



Mennogespräch

Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario

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The Markham Waterloo — Old Order Mennonite Division

by Isaac R. Horst

We as Mennonites are not proud of our church divisions, and would prefer to hide our heads in the sand with the ostrich. We know that church divisions are unscriptural, and Mennonites are opposed to them on principle; yet there are times when we cannot seem to find another solution. In all such cases, "we" tend to blame "others" for being the cause of division, while those same "others" blame "us"! Sometimes we have reasons to blame a course of events for which we are only slightly responsible, if at all.

The events which finally led to the division between the Markham Waterloo Mennonites and the rest of the Old Order Mennonites of Ontario may be said to have started in Europe. The Dutch Mennonites were historically more liberal, both in their forms of worship and in material matters, than the Swiss Brethren.¹ When migration to America began, the first to establish colonies in the New World were of Dutch origin, settling in the Germantown and Franconia areas. The settlers of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, were nearly all of Swiss extract. By this time, the Mennonites were strongly influenced by Pietism, and were referred to as the "quiet in the land".

When the westward movement in North America began early in the nineteenth century, it was motivated and carried out by aggressive, dynamic young people. Their views were frequently more liberal than the views of those in the parent community. The migrants came from different areas and backgrounds. Therefore, within the new communities there were many contrasting views.

The settlement in and around Elkhart County, Indiana, was typical of the above. The first settlers who arrived about 1840, came from Ontario, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and directly from Germany. Many came from Franconia, bringing the Dutch influence with them. Naturally the community's views varied greatly. Jacob Wisler, the bishop, was conservative by nature. Daniel Brenneman, a younger minister, was quite liberal. To further agitate the friction between them, John F. Funk moved to Elkhart in 1867, and John Weber arrived in 1868.² Funk was as progressive as Weber was conservative. Trouble was inevitable.

For a number of years, charges and counter-charges were laid between the two sides. Mediators were appointed, from Illinois, Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania and Canada. Sometimes one side was favoured and sometimes the other. Finally Wisler and his followers were expelled in 1872, apparently by Funk, who was young enough to be Wisler's son.³ Wisler soon began to hold meetings of his own for his followers, in which he was joined by a sizable number from Ohio, to form the Ohio and Indiana (Wisler) Mennonite Conference.

This division caused quite a stir in both the Ontario and the Pennsylvania Mennonite conferences, who each had friends and relatives in Indiana. These conferences had no desire for a division in their own churches. By a majority decision of each conference they favoured recognition of the main body of the Indiana church, but not Wisler's group. However, Wisler had sympathizers in both Ontario and Pennsylvania, and correspondence with them continued.⁴

For seventeen years this situation persisted in Ontario, and for twenty-one years in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The same issues that divided Indiana began to manifest themselves in both of these areas. What followed was natural. When the issues grew too great, the conservative Woolwich group withdrew from the Ontario Conference in 1889, and associated themselves with the Wisler group. Four years later, the Groffdale area of Lancaster County followed suit.

Obviously, not all of the issues were exactly the same from one district to the next. For example, folding top buggies had been tolerated in the Lancaster County and Indiana Old Order churches. In 1902, upon the death of Ontario Bishop Abraham Martin, Paul Martin, who was destined to become Abraham's successor, wrote an urgent letter to Bishop Jonas Martin of Lancaster, to inquire whether the Groffdale church tolerated folding tops among the ministry.⁴ There is no record of the reply to his question, although it was obviously in the negative. The Ontario Old Order church never tolerated folding tops.

The advent of the telephone posed another

problem. In Ontario, Peter Shirk, the Bridgeport miller, had a telephone in the mill as early as 1883.⁵ When the church divided in 1889, Shirk was allowed to keep the telephone in his place of business, but it was not allowed in homes. One hundred years later, the same standard is still maintained in the Ontario Old Order Conference; the telephone is allowed in places of business, but not in private homes.

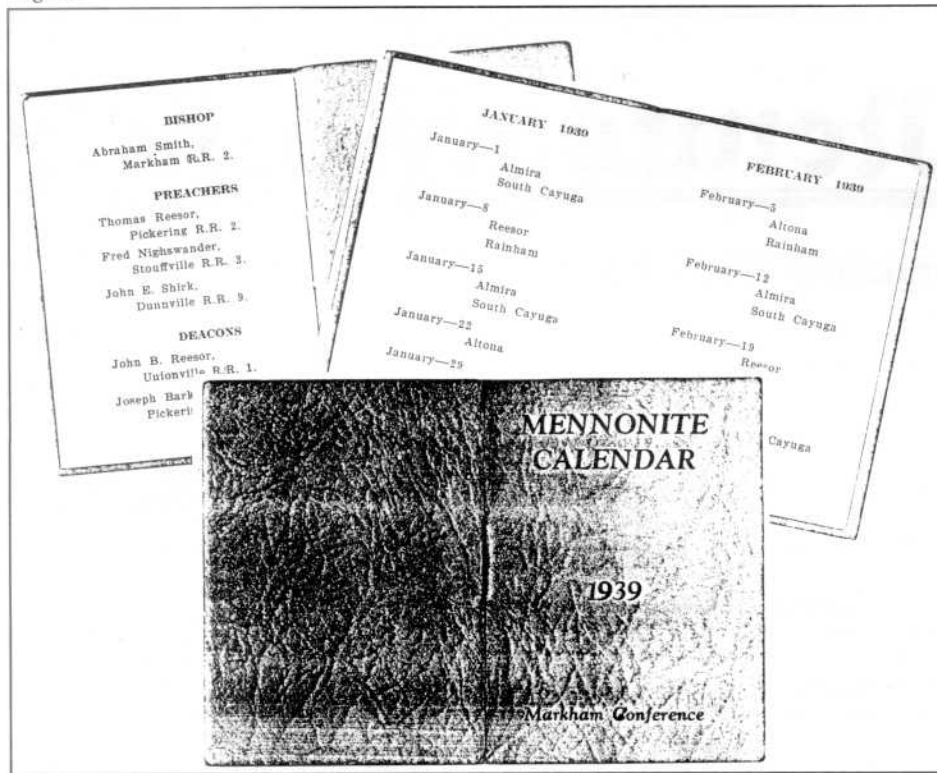
In Pennsylvania, Bishop Jonas Martin was strongly opposed to the telephone, but he finally agreed to make a concession. The telephone was tolerated in all but the homes of the ministry. To this day, there are still many homes without a telephone, even though it has been tolerated for eighty years.

