

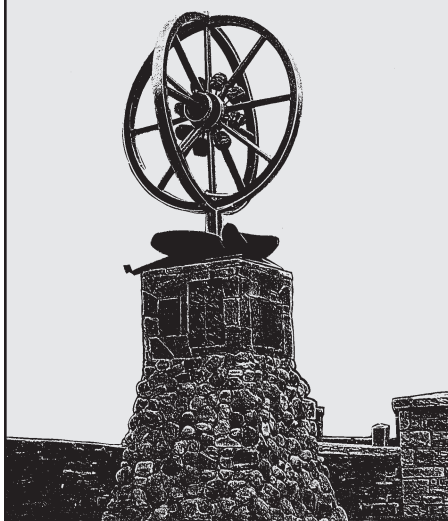
Ontario Mennonite History

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Je Me Souviens: Early Mennonite Missionaries in Québec

By Rebecca Steiner

Mennonites have called Canada home for generations, though historically there have not been Mennonites in Quebec. This changed in the 1950s, when two young couples moved there in the midst of ongoing tension between French Catholic culture and Anglo-Protestant faith. The stories of Harold and Pauline Reesor (née Short), and Tilman and Janet Martin (née Mills) have had significant influence from years of living in Quebec as agents of the Mennonite Church. In turn, the subsequent generations of Quebec Mennonites have been formed by the devoted service, humble generosity, and progressive leadership of these four pioneers.

The two couples met at Ontario Mennonite Bible Institute in Kitchener, Ontario. Harold Reesor came from a large family in Markham, Ontario, and married Pauline Short, who had moved from Archbold, Ohio, to attend the Bible Institute. Tilman Martin came from St. Jacobs, Ontario, and married Janet Mills, whose family had come to Canada from England, after the war. Tilman and Janet initially met at Toronto Bible College then finished their education at Ontario Mennonite Bible Institute with Harold and Pauline.

In the couples' final years at the Bible Institute, some of the teachers were talking about how the religious climate was changing in Quebec. Up until the mid 50s, the majority of French Canadians were devout Roman Catholic. In response to an increasing openness in Protestant Christian faith in some areas, there was a call for missionaries in Quebec. Other denominations already had presence in Quebec, some dating back to the turn of the century. At the time, some Plymouth Brethren leaders thought there should be Mennonites there, as well. This news spread to Ontario.

J.B. Martin, (a teacher at the Institute, as well as the Chair of the Mennonite Mission Board of Ontario) became aware of the possibility of Mennonite missionaries going to the neighbouring province and brought it up with the students. Shortly thereafter, Tilman, as a member of the Missions Committee, travelled to Quebec for several weeks with Enis Bearinger. They toured other Protestant churches, met with church leaders, and visited both urban and rural communities that might be lacking another Protestant presence. They visited Val d'Or, Montreal, Sherbrooke, and Quebec City among other areas. They learned more about the context in Quebec, and to what extent the culture was divided by language and ethnic barriers. Over time, waves of immigration began to create a more diverse demographic and this divided nature began to evolve. However, at the time, Protestants and Catholics were like oil and water.

After Tilman and Enis returned from the tour, The Mennonite Board of Missions (based out of Elkhart, Indiana) invited applications for two couples to begin evangelizing in Quebec. Harold and Pauline and Tilman and Janet were



*Pauline Reesor, Marc Reesor,
Harold Reesor in 1958.*

~ Continued on page 2 ~

chosen. First, the foursome went to Elkhart together for an Orientation. There, they were charged with being a presence in Quebec, and trying to “see what they could do” about the Catholic/Protestant conflict and provide a Protestant faith perspective in the language of the people.

A large part of their work would involve introducing interested Quebecois to “the free church,” or a church in which scripture does not need to be interpreted through a religious authority. They were to give a New Testament to anyone who asked for one, as a way to empower and enable independent reading of the Bible. As the Orientation came to a close and the couples were about to leave, they asked the leaders, “What is the next step, once we arrive?” These four young adults were told, “Learn the language. Do that for a year. Then you decide.”

And so it was that these two young couples packed up their belongings and moved; Harold, Pauline, Tilman, Janet (and their 2-year-old daughter, Deborah), spent 1956/57 living together on the south shore, at a Bible Institute that taught French as a second language. In between language classes, Harold and Tilman went visiting to “decide” where to go after language training. When the allotted year for learning French

was over, the two couples decided to be stationed in different areas (one urban, one rural). Tilman and Janet moved to Montreal North, and Harold and Pauline to Joliette. They received very little contact from the Mennonite Board of Missions, let alone further instruction regarding their work. Acknowledging the context and deeply entrenched influences of Catholic faith on the culture, they were aware this work would take time. That, paired with the independent nature of the positions, led the couples to deeply root themselves as locals and simply initiate whatever might seem most Christ-like in their communities.

