

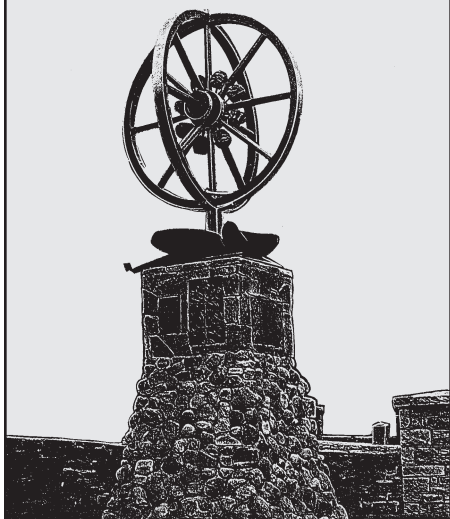
# Ontario Mennonite History

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## Rainham Mennonite Church

By Barb Draper

Jacob Hoover was born in York County, Pennsylvania, in 1729. In 1791, when he was 62 years of age, he considered going north to Canada, but was dissuaded by his wife, Barbara Summers. The following year, he and several sons

church in the township. Michael Shank is listed as the Mennonite preacher in 1816.

The first church was built beside Lake Erie where the Lakeshore Mennonite cemetery still remains, just a short distance south of the present-day



*The church in 1930 (Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo).*

Rainham Mennonite Church. It is not known exactly when this first church was built, but after it was destroyed by fire, another church was built on that location. In 1870, Peter Hoover donated the land where the Rainham Mennonite Church stands today and a new church was built.

travelled to Ontario by horseback and purchased 2,500 acres of land along the north shore of Lake Erie, near the village of Selkirk. In 1793 the families travelled by Conestoga wagon to their new home, crossing the Niagara River by ferry at Fort Erie and fording the Grand River near Dunnville.

A list of early land transactions in Rainham shows that most of the land had been granted by the Crown to Captain John Dochstader in payment for services rendered. The Dochstader land was purchased in the name of David Hoover who transferred it to members of the Hoover families including the sisters and their husbands. David Hoover kept for his personal use, lots 4, 5 and 6 in Rainham Township. A deed, dated 1836, shows that a little more than one acre of lot 5 was given to the Mennonite Society (specifically Benjamin Hoover, Henry Miller and John Fry) for a church and cemetery. As was customary at the time, the land was not officially registered until 1846.

Rainham Township was very sparsely settled before 1816, but soon after that families moved to the area from other areas such as Vineland and Niagara. Family names came to include Shank, Swartz, Strickler, Sherk, Werner, Miller and Byer. At that time it was the only



*The church in 1960 (Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo).*

The Old Order split in 1889 was very divisive in this congregation. Leonard Hoover, the minister supported Christian Gayman, the local bishop from the neighbouring South Cayuga congregation, who stood firmly on the Old Order side. Several families were opposed, they wanted to be affiliated with what became the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and the congregation was divided, leaving both groups small in numbers. The Old Order group dwindled slowly through the twentieth century and finally closed in 1955.

Moses Hoover, an older man, was ordained minister for the progressive group at Rainham in 1893, and also served the nearly congregation of South Cayuga. Because of his indifferent

~ Continued on page 2 ~

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*The Hoover cemetery on the shore of Lake Erie was the original site of Rainham Mennonite Church. In the foreground is a monument commemorating Jacob Hoover, the founder of this Mennonite community. (Photo by Roy Draper)*

health, a series of men helped serve the congregation, sometimes for a year at a time.

A. Lewis Fretz had been ordained in the Markham area in 1920 and through the 1920s he was one of the people who came once a month to lead the service at Rainham. In 1931 he moved to the area and served as their regular minister until his death in 1963. In 1945 he also served as the local bishop for the Niagara district. Orrie Gingrich assisted Lewis Fretz in the later years and was ordained in 1965. He served at Rainham until 1972



*Close to the shore of Lake Erie is a plaque with the following inscription: "This plaque is erected over the foundations of the first church of the Rainham Mennonite settlement. This was the second oldest Mennonite meeting house in Canada. Constructed circa 1810, and served as the religious and cultural centre of the community for many years. The original meeting house was destroyed by fire and was replaced in 1870 by the present structure, located one mile north of this site." It was erected by the Rainham Mennonite congregation on its 200th anniversary (1993) and by the North Erie Shore Historical Society and the I.O.O.F. Lodge of Selkirk. (Photo by Roy Draper)*

when Cyril Gingerich came to serve until 1983. Recent pastors have been Catharine Hunsberger and Karen Sheil.