In Indiana, the situation was somewhat different. It had been thirty-five years since the original division; long enough for diverse opinions to have again formed. This was in contrast to the Ontario and Pennsylvania Old Order districts where much less time had elapsed since their first division. Indiana Bishop John Martin remained firmly opposed to the telephone. On May 17, 1907, he walked out of the conference at the County Line meetinghouse, to form his own conference, and was followed by ten ministers and four deacons. Thus he had two-thirds of the ministry, but only one-third of the members.⁶ (Incidentally, that is a typical ratio. Whenever a division takes place that involves modernism, the ratio is usually about 2 to 1, or twice the ratio of ministers to lay members, which choose the conservative course).

Although the Lancaster County and Ontario Mennonites survived the telephone issue without following Indiana's course, they were not spared when the automobile made its debut. Since the liberal and conservative elements had already divided in Indiana, the automobile found easy acceptance on one side, and stern refusal on the other. Not so in the other districts.

In 1914, Moses Horning was ordained as bishop in Pennsylvania to assist the elderly Jonas Martin. When members purchased automobiles, Martin could not tolerate them

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Pages from the 1939 Calendar of the Markham Conference.

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as brethren, while Horning could not bring himself to excommunicate them. A compromise was established, whereby such disobedient members were not expelled, but were refused communion.⁷ This policy continued until after Jonas Martin's death, when the church was divided down the middle. Joseph O. Wenger became the bishop of the Groffdale conference, where no automobile ownership was tolerated.

Naturally, this division had its effect on the Ontario Mennonite church. There always was much visiting back and forth between the Ontario congregations and their cousins in Lancaster County. In my own reminiscences, I can recall numerous instances of Horning Mennonites visiting in our homes, sometimes because of blood relationships, and sometimes because of old friendships. In fact, that has continued to this day.

Shortly after the Lancaster County division, a situation developed in Ontario which made an even greater impact on the Old Order Mennonites of Ontario. Bishop Christian Gehman had died at Markham in 1927.⁸ He was replaced by Levi Grove. It would appear that the latter may not have been as strict regarding automobiles as Gehman had been. Besides, the proximity to the city of Toronto caused an environment better adapted to motor traffic. By 1930 this reached the point where the Markham group severed relations with the church in Waterloo County. The last conference which was jointly attended by the ministers of Markham, Cayuga, and Waterloo, was held on May 30, 1930.⁹ (The churches at Vineland and Bertie, in Lincoln and Welland counties, respectively, had been represented until the deaths of the ministry. Deacon Jonas

Zavitz of Welland died in 1920, and Preacher Joseph Wismer of Lincoln County in 1927).¹⁰

That this development had an impact on the Woolwich Old Order Mennonite church in Waterloo is understandable. There was a lot of intermarriage among the ministry of these districts, generally as second marriages. After Deacon David Z. Martin's first wife died, in 1876, he was married to the widow of Henry Rittenhouse, of Cayuga, mother of Bishop Freeman Rittenhouse. Bishop Paul Martin, son of the above deacon, took as his third wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Bishop Christian Reesor of Markham. After Paul died, his successor, Bishop Ezra L. Martin, married Paul's widow.¹¹ This had a tendency to tie these communities together.

There were other factors which may have been incentives in the transition of some of the Woolwich Mennonites to motor transportation. Two of these factors were seemingly contradictory. One was the close proximity of some members to the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo. In such urban areas, horse transportation became more and more undesirable. The other was the distance at which some of the northerly members lived from the closest meetinghouses and towns. Here the church was entirely free from blame. No group should be expected to drive from eight to ten miles to the nearest meetinghouse with horse and buggy, for years on end. This condition remained for thirty years before a new meetinghouse was built to serve the region.

During the 1930's, numerous members bought cars and continued to attend Old Order church services. Many of them drove to Markham to partake of communion. It became more and more obvious that the church was becoming factional. Remarks were

overheard about stubborn old fellows who will not give in. There was a tendency for members to gravitate towards certain members of the ministry whom they felt would favour them.

There was another doctrinal issue which contributed to division. About 1930, a movement broke out among the Old Order Mennonites (and other Mennonite groups) which culminated in the establishment of a church now known as the Bible Chapel. This group was very fervent in seeking and winning souls. Even among those who were not drawn into the new church, some became inspired to such an extent that they no longer related agreeably to the Old Order Mennonite doctrine.

One of these was Jesse Bauman who was ordained to the ministry in 1923. In 1933, he was ordained as a bishop to assist the aging bishop Ezra L. Martin. Jesse was obviously influenced by Bible Chapel teaching, as well as by other evangelists who operated in the area. Although he was a very quiet, unassuming man, he readily absorbed the ebullient manners of such evangelists, and demonstrated them in his own sermons. The doctrine of eternal security lay very close to the surface.¹²

Since Jesse was not necessarily a champion of Old Order traditions and life styles, he naturally had no personal objection to the advent of modern conveniences and liberalism in general. Thus, those who sought more freedom from temporal restrictions gravitated towards those who sought freedom from spiritual restrictions. This inequality would eventually lead to its own problems.

