



Wienwogespräch

Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario

September, 1991

Vol. 9, No. 2

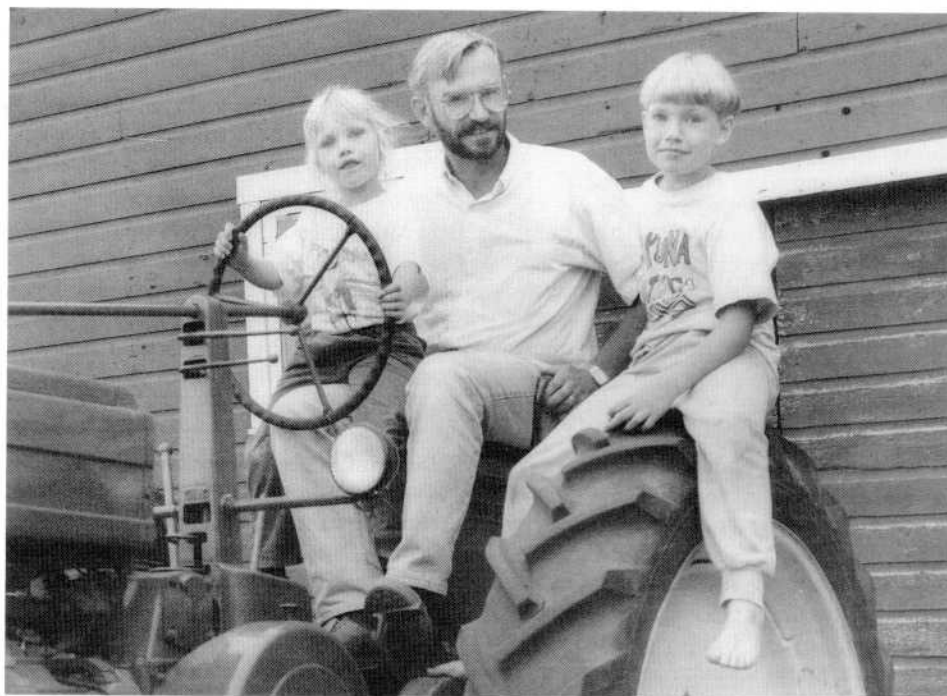
Diaries as a Source for Studying Mennonite History

by Royden Loewen

Introduction

"The great mass of diary writing is poor stuff," writes Robert Fothergill, an authority on the history of English diaries.¹ His study focuses only on those diaries that have "marvelous richness and vitality" and were kept by "remarkable human beings [who] communicat[ed] their natures abundantly."² Mennonite writers, too, have ignored the "poor stuff" of Mennonite diaries. Two recently published Mennonite diaries in Canada, James Nyce's 1982 edition, *The Gordon C. Eby Diaries: Chronicle of a Mennonite Farmer, 1911-1913*, and Harvey Dyck's 1991 translation and edition, *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880* make for fascinating reading. Eby, a young, unmarried Ontario farmer, lives within the dynamic non-Mennonite world of Berlin; he comments at length on the fragility of social relationships, the wonder of new technology—the camera, organ and car—and his somewhat mysterious work with herbal medicine. Epp, whose children later migrated to Saskatchewan, also leads a fascinating life; he resides within a model agricultural settlement for Jewish people in the Ukraine and, according to the editor, Epp's diaries "capture intensely personal, first hand impressions . . . [and] constitute a unique record of the changing world of a[n] . . . ethnic minority . . ."³

Most Mennonite diaries are not like the diaries of Gordon Eby and Jacob Epp. The majority of diaries that have come to the fore contain only curt entries about the mundane routine of farm-based life. If this is true, then why bother studying them? Why? Because they are our avenue to recreating the mindsets, the worldviews, the values of ordinary Mennonite farm men and women; and they provide us with invaluable insights into the dynamics of their everyday life. These diaries reveal the nature of personal relationships in rural Mennonite society (who were the



Royden Loewen with children Meg (left) and Rebecca (right) on family farm in Blumenort, Manitoba.

people most close and important to the diarist?); the diaries tell us about the importance of the family farm in the lives of ordinary Mennonites; the diaries give us a view of the world as seen through the eyes of the diarist (What were the boundaries of their community? How important was the church in their lives, how important were kinship networks?)

Mennonite diary keeping has deep roots in Canada. There are diaries kept by men and women in each of the various church groups, in both the Dutch-Russian Mennonite settlements of Manitoba and the Swiss-Pennsylvania Mennonite settlements of Ontario, throughout the time of the Mennonite sojourn in Canada. For convenience of space we will focus on known diaries for Waterloo County, from the 1860s to the 1920s. All of these diaries are conveniently found in the Mennonite

Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel College.