Rainham Mennonite Church is still using its 1870 building, although it has been renovated a few times. The original building had separate entrances for men and women; it had two wood stoves at each side with a centre chimney. Gas lights were installed in

1908 and they were replaced by electric lights in 1935. Horse sheds stood along the north and west sides of the building.

A major renovation came in 1957 when a basement was constructed under the existing building and a furnace was added. A few years later new pews, purchased from The First Mennonite Church in Vineland, were installed. The year 1967 saw major changes with an addition to the front of the building

providing a new main entrance and a basement kitchen. An organ was also purchased that year. In the late 1970s new windows were installed, the sanctuary re-decorated and a piano was placed in the sanctuary. In the early 1980s a new roof and new siding was installed. The cemetery at the lake also needed some work due to erosion along the shore and a break-wall was constructed there in the spring of 1975.



*The church in 2000 (Photo by Barb Draper).*

In 1925 Rainham had a membership of 24 which grew to 51 in 1985. In 1989, about 30 members who were seeking a more charismatic worship style left Rainham to form the Living Word

Christian Fellowship. This group dissolved by 1992. The Rainham congregation has never been large and membership in 2000 stood at 38. Like other congregations Rainham has offered a

variety of programs to its members and to its neighbours. Rainham was one of the locations where J. S. Coffman held revival meetings in 1891 and ten people were added to the membership. In 1925 when C. F. Derstine held meetings at the church, the school next door was cancelled for the afternoon so that the children could attend the meeting.

Sunday School was first organized in 1883 with Lydia Hoover as the first superintendent. Summer Bible School was also a regular program for many years, beginning in 1936. The women's sewing circle, first organized in 1918, has supported the mission of the church through the years. Rainham has also participated in sponsoring refugees, not only Mennonites from Russia in 1924-26, but also refugees from southeast Asia in 1980.

Rainham Mennonite Church may be the oldest congregation in Mennonite Church Canada and probably has one of the oldest buildings still used by Mennonites. (The Martin's meeting house in Waterloo is older.)

*Information from Rainham's 200th anniversary booklet, collected by Mary Dawson, Lynne Swent and Cyril Gingerich.*



# Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association and Peter A. Epp Centre Archives

By Astrid Koop

Shortly after the Helen Tiessen and Peter A. Epp marriage in 1939, Peter asked Helen to save every issue of *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Der Bote*. This small act became the first step in the formation of the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association.

The Epps had served as youth leaders, missionaries and finally, houseparents at UMEI Christian High School before retiring to their Danforth Avenue home in Leamington, Ontario. Here the Epp basement was soon filled with Mennonite historical artifacts and printed material. Mennonite historical meetings were held regularly in the Epp home.

The Epp collection was eventually moved to a room on the second floor of the UMEI where meetings were held with an elected Board of Directors. When the Leamington Mennonite Home on Pickwick Drive expanded to include condominiums, a room on the second floor there was purchased by the EKMHA to house the collection of books and artifacts which, by this time, had grown considerably.

Early in 2010, the Leamington Mennonite Home was open to negotiations about acquiring a larger facility and several rooms on the main floor of 31 Pickwick, including a kitchen, were rented by the EKMHA. The Mennonite Home provided new

flooring, the Board members painted the walls, installed a large information desk and mounted the Menno Simons story. Paintings by Mennonite artists adorn the walls.

In July of 2010, the Heritage Café opened its doors with coffee and baked goods served by volunteers Monday through Friday mornings. Pickwick Drive neighbours and friends gather for visits and take time to check out recent acquisitions. While there, they can also have their family tree printed and do research in the archives room.

In an attempt to raise funds and entertain the neighbours, a series of travelogues was offered by various seniors on winter Friday evenings during 2011. Donations were taken at the door; coffee and baked goods were enjoyed after the program.

A committee is currently putting together a *Mennonite Memories of Pelee Island* photo book. A group of Russian Mennonite immigrants lived on the Island 1925 to 1950. The Board of Directors was pleased indeed when a student from Conrad Grebel University College, working on her Doctoral degree, visited our archives on a regular basis to gather information.

The EKMHA is grateful to Linda Tiessen, administrator of the Leamington Mennonite Home, for making this splendid facility available!