Bishop Ezra L. Martin died on March 22, 1939. He had been ailing for some time previously, so much so that the semi-annual conference was held at his home the previous spring.¹³ The administration of the church now lay in the hands of a bishop who saw no value in conservatism. It must be said, however, to his credit, that he faithfully reported the wishes of the church counsel meetings.

Thomas Reesor, one of the ministers at Markham, had a daughter living in Woolwich. For this reason, he was a frequent visitor in the area. Sometime while the older bishop was incapacitated, he received an unofficial invitation to preach in the Woolwich church. His informer implied that most of the members now favoured the use of cars, and there would

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be little resistance. Thomas accepted the invitation, without suspecting that he had been misinformed. Upon reaching the pulpit, he realized his mistake. Although there were indeed those who welcomed him, the majority were disappointed by this move.

The semi-annual conference was scheduled to be held on April 14, 1939, four weeks after the old bishop's death. Naturally, the counsel meetings had already indicated that there would be problems at the conference, regarding the automobile, the telephone, and modern teaching. Consequently no communion was held this spring. A second conference was held at the Conestogo meetinghouse on April 27, with no better results. A third conference was held at the home of Deacon Elias Weber, at which time Bishop Jesse Bauman and Preacher Urias Martin withdrew, marking the official split. It was agreed to allow the Markham Waterloo group the use of the Martin's and Elmira meetinghouses when not otherwise in use.¹⁴

On June 23, Preacher Addison Gingrich, Deacon Daniel Shantz, Sylvester Martin, and Osiah Martin left for Pennsylvania to seek counsel on the matter, returning on July 1.¹⁵ Bishop Daniel G. Brubacher and his wife of Michigan, whose congregation had died out, moved to Canada in July, 1939, when he took over the temporary responsibility as the bishop of the Woolwich Old Order Mennonite congregation. At the fall conference, Bishop Joseph O. Wenger and Deacon Benjamin Hoover of Lancaster County attended, to give their support and blessings.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the church at Markham had carried on alone. They had a bishop, two preachers, and two deacons at Markham, and a preacher at Cayuga. There were three houses to worship at Markham, one at Cayuga, and one at Rainham. They had counsel meeting and communion at two places, spring and fall, with conference in late spring. However, there were only about 86 members living at Markham in 1939, because the local population was decreasing, with very little input from young people. About 49 members who lived in Woolwich at this time, took communion at Markham up to 1939.¹⁷

On June 6, 1939, Bishop Jesse Bauman and Preacher Urias Martin withdrew from the Old Order conference in Woolwich. About one-third of the Woolwich members followed them. Two days later, the group had a meeting for their members at the home of Aaron M. Weber of Elmira, Preacher Thomas Reesor's son-in-law, to decide on a course of action. The following day, Aaron Weber and Noah Bearinger, two influential lay members, visited church officials at Markham, Ontario, ostensibly to deliver a report on the previous day's meeting.¹⁸

Apparently their reception was satisfactory, for the next day, Bishop Jesse Bauman and Preacher Urias Martin went to Markham, to the home of Bishop Abraham Smith, where they convened with the Markham officials. The following day, on Sunday, Jesse and Urias attended the church at Markham.¹⁹ The chronicler does not report whether their wives

were also present, nor whether the Woolwich ministers took part in the service. In view of the developments which followed, one would assume that the men preached, and that their wives were also present. Two weeks later, the Markham group had church services at Martin's meetinghouse.²⁰

The transaction was completed. Those who wished to drive cars now could have fellowship with a like-minded group. They were no longer hampered by restrictions in which they saw no value. Those who faithfully followed Jesse Bauman were no longer harassed by those who objected to Jesse's manner and delivery in preaching.

However, this complacency was short-lived. As soon as the dust from the disturbances had settled, and the Markham Waterloo church was on its own, the inevitable happened. The majority in the Markham-Waterloo congregations were no more enamoured by Jesse

Markham Waterloo church services were held at the Elmira meetinghouse in the morning. Jesse Bauman was present. In the afternoon, special services were held for the visiting ministry who had come for the conference. Jesse was not present. In the evening, Jesse attended the Mennonite church in St. Jacobs.²²

During December, Jesse attempted to hold his followers together by conducting separate meetings. On December 3, in the afternoon, he held a meeting at the red brick Mennonite church at Elmira, beside the white meetinghouse. December 10 saw him at the St. Jacobs Mennonite church. On December 17, he conducted a meeting at Snyder's church, Bloomingdale, in the morning, and at Elmira in the afternoon.²³

Most of his followers were by this time attending the Elmira Mennonite church, where Jesse and his wife were accepted as members into the fellowship of the Ontario Mennonite



Photo by Hunsberger Photography.

Bauman's zealous and emotional preaching style than the Old Order group had been. With only two preachers among them, they heard Jesse's sermons practically every Sunday. Additionally, Jesse probably did not feel as restricted as he had before.

Five months after the church had officially started, the matter came to a head. On November 17, 1939, an unusual conference was held at Elmira church. Officials were present from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. Jesse pleaded for time to ponder his decision.²¹

Jesse Bauman had arrived at the same point as many earlier fervent and emotional ministers in the Mennonite church. Daniel Hoch, Daniel Brenneman, Solomon Eby, and many more, felt that they were led on the paths they had taken, by the Holy Spirit. Why, then, should they listen to men? Yet, very often, such men left no room for the views and convictions of others.

On Sunday, November 19, regular

Conference, on July 7, 1940. One cannot help but pity the man, for having been misunderstood in his earnest endeavour to preach the Gospel as he saw it.

The spirit which Jesse Bauman had brought into the Markham Waterloo church did not die altogether when he left the church. George Brubacher was ordained to fill Jesse Bauman's place in the Elmira district, in 1942. It is quite possible that when George had cast his lot with the Markham Waterloo group when the church was divided, he did so more for the sake of Jesse than for modernism. However, he did not leave the church when Jesse did. During his first years as a preacher, George's sermons seemed to reflect Jesse Bauman's teachings.