Harold pastored the Joliette group for the first few years. He built a bungalow in which his family lived on the ground floor. The large basement served as the church building from 1962 until 1982. In 1963, Harold passed the responsibilities of the Joliette church on to Clyde and Elisabeth Shannon. The Reesors moved from Joliette to Terrebonne, and then to Mascouche, so they could be closer to the work that they were growing more involved with in Montreal. After leaving Joliette, Harold was no longer under contract with the Mennonite Board of Missions, but was instrumental in providing leadership to the emerging church in the city for the next years. Mascouche was where the

Reesors settled long-term, and where Harold’s farming background was able to come into its own and flourish.

Meanwhile, Tilman continued to pastor at Montreal North. He became part of the Protestant Ministers’ Association, a city group which met once a month for mutual support and to share resources. Like the Reesors in Joliette, the Montreal North group met in the Martins’ home. On one occasion, a woman came to the church wanting someone to visit her son who was in prison. Tilman made the visit, and from then on, was very involved in prison ministry. He and Janet welcomed many people on parole into their home. For the next several years, Harold and Tilman shared the gospel with many Quebecois through visits and conversations, using tracts (from the Western Tract Mission), and walking alongside those in and out prison. Later, they also did outreach with a growing immigrant community in Montreal.

During the 1960s, the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conference began a church planting ministry in St-Jérôme. Some of their missionaries who had worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) had passed through Quebec to learn French. This brief encounter made the conference aware of the possibilities for evangelism in Quebec. The addition of another Anabaptist presence was welcomed.

Both the Martin and the Reesor families were growing. By 1970, Harold and Pauline’s children included: Marc, Rachel, Carole, Christine, Paul, Annette, and Philip. They, along with Tilman and Janet’s children: Deborah, Denine, Luke, and Joel, grew up interacting with French playmates and quickly become “Petits Québécois” themselves. Due to the nature of the work, as well as the families’ generous spirits to those in need, both the Reesor and Martin homes were described as “Grand Central Station.” Before the Mennonite churches had buildings, their homes housed strangers and volunteers, were the meeting places for social events, and were the spaces to gather for prayer,



*Deborah Martin-Koop, Pauline Reesor,
Janet Martin, Tilman Martin*

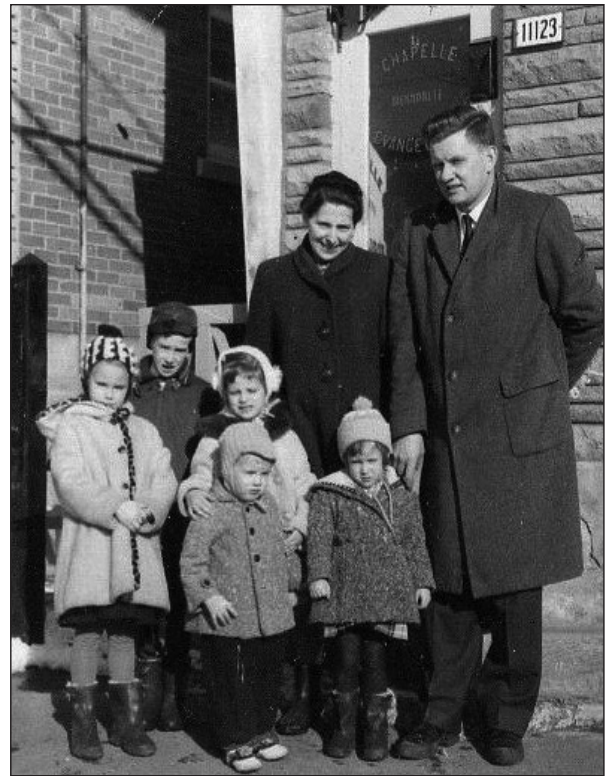
worship, and fellowship meals. Even after a church building was purchased, these two homes remained cornerstones and hubs of activity in the community.