At the 2010 fall meeting, Laureen Harder-Gissing showed members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario this 1748 copy of the *Martyrs Mirror*, recently acquired by the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. This copy had been owned by Wilfred Schlegel, the founding pastor of Nairn Mennonite Church. The *Martyrs Mirror* was first published in the Netherlands in 1660. There were 1,300 copies printed in the German language at the Ephrata Cloister by the Franconia Mennonite Conference between 1748 and 1749. Concern of Mennonite leaders over an impending war in colonial America was a major incentive for the project. It was an extraordinary feat for that time to translate, publish and print a book of 1,512 pages; it was the largest volume of any kind to be printed in colonial America. This is the second copy of this edition to be held by The Mennonite Archives of Ontario. (*Canadian Mennonite* photo by Dick Benner)

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# Expanding the “Mennonite Box”

by Laureen Harder-Gissing

## The Archives’ first 70 years

The Mennonite Archives of Ontario had its origin in the research undertaken by Lewis J. Burkholder in the early 1930s for his book, *A brief history of the Mennonites in Ontario* ([Kitchener, Ont. : Mennonite Conference of Ontario], 1935). During his research he gathered a significant quantity of 19th century letters and published documents and placed these in a “Mennonite box” at the Archives of Ontario in Toronto.

In 1941, when the Golden Rule Bookstore (later Provident Bookstore) was built in Kitchener, an archives room was included in the basement. The manager of the bookstore, J.C. Fretz, was also the historian for the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. When the room was ready, the box was retrieved from Toronto, and returned to Mennonite hands. In 1959, the growing Archives moved to 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 initiated plans to establish an Ontario Mennonite archives. Incorporated in 1961 as a college affiliated with the University of Waterloo, Grebel has always had an interest in providing educational opportunities for the community. Bringing the Mennonite Archives of Ontario under the wing of the College and expanding its mandate was seen to be such an opportunity. A committee appointed by the College, including Dorothy Swartzentruber and College President J. Winfield Fretz, invited Grebel’s constituent conferences and other Ontario Mennonite groups to deposit their archival materials at the College.

In a related development, the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, formed in 1965, listed “preservation of Mennonite historical materials, including centralizing these materials at Conrad Grebel College’s historical library and



archives” as part of its original purpose. In 1965, the collection was moved from Rockway to Grebel. Lorna Bergey took charge of the collection until 1974 at which time Sam Steiner was hired as the first paid staff person. Laureen Harder-Gissing became archivist after Sam’s retirement in January 2009.

MAO serves as the official repository for Conrad Grebel University College, Mennonite Central Committee (Ontario) and Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. Other Mennonite institutions, organizations, congregations and individuals also have collections here in letters, diaries, meeting minutes, photographs, films, audiotapes, artwork and clothing. Our growing collection currently consists of 780 linear metres of records in print, audio visual and photographic formats. The collections are of local, regional, provincial and national significance. In addition, the Archives houses the Mennonite Historical Library, the largest collection of publications of Mennonite/Anabaptist origin in Canada.

## Planning for the future

Archives are resources for history, identity, and vision. Mennonites in Ontario benefit from the presence of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario through the connections it creates and reputation it builds with scholars, the Mennonite constituency, the local community, and worldwide. The recorded experience of Ontario Mennonite institutions, people, and congregations, will continue to grow. Turning away unique or vulnerable archival materials due to space constraints means they could disappear forever. After 70 years of expansion of our collections and visitors experiencing

cramped conditions, it is time to enlarge and revitalize the Archives. Several years of planning have resulted in a design that is both functional and pleasing.

## What will it look like?

Approaching Grebel from Westmount Road, visitors will be guided to a prominent College entrance. Making their way past a community education room available for occasional use for Archives educational events, visitors will move towards the stairs or elevator to enter the library and archives.

Ascending one level, they will arrive at a gallery where Archives’ treasures will, for the first time, be displayed in a suitable and secure environment. Upon entering the library and archives reception area, they will see an archivist’s office and be able to look into the workroom where staff and volunteers will process archival records. A designated reading room will offer visitors large tables for reading archival records and equipment to aid in research. This area could easily accommodate school visits or adult education workshops. The storage area, accessible only to staff, will be built to accepted archival standards and triple current capacity.