On February 24, 1946, quite a stir was created in the North Woolwich meetinghouse, when George Brubacher's wife began to pray out loud. Naturally, such a disturbance would

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have been considered quite normal in some spiritually zealous churches, but in an Old Order church, only slightly more liberal than the main branch of the Old Order, it was considered as the manifestation of a strange spirit. Consequently, on the following Sunday, at Elmira, George Brubacher was silenced, (likely as a sympathizer), and his wife excommunicated. Three weeks later, George made a confession, and on May 12, his wife was again restored into church fellowship.²⁴

As already stated, we realize that church divisions are unscriptural. At the same time, there seem to be certain benefits resulting from church divisions. It is doubtful that we are intended to look on this as a justification for church divisions. Instead, one might infer that since man in his imperfection does not seem to be able to totally avoid church divisions, God allows certain benefits to result, which may lead men to a better understanding of the matter.

Following the division, church attendance increased on both sides of the division. This was something which had been seriously neglected during the last half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the present. The establishment of a form of family altar gradually became more common. There was a gradual shift towards more wholesome reading, more religious singing, and more edifying conversation. This was especially noticeable after the establishment of the parochial school system, which was jointly inaugurated by the Old Order, Markham Waterloo, and Orthodox Mennonite churches.

Both sides of the division continued to prosper. The shift towards more liberal churches continued to some extent on both sides. Liberal minded and dissatisfied members left the Old Order church to join the Markham church. Others left the Markham church to join the Conservative, Bible Chapel, or Ontario Conference churches. However, the natural increase far exceeded the defection to other denominations.

Thus, the common assumption that church splits weaken both sides of the division does not necessarily hold true here. In the absence of firm statistics, it can be safely assumed that the Old Order group is considerably stronger numerically than the combined groups were before the division, and the Markham Waterloo group not far behind. Certainly the available statistics strongly support this view. In 1939, there were five places of worship in the entire Old Order group, with twelve men in the ministry. Today, the Markham Waterloo group alone has ten places of worship, and nineteen ordained men. The Old Order group has twelve places of worship, and a total of twenty-seven ordained men.

There seems to be a spirit of harmonious interaction between the two groups. Naturally, there is little identity between the most liberal of the Markham people and the Old Order Mennonites, but the conservative element readily intermingles with the Old Order members wherever feasible. The doctrine, goals, and problems are similar. Both desire to be a people separated from the world. The differences lie only in the extent of such separation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Carl Justus van der Smitten, *Zweyter Briefe aus Dänemark an die Mennoniten Gemeinde in Canada* (Berlin, Canada : Heinrich Eby, 1841).
- 2 J.C. Wenger, *The Yellow Creek Mennonites : the original Mennonite congregations of western Elkhart County* (Goshen, Ind. : Yellow Creek Mennonite Church, 1985), pp. 34ff., 145ff.
- 3 Wenger, p. 37.
- 4 Hoover, Amos B., ed. *Jonas Martin era presented in a collection of essays, letters and documents that shed light on the Mennonite churches during the 50 year ministry (1875-1925) of Bishop Jonas H. Martin* (Denver, Pa. : Amos B. Hoover, 1982), p. 375.
- 5 *Family history of Peter Shirk* (Waterloo County : s.l., 1984), p. 6.
- 6 Wenger, p. 158.
- 7 Hoover, p. 29.
- 8 *Meeting calendars : Ontario Mennonite, 1848-1894; Old Order Mennonite, 1890-1980; Markham-Waterloo Mennonite, 1940-1980* (Mt. Forest, Ont. : Isaac R. Horst, 1980), p. 359-360.
- 9 *Meeting calendars*, p. 364-365.
- 10 *Meeting calendars*, p. 344ff.
- 11 Bauman, Angus S., *Family records of the descendants of pioneer Joseph Bauman; also some records of David and Henry Bauman* (Waterloo : S. Bauman & E. Freeman, 1967), p. 121.
- 12 For a longer discussion of Jesse Bauman's influence see Ken Bechtel, *Three score years : Elmira Mennonite Church, 1924-1984* (Elmira, Ont. : The Church, 1984), pp. 32-36.
- 13 *Meeting calendars*, p. 377.
- 14 *Meeting calendars*, p. 379.
- 15 *Meeting calendars*, p. 379.
- 16 *Meeting calendars*, p. 379.
- 17 *Meeting calendars*, p. 453.
- 18 *Meeting calendars*, p. 453.
- 19 *Meeting calendars*, p. 453.
- 20 *Meeting calendars*, p. 453.
- 21 *Meeting calendars*, p. 453.
- 22 *Meeting calendars*, p. 453.
- 23 *Meeting calendars*, p. 453.
- 24 *Meeting calendars*, p. 461.

Old Order Mennonites: Our Life and Faith

by Amon Weber, R.R. 1, St. Jacobs, Ontario

I have been asked to put on paper a few thoughts and perspectives on the faith and life style of the Old Order Mennonites that live in the heart of Waterloo County, Ontario, Canada. Having been a member of this group for more than twenty years and having grown up amongst its people the reader can well imagine the bond that ties me to these people. As can be expected from so large a group of people as we are, there are variations amongst us in the way we live that result in inconsistencies in our Christian witness over which we as a church mourn. But as with all Christian people we ask God to forgive. Our bishop often refers to the force that keeps us together as a strong elastic band. Sometimes it stretches far out but the love of the church always brings it back again.