They were never formally given “church planting” as a mandate. Rather, the approach was more informal, integrated, and people-based. There was growing belief in the Mennonite community that sharing the gospel meant strong community connections, moving into the place in which you are called to share good news, and walking alongside your neighbours. In addition to visiting Catholic homes and caring for youth in and out of prison, Tilman and Harold led Sunday evening prayer groups. These gatherings were often comprised of their families, volunteer service workers, engineers and doctors studying or working at McGill, and other Mennonites whose employment had brought them to Montreal and were seeking Anabaptist fellowship. Some of these people included Margaret and Walter Friesen, Rachel and Joe Martin, Irwin and Katie Dueck, Henry Remple, Alex Groot, Dave Sauder, Emily Nighswander and Robert Koop, among others. These Sunday evening prayer groups were times to connect with like-minded people and share the joys and sorrows of daily life and ministry. At points, the couples felt pressure from colleagues of other denominations who were planting churches to make a more formalized effort of their presence, which eventually was a catalyst for a downtown ministry and church.

There had always been talk of starting some sort of inner-city ministry, however, it was not until Albert Hodder and his family arrived in 1971 that this materialized. Around this time,

Tilman started working as a Prison Chaplain and moved his family to St. Paul de Joliette. Albert came with his family and a background in inner-city work through the Salvation Army in Paris. He took over leadership for the church in Montreal North. However, with a penchant for evangelism, the scope of work was not challenging enough; he moved the Montreal North congregation downtown in 1973, and shortly after that, the church moved into the old community centre on Duluth Avenue that the conference had just bought for inner-city outreach.

The community centre was in the heart of the neighbourhood (now “Le Plateau”) that was traditionally known as “the place through which you pass” as a new immigrant. While there were many Quebecois families there, at first, there were also large numbers of Jewish and Ukrainian communities, followed by a Greek migration, and later Portuguese. There were newcomers from Chile, and other parts of South America, as well as El Salvador. The building was named, “La Maison de l’Amitié,” or The House of Friendship. The building itself had always been a positive place for the neighbourhood. Its origins were as a Jewish Community Centre, offering space for a group that had a vision for a gathering place in the city. After it had seen a good run, a Ukrainian Community Centre moved in for several



*The Reesor family. Back Row: Rachel Reesor, Marc Reesor, Carole Reesor, Pauline Reesor, Harold Reesor
Front Row: Paul Reesor, Christine Reesor*

years. So it was fitting that the new owners of the building were calling it, “The House of Friendship” and starting another community ministry there.

Albert took the main leadership in piloting this new venture, and Harold remained a constant co-leader who provided support. By 1977/78, church services were consistently being held in the Duluth building, and so as the Montreal North church dissolved, a new congregation: Montreal Mennonite Fellowship was formed. The church was an amalgamation of the Montreal North group, the Reesors in Mascouche, and the small population of Mennonites who had come to Quebec for employment

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Inquiries, articles, book notices or news items should be directed to the Editor, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario c/o Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6 TEL. 519-885-0220, FAX 519-885-0014



The Reesor children celebrate a birthday.

or volunteer work. There were both French and English services at Montreal Mennonite Fellowship.

After a couple of years in this place, Albert resigned from his position to pursue a non-denominational church plant. This opportunity would allow his passion for evangelism to flourish. The theology of Montreal Mennonite Fellowship and La Maison de l'Amitié was community-centred, involved serving marginalized/fringe communities, and fellowshiping together. Harold continued to provide leadership through being highly involved

in the life of Maison de l'Amitié and Montreal Mennonite Fellowship.

In 1976, Gloria and Vern Redekopp took over from Albert Hodder as Directors for La Maison de l'Amitié. In 1980, this responsibility was passed onto Ernie and Tina Dyck. Over the years, La Maison de l'Amitié developed programming for youth, a daycare for low-income families, refugee intervention and legal support, French language classes, and later computer and English classes. Eventually, in 1980, Tilman and Janet's oldest daughter, Deborah and her husband Robert Koop, took over pastoral leadership for the Montreal Mennonite Fellowship congregation.

During their time as co-pastors, a Ukrainian couple walked by La Maison de l'Amitié and curiously inquired about the groups occupying the space. By the time Debby had finished telling them about the programs and purpose of Maison de l'Amitié, the couple was

beaming. They said, "This place was always intended to be a place of joy." The couple would be glad to know that the same intentions still remain. To this day, La Maison de l'Amitié and Montreal Mennonite Fellowship are places for friends, and places of joy.