Building design will take into account the future need for digital storage. An accessible washroom will be adjacent to the reading room, and a photocopier room will be shared with the library. Burkholder’s “Mennonite box” will soon be housed within a much larger Mennonite box. However, the purpose of the Archives remains the same: to collect, preserve and make Ontario Mennonite history accessible.

# Lorraine Roth resigns after many years of service



Lorraine Roth, a charter member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, has resigned her position on the *Ontario*

*Mennonite History* committee after serving since 1994. She also contributed to the *Mennogespreech*, the forerunner of *Ontario Mennonite History*, writing a regular column on genealogy from 1983 to 1989.

Lorraine dedicated a big part of her life to researching Amish Mennonite families who migrated from Alsace to Waterloo Region in the 1820s and her work provides much valuable information for other historians. In 1969, Lorraine set sail for Europe, not knowing how she was going to support herself, but hoping that somehow she would be able to find information about her forebears. For the next year-and-a-half, as well as doing secretarial work for the Mennonite Board of Missions and MCC, she did grassroots research on Amish Mennonite families.

When she returned to Waterloo Region, she continued her genealogical research, meticulously going through census records, municipal records and registry records. She taught herself to read German script so she could read letters and other written documents. Over the years she has continued this research with the same perseverance and attention to detail.

Lorraine wrote genealogies of the four branches of her own family (Roth, Brenneman, Schwartzentruber and Oesch) and soon other people were asking for assistance in compiling genealogies. In her lifetime, Lorraine compiled 25 different genealogies and has assisted with another 15 or 20.

In 1972 when the Amish Mennonites were celebrating their sesquicentennial,

Lorraine wrote the historical background for the souvenir booklet. At the time, early records of the township were scarce, but in 1986 more information came to light when the University of Toronto was moving its archival collection. Lorraine was excited to find new documents to comb through and in 1998 she published *The Amish and Their Neighbours: The German Block, Wilmot Township, 1822-1860*.

Over the years, Lorraine has served on the Historical Committees of the former Western (Amish) Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada and the Mennonite Church. She served on the board of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario for many years. When the Women's Missionary and Service Commission was looking for someone to feature the achievements of the past, they turned to Lorraine, and her book, *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women* was published in 1992.

Lorraine herself was an outstanding woman for her time. She completed high school at Rockway Mennonite School at a time when that was unusual. She went on to graduate with a B.A. from Goshen College and served two terms with the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions, working in Honduras. She was an intrepid traveler and returned to Europe a few times to continue research there. She supported herself by working at Provident Bookstore and as a secretary at Wilfrid Laurier University all the while following her passion for Mennonite history.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada honoured Lorraine with the Award of Excellence in 2010. Thank you to Lorraine for her many years of dedicated service to preserving and making available to others the history of Amish and Mennonite families in Ontario.

## GAMEO releases DVD

*GAMEO release by Sam Steiner*



Richard Thiessen

The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) Management Board met on Nov. 20, 2010 in Akron, Pa. The board appointed Richard Thiessen

of Abbotsford, B.C., as managing editor of GAMEO effective Jan. 2012, following the retirement of Sam Steiner. Thiessen, Library Director at Columbia Bible College, has been serving as associate managing editor since Nov. 2006.

A DVD version of GAMEO was released in March 2011 which includes all encyclopedia content through Jan. 19, 2011. The target audience for the DVD edition is conservative Anabaptist groups who use computers but not the Internet. Some copies may also go outside North America where Internet accessibility is limited. These DVDs will be provided without cost, though donations would be accepted.

The Board also approved the formation of a panel of consulting editors to advise on subject areas such as theology, history, sociology, and the arts which are currently 20-50 years old. Barbara Nkala (Zimbabwe), Gerhard Ratzlaff (Paraguay) and Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Germany) are among the international consulting editors named.

GAMEO has also obtained permission to translate into English some material from Mennonite sources in Germany and Paraguay. Fundraising towards creating a truly functional multilingual site continues with about half the required \$20,000 raised.

GAMEO is a project of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, the Historical Committee of Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite World Conference. All work is done by volunteer staff, editorial boards and writers. It is freely available at [www.gameo.org](http://www.gameo.org) and includes over 1,800 contributors and 14,750 articles.