My own commitment to the Old Order Mennonite way of life and faith was solidified by the following incident. When I was a young lad searching for the truths and value of life and a suitable church, I remember working in a factory in our local town for a few weeks. One damp, rainy and chilly day, before I went home at the end of the day, I walked past the truck entrance of the loading dock and there

saw our minister drive past in an open buggy huddled under an umbrella. He was 14 miles from home exposed to the inclement weather elements yet committed to his appointed duty.

Mentally comparing his life with the cozy, comfortable way of living and travelling of much of society my heart was moved by this man's religious commitment and integrity. Many of our young people do go through a stage in their lives when the "higher" class of living beckons them and although some are lost to this way of life, amazingly, many choose to retain the life they have been taught.

As the reader knows we have shunned the use of the car, although we do use tractors to work our fields. We feel that the car could so change our life style that our plain way of life would be severely jeopardized. History has proven it to be so for other groups. We do drive in cars when the need arises and in no way condemn people who own them but feel we can serve our God better by keeping back.

Our ministers and deacons are chosen by the lot selection system. On top of their duties of providing a home for their family and raising their children they are asked to preach the Word, study the Scriptures, visit the sick and

no matter what weather attend services all without pay. Summer and winter they preach alternately in our 12 churches driving as far as 40 miles between morning and evening chores.

At the time of joining the church and accepting Christ as our saviour we promise in one of our 18 articles of faith that should God see it fit to call us to the ministry we will not decline. If a church needs a leader the older men, as they feel led from above, take the name of a man (who they feel is qualified) to the bishop and deacons in the council room. Later the names of all men thus submitted, are brought to the congregation and these men with their wives are asked to attend an "examination" day where they and the congregation prepare themselves for the forthcoming leadership selection process. The next day the lot is cast and the person so chosen by God is ordained and begins his new life of duty. Although only one person is ordained and we all feel responsible to support and uphold the selected person(s), we all accept individual responsibility to Christian duty even though it is not behind the pulpit.

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The foundation of our faith is salvation through faith and grace of the suffering and death and resurrection of our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. One of the crosses we Old Order Mennonites have to bear (as some other Christian must as well), is the accusation of the world that we lean too heavily on our works for salvation which is far from the truth. Faith is all important but without works it is dead.

In church council meetings members are asked not only to express their burdens to church officials but also to give advice.

Our guides for living a Christian life emerge as follows. The ministers and deacons meet on an appointed day and with the prayers of the congregation supporting them and in the power of the Holy Spirit draw up a Christian behavioral constitution which members are asked to abide. Consequently we are sometimes accused of advocating living under the old 'dispensation of the law' and not under grace. We do not interpret it this way. We see the constitution as help in our Christian walk only. Should someone fall in moral sin he/she is banned from the body of believers until true repentance is felt and seen.

Our life is based in part on the value of physical work. In scripture we are told to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. Thus we try to shun sports such as organized church leagues of baseball or hockey. We feel our young people should be physically tired at the end of the day and go to bed to sleep and rest. The exception is Sunday night when getting together to sing hymns and share in fellowship is quite appropriate. These Sunday evening meetings are however the church's responsibility and it has to see to it that discipline and modesty prevail.

Although we do have tractors they are meant for the heavy work only. Our team of horses are used during seeding, harvesting and other somewhat lighter work.

Our young people leave school at fourteen but spend the next two years at home under an apprenticeship format until they are 16 after which they go to work amongst the brethren for a minimum wage. The boys work for 150 to 200 dollars a month and the girls for about 80. At today's prices this will not allow them to start farming but as we parents prosper we are asked to share our wealth with those families just starting farming. Often money is loaned at low or no interest rate to help our young families along. If someone gets into deep financial problems older men are asked to provide advice and management help.

Living in an English speaking society, we feel it necessary to conduct German school in winter on Saturdays to retain our precious European Anabaptist heritage. Secondly since our church services are conducted in German it is a prerequisite that our people understand German.

We tend to avoid insurance policies because they would decrease our dependence on one another. Because of high hospital costs the church covers 3/4 of them but no doctor bills. The poor are cared for through voluntary offerings and our schools are funded in the same

way. In case of disasters all manual work to rebuild is donated and often offerings are raised to cover some of the material costs.

Our doctrine of faith tells us to place great value on brotherly love the result of which should be no extremely rich or poor people among our church members. We do not look up to a man with great talents nor down on one with less. After all the Lord distributed them and asked us to work with what he gave us. Personally I would like at my departure from this world no great riches and no debts. If riches should come my way I would feel pressed to pass these on to the less fortunate. On the other hand I also know that should I be in dire need some day the church will support me if I have done *all* in my power to provide. Slothful attitudes are not accepted in the church.

But let me in summary again stress the following. Even when we have done our best here on earth we are still considered unworthy servants of God and require the redeeming blood of His Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to be acceptable to Him. While here on earth we use His church for support to guide and sustain our faith till we meet hopefully in that better land.

Family History Display

The Genealogy Committee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario sponsored a Family History Display on November 27th at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo.

There was a good turnout of exhibitors who displayed their ancestral charts, photographs, family records, and other relics. Some of the families featured included Bauman, Breneman, Bricker, Brubacher, Durksen, Dettweiler, Horst, Koch, Martin, Reist, Schiedel, Schwartzentruber, Sherk, Stauffer, Steiner, Steinman, and Wenger.

Persons who presented displays were Lorna Bergey, Lloyd Bowman, Aden Brubacher, Melvin G. Brubacher, Peter Durksen, Allan Dettweiler, Roger Harris, Betty Lang, Winston Martin, Lorraine Roth, Jane Sherk, and Walter Steinman.

The majority of the displays were of families of Pennsylvania German background, several were of the Amish background, and one was from the Russian Mennonite background.

The Genealogy Committee would like to encourage more participation from persons of the Amish and Russian Mennonite families.

If there is sufficient interest, this event may be repeated in the future.

