellesley and Mornington Townships. Wellesley and Mornington Townships were part of what was referred to as the "Queen's Bush". This area was designated as a "Clergy Reserve", land which had been set aside for the funding of the Anglican clergy in Upper Canada.

Parts of the Queen's Bush had been settled and cleared by squatters with no title to the land. This included some Amish, and also a large free Black settlement, having escaped slavery in the USA. When this land was surveyed and opened for purchase in 1843, many of the squatters, and particularly the black settlers, could not afford to purchase the land and so were forced to leave for other parts of Ontario. This left land available for purchase by new settlers, such as the Amish, Mennonites and others.

Writer: David G. Neufeld