# People and Projects

When the new Waterloo Region Museum in Kitchener will open its exhibits later this year, one of the highlights will be the museum's **Conestoga wagon** driven from Pennsylvania by Abraham Weber and his family in 1807. The wagon is in a remarkably good state of preservation, with the exception of the linen wagon cover. Vintage linen fabric, salvaged from Europe, has been purchased and a pattern is being developed, based on original wagon covers in other museum collections. The museum is inviting individuals and groups to help with hand-sewing the fabric into the desired shape. For more information contact Deborah Young, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, at 519-748-1914 ext. 3272 or [DeYoung@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:DeYoung@regionofwaterloo.ca).

**Erb Street Mennonite** congregation will celebrate 160 years in 2011! Although Pennsylvania Mennonites started meeting in the area in the mid-1830s, the first meetinghouse was built in 1851 at what is now southeast corner of Erb Street and Fisher-Hallman Road in Waterloo. To celebrate, Erb Street's newsletter, *The Community*, will show early photos, and a permanent display of photos, artifacts and antique quilt squares is being planned. Later in the year, an event featuring a commissioned musical composition by Joanne Bender will be held. In 2012, Erb Street will mark the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the present church building at 131 Erb St. W, Waterloo. According to anecdotal evidence, when the old meetinghouse was dismantled in 1902, the bricks were used in building the house on the corner of Dawson Street and Dunbar Avenue.

**Mennonite Heritage Portrait** is an online archive of Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren heritage and culture. This website allows you to sign up and contribute your stories and photos to Waterloo Region's cultural history. You can search this online database to find articles, photographs, stories and digital artifacts. When information for this

website was initially gathered some of the major projects were digitizing the David Hunsberger and the Peter Etril Snyder photograph collections as well as photographing and describing the Brubacher House Museum artifacts. This website continues to be updated by its users and contributors. You can visit the Mennonite Heritage Portrait at [www.mennoniteheritageportrait.ca](http://www.mennoniteheritageportrait.ca).

**Waterloo Region Generations** website is a lineage-linked record of people who once called Waterloo Region their home. Goals are: to preserve the identities of these people; to systematically record—with sourced material—the information that documents their lives; to map

locations of the events and residences that shaped their lives; to gather from the public, stories, documents and photographs; to encourage people to thoughtfully and thoroughly research their Waterloo Region families and share their findings. The site was created and is managed primarily by volunteers who welcome your pictures, obituaries, stories etc. to share. Also welcome are people who know how to use a genealogical program and would be willing to help process original records. Information is at <http://generations.regionofwaterloo.ca>.

**Lorna Bergey** was inducted into the Waterloo Region Hall of Fame on May 15 at the Waterloo Region Museum.

## Mennonite Historical Society Launches New Projects

*Mennonite Historical Society of Canada release by Sam Steiner*

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC), hosted by the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, held its annual meeting on January 22, 2011 at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon.

The board approved two new multi-year initiatives. Esther Epp-Tiessen of Winnipeg will write a history of Mennonite Central Committee Canada, which will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013. Funding for the project will be shared by MCC Canada and the Historical Society. The Society also approved the creation of a genealogical website giving particular attention to digitizing primary source documents. The site will provide one standardized internet source for Mennonite-related genealogical data in Canada.

Two "Awards of Excellence" were awarded to the late Dick Epp (1927-2009), a longtime leader of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, and to Esther Patkau who has written family histories, as well as histories of Rosthern Junior College and First Mennonite Church (Saskatoon).

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was established in 1968 to sponsor the *Mennonites in Canada* history series by Frank H. Epp and Ted D. Regehr. Its membership is composed of six provincial Mennonite historical societies, four Mennonite denominational bodies, Mennonite Central Committee Canada and the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

The 2011 executive is Sam Steiner (Waterloo, Ontario), President; Royden Loewen, (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Vice-President; Lucille Marr (Montreal, Quebec), Secretary; Richard Thiessen (Abbotsford, B.C.), Treasurer; and Alf Redekopp (Winnipeg, Manitoba), fifth member. The board approved a budget for 2011 of \$41,000.