— Allan Dettweiler

Book Notes

Frontier Community to Urban Congregation by E. Reginald Good (Kitchener, Ont.: First Mennonite Church, 1988), 160 p.

When I agreed to preview this volume, I expected to see the usual congregational history. I found much more. This volume locates First Mennonite Church in the broad context of: pioneer settlement patterns (including conflicts with native land claims), the emergence of the Old Mennonite Church in Canada, changing authority patterns in the church, and U.S. influence in church and national policies.

This is the story of how the administrative centre of a church district became a more autonomous congregation, without breaking ties with the wider Mennonite body. This is the story of leaders who pioneered new directions while trying to stay true to the tradition. This is the story of a congregation being tugged and pulled by both renewal and retrenchment movements.

The book is rich in detail for those with direct connections to its history. For a much wider circle, however, the book opens a window on formative years of the Canadian Mennonite experience.

— Ron Rempel, *Mennonite Reporter*

This history can be purchased from the Provident Bookstore or First Mennonite Church, 800 King Street E., Kitchener, Ont. N2G 2M6

Price: \$15.00. If ordered, please add \$2.00 for mailing.

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Vicarious pioneer: the life of Jacob Y. Shantz by Samuel J. Steiner. (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1988), 223 p. \$14.95.

This book was sponsored by the Mennonite Bicentennial Commission, beginning in 1985. It is the last major project to come out of the Bicentennial celebrations.

Jacob Y. Shantz was a wealthy Mennonite businessman in Berlin (Kitchener), Ontario in the second half of the 19th century. His business career was summarized in the March, 1987 issue of *Mennogespräch*.

He was best known for his central role in assisting Mennonites from Russia during their immigration to Southern Manitoba. He led the Ontario Mennonite committee that provided loans, and obtained a large loan from the Canadian government to assist the new settlers during their first years in Canada.

This book attempts to give a well-rounded look at his business, religious and charitable efforts.

— Sam Steiner

It is hoped both of these books can be more fully reviewed in a future issue.

A Glimpse of the Amish Settlement in Wilmot in 1843

by Lorraine Roth

We have very few primary sources which tell us how things were back in the days of the pioneers. We have few eye-witness accounts. Recently I received a copy of a letter written by a rather disillusioned settler in Wilmot Township. He must have come to this new settlement about 20 years after Christian Nafziger set foot in these primeval forests.

At the time of this writing, I have not yet found a record of a purchase of land in Wilmot by either Jacob Waltz or his father. It is likely that they left before they completed their land purchase to the point where it was registered in the Registry Office at Berlin. Jacob did not encourage his brother-in-law George Diener to come to Canada; so neither the Diener nor the Waltz names are familiar to the Canadian Amish Mennonite scene. Two Diener sisters, however, did come here and remained. Elizabeth Diener was the second wife of Joseph Schrag and lived in South Easthope Township. Anna Diener was married to Nicholas Roth and lived in East Zorra Township. She was the mother-in-law of Bishop Daniel S. Iutzi. Many of her descendants are Canadian.

The Waltz family, according to the Diener family history, migrated to Tennessee. No doubt, it was not as cold there, but one wonders whether the other problems he found in Wilmot were solved in Tennessee.

A few comments on the persons mentioned in Waltz's letter: Christian Ebersol, from the same area in Lorraine, France, as the Dieners was also living at the "end of Wilmot", on Snyder's Road. During the 1830s Christian was located in Woolwich Township and came to Wilmot in 1840. The Neuhausers were nephews of Christian Ebersol's wife. John Oesch was among the early settlers in Wilmot. He also lived along Snyder's Road at present-day Baden and was the bishop of the Amish congregation at this time. Jacob Erb may have been the father of John (Hans) Erb, who lived across from the Baden Hills. John Ulrich was one of Waltz's neighbours, who lived along Snyder's Road.

I have often wondered how the settlement in Wilmot was able to get along, because the people came from so many different places and would have had different customs as a result of their being scattered over various regions in France, Germany and Switzerland over a period of more than a hundred years. Most of them spoke a German dialect of some kind, but religious customs would likely have varied quite widely. In the 1840s there was a division in the Wilmot congregation, but we have not found any documentation as to what the issues might have been. It seems that the differences were ironed out again in a few years. In the late 1840s and early 1850s, however, the Reformed Mennonite Church was established in the community and quite a few Amish joined that movement. It is more of a wonder

that the Amish congregations were able to form the unity which did exist. Waltz's letter gives us a glimpse of the problems.

Waltz's reference to a suit against 21 of the wealthiest Amish farmers probably refers to the problems the Amish were having, because the land on which they settled was given by the government to the University of Toronto as an endowment. The details concerning the problems of individual farmers with the university when they could not come up with the rather high rents or purchase price still need to be researched, but Waltz's statements may not be as overly pessimistic as they at first appear.

A translation of the letter follows:

Wilmot, November 12, 1843

A sincere greeting of love and of peace from me, Jacob, and from my wife, Magdalena Waltz, to you dear friend and [brother]-in-law, relatives and acquaintances. We should hope that our little writing finds you in the best of health. We are, thanks be to God, also well as long as God sees fit to grant it.

Dear friend and in-law, we believe that you are wondering how we are getting along in Canada. We are well but we do not yet like it here in our bush (woods) where we are living now. I bought a lot of 80 acres at the end of Wilmot and this fall I built a house on it and a stable. Dear friend and in-law, during the past summer we were living with John Oesch, as I have told you in my first letter. And the people made me believe and said that we were still young people, we ought to take up a lot, and we would soon have our own home. But the people did not tell us that they were on their land for 18 and 20 years and have not yet paid a cent of money on it and that in their lifetime they would not be able to pay it, not even the interest. Dear friend and in-law, we have often regretted that we took up land so soon and built a house and put our little bit of money into it.