Harold, Pauline, Tilman and Janet left a mark on the Mennonite community in Quebec. They lived their lives as vessels of offering, opening their homes, giving more than they received, walking alongside their brothers and sisters, and keenly aware that transformation takes time. Pauline and Janet are dearly remembered as strong, genteel and generous women who led radical lives. Tilman and Harold continue to share their gifts and stories that made them such strong leaders in Quebec with the communities they are a part of today.

Rebecca Steiner lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she works remotely as the General Director of Theatre of the Beat. She enjoys sailing, cooking, and thrift shopping. Rebecca is the eldest granddaughter of Harold and Pauline Reesor. In June, 2014, she married Pierre-Joël Koop, grandson of Tilman and Janet Martin!

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In Memory Of... Mary Ann Horst

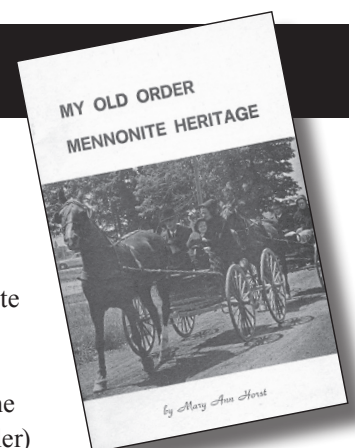
Mary Ann Horst passed away on July 30, 2014 at the age of 83. She made an important contribution to the understanding of Mennonites of Waterloo Region through her writing—especially her booklet *My Old Order Mennonite Heritage*.

As an adult, Mary Ann returned to school to obtain her secondary education. She valued her heritage and had a keen interest in history and genealogy. She was author of a number of books related to Waterloo County Mennonites. For many years she operated a Pennsylvania Dutch gift, craft, and book shop on King Street, and was a vendor at the Kitchener Farmers Market.

In 1993 Mary Ann was recognized as a Woman of the Year with an award in the Arts/History/Literature category. Mary

Ann was a long-time resident of K-W and was member of First Mennonite Church in Kitchener. More recently she moved to Elmira and joined Elmira Mennonite Church.

She passed away at Martin's Rest Home in Elmira. She was the daughter of Eli and Matilda (Sittler) Horst and had the following brothers and sisters: Ismael, David (Perseda), Urias, Susanna, Salinda (Gordon Ariss), Sarah, Noah (Evelyn), and Eli (Helen).



Spring meeting highlights family searches in Soviet Union

By Barb Draper

The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario hosted "In Search of Family in the Soviet Union" at Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church on June 14, 2014. Maureen Klassen, author of *It Happened in Moscow* and Anne Konrad, author of *Red Quarter Moon: A Search for Family in the Shadow of Stalin*, gave us some glimpses into their stories. Both of them were able to discover information about family events in the Soviet Union that had been impossible to access before the 1990s.

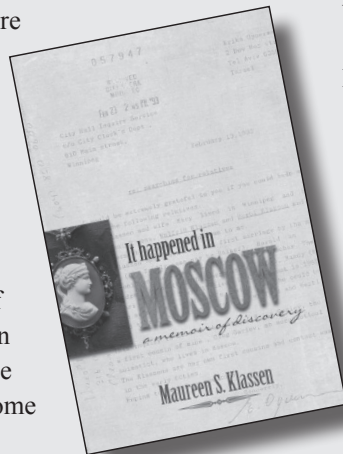
Maureen Klassen

Maureen and her husband, Herb Klassen, were serving with Mennonite Central Committee in Moscow in the 1990s when they were surprised to receive a phone call from someone who was searching for a brother. This phone call led them to discover some surprising information about the C.F. and Mary Klassen family.

"We were in Moscow at just the right time," said Maureen. The fact that they had studied Russian allowed them to communicate with this woman who turned out to be a kind of step-sister to Herb.

It took 20 years to gather the information for *It Happened in Moscow*. Through it all, the people living in the Soviet Union were faced with the perennial dilemma of whether to stay where they were or to flee.

Maureen recognized that there was great suffering in Russia and concluded that through it all, faith lives and that's what's important. She remembered the experience of being at the first performance of Handel's *Messiah* in the Kremlin after the end of communism. She found it a symbolic closure to some very difficult years. She said we should always look for God's grace in all of our stories because "God has the last word."



Anne Konrad

Anne Konrad was born in the Peace River area in northern Alberta to a refugee family who fled Russia in the 1920s. Her father had three brothers and two sisters who remained in the Soviet Union. Her book, *Red Quarter Moon* was a search to answer the question of why her people were persecuted.

In 1989 Anne Konrad, who is married to Harvey L. Dyck, was able to visit Russia where she met some relatives.