*Esther Epp Tiessen*

# Book Uncovers History of Mennonite Women

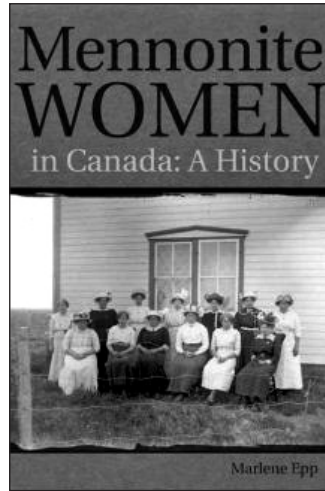
*Book review by Lucille Marr*

Marlene Epp. *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History*. University of Manitoba Press, 2008

Elizabeth Buhler made national headlines as the “oldest Canadian,” one of the last to have lived in the Victorian era, when she died in Manitoba in early February, 2011, two weeks short of her 112th birthday. An immigrant from the Ukraine, her legacy, similar to many Mennonite women, was hard work, her faith, and her family. But who was this woman? What did she contribute to the Mennonite community, to Canadian society at large?

In the first comprehensive history of Mennonite women in Canada, historian Marlene Epp has attempted to penetrate what she calls the “low lying fog” that obscures the contributions and experiences of Mennonite women, by giving “voice to their stories”(ix). The broad framework that she offers shows the complexity and diversity of Mennonite women’s lived experience, and gives us a context that helps us to better understand the lives of such as Elizabeth Buhler, our mothers and our grandmothers, and ourselves.

Writing from the perspective of an insider, Epp uses the tools and methods of the feminist historian, in her words, to “explore women’s roles, as prescribed and lived, within contexts such as immigration and settlement, household and family, church and organizational life, work and education, and in response to societal trends and events.”



“How did Mennonites prescribe the behaviour and ‘place’ of women within the church, family, and community,” she asks. “How did women, collectively and individually, actually behave?” Epp shows how the “historical lives of Mennonite women have been shaped by multiple identities and dichotomies” right from their sixteenth century origins. Exploring the opposing forces in women’s lives, she argues that “relationships with their families, churches, and ethnic and local communities consisted of a dialectic dialogue, in which women were acted upon, but that women also helped to shape.”(5)

This framework should not be intimidating. In five carefully constructed chapters, Epp tells countless stories of Mennonite women and the places that “they carved out” for “themselves within the structures that constrained them.”(5) For example, she shows the significant

economic role that women played in pioneering from 18th century Upper Canada to 20th century Western Canada. Some readers will know of Epp’s work on midwives in Mennonite communities. Diaries and family stories give fascinating accounts of the significant roles that these women played during times of immigration and community building.

Stories of women who preached, and others who resisted the roles laid out to them as the bearers of the culture through traditional dress, for instance, give spice and depth to this story. The fog continues to lift as we read stories such as that of the women in the 1920s at Kitchener’s First Mennonite who declined to wear the mandatory head gear thus precipitating a church split. At the same time, we celebrate the myriad of ways that women demonstrated their creativity, whether through traditional means such as quilt-making and canning, or art and writing.

This book goes a long way in penetrating the fog created by a historical narrative where women’s voices have been previously unheard. Epp has done the Mennonite community, and the broader Canadian society, a great service in creating a framework by which to tell the diverse stories of Mennonite women, showing the significant and diverse roles that they have played. This work is guaranteed to inform, entertain, and make its readers think. May it also meet the author’s hopes that it will inspire others to continue the task of uncovering the rich history of Mennonite women in Canada.

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## Brubacher House Update

The Brubacher House is currently being cared for by Mark and Allison Brubacher. We have greatly enjoyed being the stewards of the museum and maintaining the history of the Region amid the modern high tech companies that are sprouting up around the museum. This past year we’ve been able to meet many visitors from around the Region, but many from around the world as well. For example, we’ve have visitors from the USA, Turkey, France and Switzerland. They have all been thoroughly interested in learning about Mennonite history. The Brubacher house is going to be open its regular hours during the Mennonite Church Canada Conference for tours. There will also be a young adult event on the Tuesday of the conference where a movie will be projected on the outside wall, with a camp fire down by Columbia Lake.

# Christian Erb Gravestone Project

Among the many Mennonite families who migrated from Pennsylvania to Waterloo Region between about 1800 and 1830 was the Erb family. Christian Erb (1734-1810) and his wife, Maria Scherch (also spelled Sherk or Shirk) 1737-1814, had a family of 12 children. According to Ezra Eby in his *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township*, seven of these children came to Canada: Abraham, Jacob, John, Magdalena, Anna, Mary and Elizabeth. Two of their daughter Susannah's children, Mary and John, also moved from Pennsylvania to Canada. These seven children and two grandchildren of Christian and Maria arrived in Canada over an 11-year period.