Dear friend, we believe you are wondering how your old acquaintances are getting along. Jacob Erb and Hans Ulrich send greetings to all of you. And Jakie Erb's first wife "rode to eternity" (died), and he was widower for three years. Now he married again, an English woman, and it is not going well with either of them. They could not even raise their own bread this year, and we were afraid it might go the same with us. If we knew that it would go that way with us, we would rather come back to you next summer or fall.

Dear friend and in-law, write to us again, what you think of this, whether we should come back again or not. Further, we want to make clear that we wish no evil on Hans and Christian Neuhauser and on the red Ebersol that they would suffer the loss which we have if we would have to go back again.

Dear friend, I am writing you the absolute truth. I had promised you that I would write everything as it is. We live seven miles in the bush and can have nothing for there are only five settlers here where we live. I have three head of cattle, two oxen and a cow, and if I want a sled full of straw, I have to go seven or eight miles for it. And for two weeks there has been about a foot of snow already, but this is Canada, and [that is] nothing new. It is to be feared that it will be a hard winter again. Dear friend and in-law, the land in Canada would be good enough if it would not get so cold and freeze so much, but in the middle of the summer in harvest there is frost. The people can live all right, but one cannot sell anything. John Oesch has two hundred acres of land and he has 130 acres of cleared land, but he cannot sell ten bushels of wheat this year, and so there are many others who get nothing but their bread.

Dear friend and in-law, a little son was born to us and his name is Christian and he is eleven weeks old. We thank God that he is very alert, healthy and is growing. This is all the joy and comfort we have in Canada.

Further news to tell you — my father and mother also do not like it in Canada. They also have a lot of a hundred acres and have built a new house on it, and they are also living in the bush, 18 miles from us.

Dear friend and in-law, things are also in poor shape in the church here, for whenever they come together in an assembly (worship service), there is scolding and disputing and nothing is accomplished. It is much worse here in Canada than in Germany. This puts us out too. We would so like to be where there is peace and love, even if we had nothing. We think it would be better for us and our child.

Dear brother-in-law, George Diener, I do not advise you to come to Canada because you can earn more where you are than here in Canada. But if you would want to become a constable, they you should come, for to be a constable is a good trade here in Canada. Recently there were 21 Amishmen who were sued in one day, and they were all of the richest farmers in Wilmot.

Copies of original letter from William Diener and Elmer Kennel. Translated by Noah Good, revised by Lorraine Roth.

First Mennonite Anniversary

by Dorothy Sauder

First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, celebrated 175 years of history in a variety of events during 1988. Orie Bender chaired the Anniversary Committee which began meeting in February of 1987.

A showing of *The Trail of the Conestoga* film, based on the drama adaptation of Mabel Dunham's book, was seen by a packed house at our celebration on January 10. Children entered an arts contest based on this film.

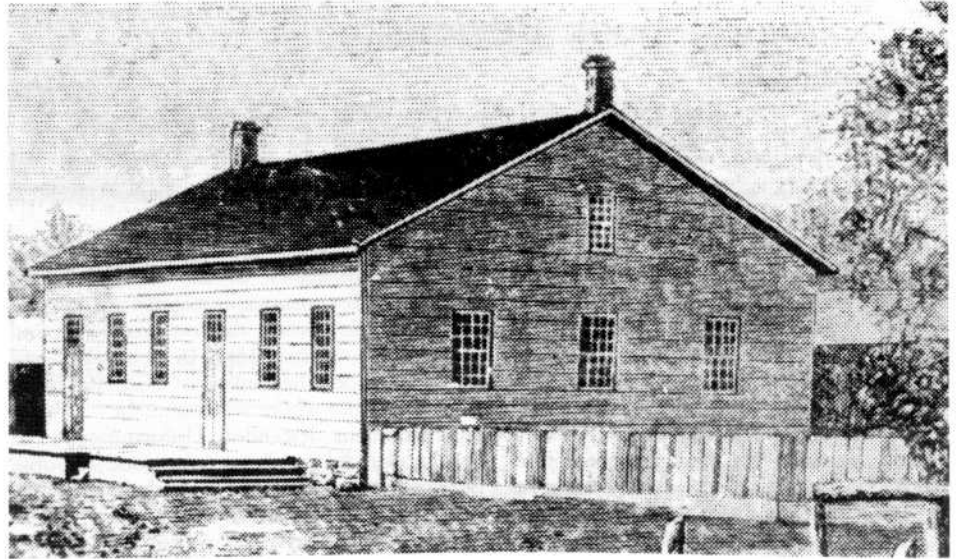
Our annual church picnic was held at Doon Heritage Crossroads. A scavenger hunt had people looking for historical dates and artifacts with the help of a questionnaire prepared by the Village. Doon staff also set up a display in the church foyer during the month of October.

Another highlight of the year was the weekend return of previous pastors: Edgar Metzler, Ernie Martin, Robert Johnson and Jean Jacques Goulet. Gerry Vandeworp who was ordained at First Mennonite was also a weekend guest. In addition to the Sunday morning services at which they ministered, a Saturday evening reception/social was arranged for a time of fellowship in a smaller setting.

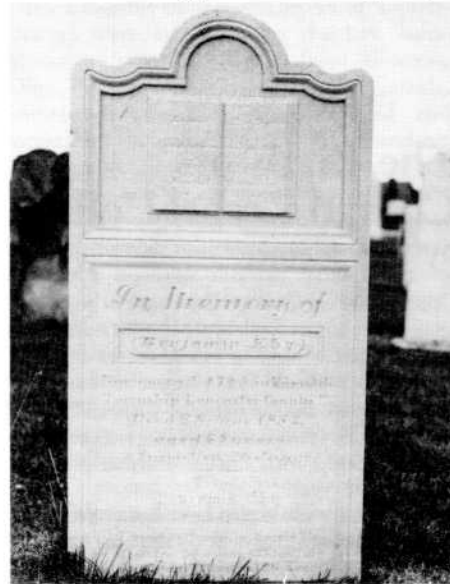
Jan Gleysteen also spent a weekend with us, highlighting our past with film and stories. This event drew a large crowd.