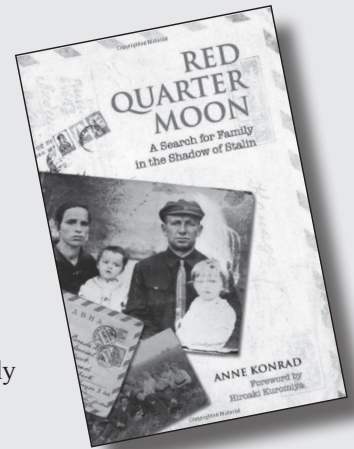
She spent 20 years searching for information about missing relatives and putting together the stories of those who lived in the shadow of Stalin. Her book was published in 2012.

Her book begins with some political background to provide context for the story and to explain why German-speaking people were feared by the Bolsheviks. Records were kept of anyone who accepted foreign aid, especially if it came via Germany.

Konrad tried to find interrogation records. The secret police files were very difficult to access, but during the years when she was searching she was able to view some records if she asked in advance, if she came in person and if she was a relative.

Because so many Mennonites were exiled or killed, those who remained often suffered from survivor's guilt. Her uncle wondered why he was fortunate enough to survive when so many others were not.

Red Quarter Moon broadens our picture of the life of Mennonites under the Soviet regime.



Maureen Neufeld and Helen Epp



Anne Konrad

By Barb Draper

Most of the manuscripts that come to Amsey are handwritten or typed. When his editing process is finished, he assigns someone (sometimes from his family) to carefully type out the pages so that they are “camera ready” which means he can send them to a printer to be scanned. The

Top Left Picture: One shelf in Amsey Martin's study contains the books he has published.

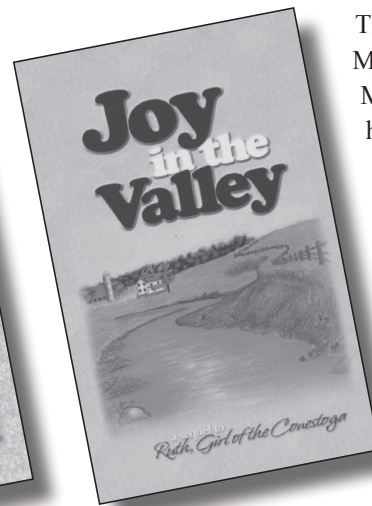
Vineyard Books

Two of the books by Vineyard Publications are *Ruth, Girl of the Conestoga* and *Joy in the Valley*. Ruth Weber, the main character in both books, lives and works in the Conestoga River valley. She grew up near Hawkesville, but often travels to Wallenstein or St. Jacobs as she works in other's homes, attends church services and visits her friends. Ruth is in her late teens, finished with school and trying to find her footing in an adult world within the Old Order Mennonite community of Waterloo Region.

The books explore a wide variety of issues that come up in daily life in a traditionalist culture, such as getting along with others, the pain of gossip, learning to trust in God, and even how to respond to books that show Old Order culture in a negative way.

Unlike many Amish romances, these stories are authentic. The story is told from within the community and although Ruth struggles at times, she clearly espouses the values of her people. Amsey Martin, the publisher, writes, "For anyone interested in Old Order Mennonite thought, faith, and lifestyle, I believe this series is good reading."

Called to be a Soldier by Darrell Frey, is a book that describes the experiences of conscientious objectors at Alternative Service camps during the Second World War. This book was not done with a typewriter and it has many photos, letters and documents that help describe the experiences of the COs, especially those at Montreal River in northern Ontario.

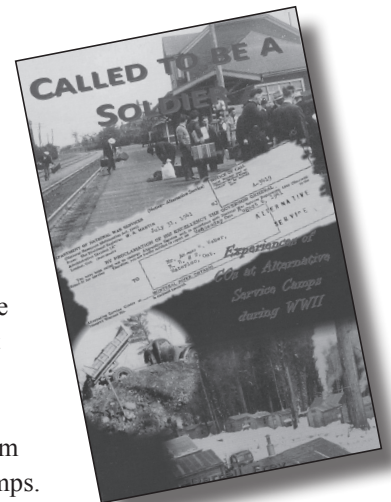


The author is from the Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference and he used a computer to put the manuscript together. His style is a kind of creative non-fiction as he anchors his story on facts, but is creative with how he tells the story. When he describes the activities of the camps, he uses dialogue and it's not clear that those words were ever

spoken 70-plus years ago. He uses

footnotes to identify exactly who the individuals are and who they are referring to, so that many readers will find well-known friends and relatives in the story. This playfulness with historical facts will make historians uneasy, but it makes for an interesting tale about events that actually happened.