Daughter Anna (usually referred to as Nancy) married John Bricker. They came in 1802 making them some of the very first settlers. Mabel Dunham's *Trail of the Conestoga* is based in part on this family.

Daughter Magdalena married Indian Sam Eby and they arrived in 1804.

The year 1805 saw the arrival of son John Erb who is considered to be the founder of Preston, now part of Cambridge, Ontario. He erected a sawmill and a grist mill which according to Ezra Eby made Preston "quite a business centre."

In 1806, four of John's siblings, namely Elizabeth, Mary, Abraham and Jacob came to Canada with their spouses. Elizabeth and Mary were married to the Schneider brothers. Elizabeth and Christian settled in Doon while Mary and Jacob (known as Yoch) settled in the Bloomingdale area. Christian and Jacob were brothers of Joseph Schneider whose house in Kitchener is now the Schneider Haus museum.

Abraham Erb is considered to be the founder of what is now the City of Waterloo. Like his brother, John, he erected a sawmill and a grist mill in what is now downtown Waterloo.

The seventh of Christian and Maria's children to come to Canada was Jacob who settled a little west of Berlin — now Kitchener.

Susannah was married to Jacob Brubacher who had died at the young

age of 35, leaving his widow to care for their seven children. Susannah purchased several of the original lots of the original German Land Company. Her daughter Mary married Bishop Benjamin Eby and they arrived in Canada in 1807, shortly after their marriage.

John, another of widow Brubacher's sons, came as a young man in 1815. He returned to Pennsylvania in the fall of that year. The next year, he came back to Canada with his widowed mother, who by now was about 54 years of age.



Susannah stayed in Canada for a two-year period, visiting with family before returning to Pennsylvania to be with the rest of her family.

Susannah had also visited Canada in 1809 to visit her parents, who had moved to Canada sometime during these years and lived with their daughter, Elizabeth and Christian Schneider.

Christian died in July, 1810 and Maria in the summer of 1814 and were buried in the Blair Cemetery. The first known burial in that cemetery was little Johnny Bricker, their grandson, the son of Nancy (Erb) and John Bricker. Their gravestone is a sizable monument compared to many of the others nearby and bears the following approximate inscription:

HIER RUHET  
CHRISTIAN ERB IST GESTORBEN  
IM JAHR 1810 WAR ALT 75  
JAHR 10 MONAT. WER HIER  
WILL SINDEN GOTTES REICH  
DER WERDE EINEM KINDE GLEICH  
UND FOLGE SEINES  
VATERS RATH IN TREUER  
THAT NUR IHM ZU LEBEN  
FRUEH UND SPAT  
HIER RUHET MARIA ERB  
CHRISTIAN ERB SINE WEIB  
IST GESTORBEN IM JAHR  
1814 WAR ALT 76 JAHR ACH  
GOTT WIE MANCHES HERZELIED  
IST MIR BEGEGNET IN MEINER  
ZEIT DER SCHMALE WEG WAR  
TREUBSAL VOL DEN ICH ZUM  
HIMMEL WANDLEN SOLL

English translation:

HERE RESTS  
CHRISTIAN ERB WHO DIED  
IN THE YEAR 1810 AND WAS 75  
YEARS, 10 MONTHS OLD.  
WHOEVER HERE WISHES TO BE IN GOD'S KINGDOM  
MUST BECOME LIKE A CHILD  
AND FOLLOW HIS FATHER'S ADVICE  
IN FAITHFUL DEED, AND TO LIVE FOR HIM BOTH  
EARLY AND LATE.  
HERE RESTS MARIA ERB  
WIFE OF CHRISTIAN ERB  
WHO DIED IN THE YEAR 1814  
AND WAS 76 YEARS OLD.  
OH GOD, MUCH SORROW  
I HAVE MET IN MY TIME,  
THE NARROW WAY,  
WHICH I SHOULD WANDER TO HEAVEN  
WAS FULL OF TRIBULATION.

Christian and Maria's gravestone is badly worn and corroded, so the above transcription may not be precise.

A project named the **Mennonite Gravestone Project** is now underway to raise the necessary funds to erect a new monument either to replace this one, or to be placed next to it. Anyone wishing to make a donation (no tax receipts are being issued) should send a cheque payable to Mennonite Gravestones to Mennonite Gravestones, c/o Doris Gingerich, 10 Tagge St., Kitchener, Ont., N2K 3R6.