Schneider Haus, a museum in the home of an early First Mennonite deacon, cooperated with a number of projects: 1) a Singing School which was held at the Haus; 2) a Show Towel exhibit for which towels were solicited from our members; 3) cemetery tours. Around a dozen groups of children from local schools were given this guided tour of the oldest cemetery in the city, a program which will be carried on by Schneider Haus.

On the weekend when Edgar Metzler was with us, a Seminar on Peace and Justice was



The 1834 building (CGC Archives photo)



Benjamin Eby tombstone.
(David Hunsberger Photography)

held. This attracted a number of community people. Another community event entitled "Faith Communities and the City" arranged by Brice Balmer brought civic and denominational leaders into dialogue.

Homecoming, on the last weekend of October brought the celebrations to a close. John and Ruth Hess, Kingston, and Grace Derstine Brunner (daughter of C.F.), Louisville, Ohio, were featured guests. Morning and afternoon services included reminiscences, and a choir of the 1960's sang. A banquet was held on Saturday evening, and an artifact and book display was set up in the basement.

The history book *Frontier Community to Urban Congregation*, written by Reginald Good, was presented at the afternoon session. This book covers a wide sweep of history relevant to the development of this area and to the formative years of the Canadian Mennonite experience. It contains material not published heretofore.



Between 1928-1950. Notice sheds at back. (E. Denton photo)

Genealogical Book Reviews

by Lorraine Roth

All in a Row: The Klassens of Homewood
by Katherine Martens
(Winnipeg: Mennonite Literary Society, 1988)

This is a delightful collection of family reminiscences and stories. The first several chapters deal with historical facts and anecdotes on both sides of the ancestry of David Klassen and Susan Heinrichs Klassen.

The remainder of the book highlights the family experiences and events — both joyous and sad.

The members of the Klassen family will, of course, delight in this, their story, but it will have appeal to those beyond the confines of the immediate family as well.

Available at Provident Bookstore.

* * *

The Family History of David and Anna Klassen, 1773-1988 (Klassen Family History Book Committee, 1988).

This is a beautifully crafted family history of the David and Anna Klassen family. It begins with a collection of stories, anecdotes, photos and reproductions of a general nature, giving origins of the Klassen family in their religious, geographical and historical settings.

The second part is devoted to the families of the children of David and Anna Klassen. Each family begins with a schematic "family tree," giving names and dates of birth, marriage and death. This is followed by brief descriptions including places of residence, occupations and other pertinent information and family anecdotes. These are accompanied by a variety of family photos.

A third section contains photographs and family trees additional relatives and family lines.

The layout and design of this book are superb and could serve as a model for anyone contemplating doing a similar family history.

The Brenneman History
by Albert H. Gerberich
(1988 Reprint of Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1938).

This is a good, basic Brenneman family history, primarily of the descendants of Melchior Brenneman, immigrant to Lancaster County. However, it also contains background on the Brenneman family in Switzerland and also includes the family of Nicolaus Brenneman, from whom we assume the Canadian Brennemens descended. Unfortunately, the compiler did not get a very good response from the Canadians; so the little information he was able to gather is listed under "unconnected branches."

The cost of the reprint is quite high — U.S. \$50.00 plus \$3.00 postage/handling.

The Birth of Conrad Grebel College by Sam Steiner

Conrad Grebel College has chosen the fall of 1988 as the time to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the College. It was 25 years ago this fall that J. Winfield Fretz began teaching the first classes under the name of Conrad Grebel College. The residential building was actually not completed until 1964 — another possible anniversary year.

Other years could also have been chosen. A possible earlier date was 1959. On April 4, 1959 there was the first formal meeting of ministers in Kitchener-Waterloo to discuss Mennonite cooperation in higher education in Ontario.¹

During the 1950s a K-W Inter-Mennonite Ministers' Fellowship functioned that included pastors from the Old Mennonite, United Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren congregations. Leadership was given by a three-person committee. In early 1958 this leadership committee was composed of John W. Snyder (chair), Harvey Taves (Sec.) and Jacob J. Toews. Their brainstorming in 1958 did not include discussion of higher education.

This changed in 1959. In March the committee met and planned a panel discussion on "Possible kinds of cooperation in higher education." From the hand-written notes of that meeting, alternate topics included: "Possible inter-Mennonite co-operation in higher education at Waterloo University."

Frank C. Peters, visiting from the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, chaired the panel. Other panel members were Norman High, John C. Sawatsky and Arthur Sherk, an academic of United Missionary Church background.

The notes from this panel discussion are hand-written and sketchy. It is clear that cooperation with Waterloo University was discussed, and that Frank Peters suggested it would not be possible to get a separate provincial charter for a Mennonite liberal arts college — the model followed in the United States.

At the same meeting a new leadership committee was elected, since John Snyder had completed his term and J.J. Toews was leaving the city. The new committee was composed of Harvey Taves, Henry H. Epp and Ross Bender. In little over a month this committee had prepared a lengthy report on "Mennonites and higher education at University of Waterloo," the basis for further discussion that ended in Conrad Grebel College.

NOTES

- 1 All documentation in this piece is from the K-W Mennonite Ministerial Fellowship Collection in the Conrad Grebel College Archives.

I would like to become a member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. I will be informed of all Society events, will be eligible to serve on the various committees of the Society, and will receive *Mennogespräch* as part of my membership.

NAME _____ PHONE _____

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Memberships:

Student - \$5.00
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at same address
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Mail to:

Secretary, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
c/o Conrad Grebel College
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