The back of the book contains many letters and documents, a number of which were written by Noah M. Bearinger who served as the secretary of the Committee on Military Problems and part of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches. Other lists include the names of those from Ontario who served in CO camps.

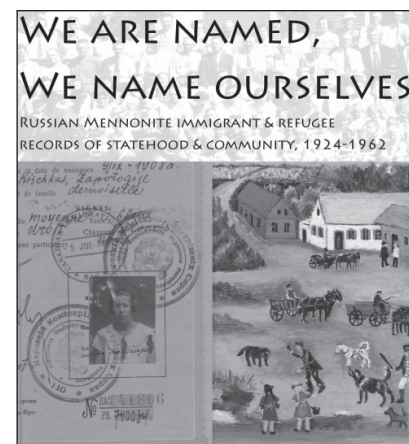


New exhibit gallery at the Archives

The first exhibit at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario gallery commemorates the 90th anniversary of Russian Mennonite settlement in Ontario.

The 20th century was a time of dispersal for Russian and Soviet Mennonites, as for many immigrants and refugees around the world. Keeping records became an urgent activity. The state requires records of ethnic origin, health, nationality, and relationships. Dislocated communities, families and individuals require records to find the scattered, distribute aid, rebuild religious life, and recover identity. Behind every record is a name, a story.

The exhibit runs from September 2014 to January 2015 at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario gallery (located at the entry to the Milton Good Library at Conrad Grebel University College).



The passport of Sara (Hildebrandt) Pauls; young Sara ("the little blonde girl") as painted by her husband, Henry B. Pauls.

In Memory Of... Paul Burkholder

By Leonard Friesen

The Ontario Mennonite Historical Society lost a loyal founding member with the passing of Paul H. Burkholder on 29 March 2014. As the son of Ontario Mennonite historian and Markham minister, Lewis J. (and Emma) Burkholder, Paul almost inherited his love of history and genealogy.

Mennonite history was about relationships for Paul. As a Mennonite from Markham he understood himself to be kin to all Markham Mennonites past and present regardless of whether they stayed in the Mennonite fold. After he married Eva A. Reesor in 1950 (who predeceased him in 2008), Paul “adopted” Eva’s family tree as his own. Eva connected Paul to the Waterloo county Mennonite story through her Weber “Freundschaft,” though he felt equally connected to Vineland through Lewis’s first wife, Lucetta High. And well beyond historical matters, Paul and Eva’s strong commitment to faith in action was reflected in their support of the Mennonite Central Committee.

Though he was particularly committed to the Ontario (“Swiss”) Mennonite story, Paul was interested in almost any-

thing past and present. He had a keen eye for detail and was a man of many talents. He was equally comfortable leading an OMHS bus tour of the Markham district as he was leading his grandchildren on a hike of historical sites along the creek below the Cedar Grove Cemetery. He was also a skilled artist, whether as furniture maker, creator of countless celebrative plates, or the logo that is used to this day by the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario.

Paul H. Burkholder was a man of deep Christian faith. He was loved by family and friends, and will be missed.



(July 25, 1926 – March 29, 2014)

News & Notes...

Marion Roes has received an Ontario Heritage Trust Certification of Lifetime Achievement Award. It was presented to her at the Waterloo Regional Council meeting on June 25, 2014 for her work in preserving the history of Waterloo Region.

Sam Steiner is working on the last stages of his book project that encompasses the history of Mennonites in Ontario over the last 200 years. It is being published by Herald Press with support from the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. It will be a large volume, but because of its broad scope and careful research, many people will want it on their reference shelf. The projected completion date is March, 2015.

An exhibition of 22 paintings by Ray Dirks is on display at Conrad Grebel University College until Jan. 18, 2015. This collection, “Along the Road to Freedom,” can be found on the 4th floor (in the gallery of the MSCU Centre for Peace Advancement) and in the Milton Good Library on the 3rd floor. The paintings depict women of courage and faith who led their families out of the Soviet Union after the revolution and after the Second World War. The exhibit is a project of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada will be meeting at Conrad Grebel University College January 15-17. The annual general meeting on Sat. Jan. 17 is open to the public and anyone interested is invited to attend.

Plans are underway for an all-day bus trip to Leamington in early June, 2015 which will include the spring meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. We will be hosted by the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Society.