There are few differences between the sets of diaries in Manitoba and Ontario. True, the diaries of Ontario Mennonites are primarily in English, reflecting the decline of their Pennsylvania-German dialect, and the length of time since they first arrived in North America over 200 years ago; the diaries of Manitoba Mennonites, on the other hand, invariably are written in German, in the Gothic script, although several have been translated into English by descendants of the diarists. What most of the Manitoba and Ontario diaries have in common is that each was written by a member of a farm household, by both men and women, ministers and lay members, the elderly and the young.



Isaac S. and Elizabeth (Schneider) Cressman family. Diarist Ephraim Cressman standing in back row (second from left).

The Family Farm Household

Most Mennonite diaries, thus, offer records of those patterns of life that are the most important to the whole household: weather, seasonal changes, community networks, work routine, but most importantly household relationships. These are especially the patterns in the diaries of four adult Mennonite men of the 1880s and 1890s—Ephraim Cressman of Breslau, Isadore Snyder of Berlin, David Bergey of New Dundee and Moses Bowman of Mannheim—each a respected married Mennonite farmer at the time of the diary writing.⁴ The focus of the Cressman, Snyder, Bergey and Bowman diaries is the farm household, its economic concern and its internal and external social relationships. Most important is the work routine that keeps the household alive economically. It reflects a preoccupation with the diversity of tasks, changing from season to season and day to day. It reflects a person in tune with the changing of the seasons.

The work described in Cressman's 1890 diary, for example, closely follows the contours of the seasons of Ontario and reflects Ontario's array of markets, advanced technology, mixed economy, closeness to town markets and moderate climate. The winter months of January saw Cressman undertake an endless cycle of choring the pigs and cattle, of travelling to nearby Breslau to purchase "bran and shorts," and, on 17 different days, of cutting "lumber, firewood, logs and stakes" in the family woodlot and selling them to the urban folk of Berlin. In early spring the tasks shifted to prepare for the new season; the last of the wheat was

marketed, supplies and tools were purchased at the sales of neighbouring farmers, seed grain was procured, and the birth of the first calves observed. By 5 April land work began and, with his new "hired man," Cressman undertook the task of "drawing dung," picking rocks, and "gangploughing" the seedbed, then seeding the wide variety of crops, including clover, wheat, barley, oats and peas. In May attention turned to the root crops—the sugar beets, carrots and turnips—then to successive days of "making fence" and selling the first cattle and pigs, sheering the sheep and washing its wool. June was a month of tedious weeding that included "scuffling potatoes" and "spudding thistles."⁵

July was the month to cut the first hay and also to bring out the binder and begin "cradling" the winter wheat. After the hay and wheat had dried in the fields, they were brought into Cressman's huge barn. During August the rest of the crops were cut and "thrashed." In September the routine of seeding began again as Cressman scrambled to prepare the fields for the seeding of winter wheat and rye, but not before drainage tiles had been placed carefully in the low lying parts of the field. October marked the sale of the season's first wheat, a lot of 12 bushels of wheat for 83 cents in Conestogo. This was also the month of statutory road work, of "pulling" the apples and "digging" the potatoes, and bringing in the feed roots—14 loads of turnips and four of carrots.

Now, that the outside work was done, Cressman returned to the barn; the summer pigs were sold, for \$6.00 a dressed hundred weight, and the wheat "shocks"

stored in the barn since summer were "thrashed." December reintroduced the routine of winter; the endless days hauling wood to Berlin, broken only by the hog butchering bee and the year end financial arrangements required by Waterloo's Molson Bank.⁶ Each day brought a task toward building the economic strength of the household; it was a routine so unyielding that not to work the field or market a product was an unusual day, duly noted with the words, "tinkering around."⁷

These records clearly indicate how seasons and farm concerns shaped the average Mennonite's life. Of the various restrictions, weather patterns and changing seasons were the most immutable to human agency. The whole of life was shaped by temperatures, wind velocities, precipitation and degrees of sunnyiness. Daily weather entries and the signs of seasonal changes were never recorded by idle minds; they were a crucial feature of all household diaries for they quickly translated into the range of possible activities. For Isadore Snyder the splendidly warm day of 24 March 1892 meant that "roads bad, snow soft"; the unseasonably cold weather of early April meant that "ground frozen hard last four nights"; the "awful hot" day of 4 August brought "local thunder showers"; the "very cold, snow flurries" on 25 December translated into "some sleighs going . . ." So important were these seasonal changes that farmers looked for the first sign of the new season; this was the gist of Moses Bowman's entry for 3 March 1890 when he noted that "the bees are flying for the first time this winter" or David Bergey's entry for 17 October 1900, "first heavy frost tonight." Clearly the rhythm of nature dictated the moods and the behaviour of all household members.⁸

If weather patterns marked the limits of human possibilities, the economy of the household marked the attempt to manipulate and secure the fruits of nature.

Mennogespräch is published semi-annually by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6.

Editor: Reg Good.

German Translation Editor: Herb Enns.

Review Editor: Linda Huebert Hecht.

Mennogespräch is received by all members of the Society. See membership form for current rates. All correspondence should be directed to the editor. Assistance received from the Ontario Ministry of Culture & Citizenship is gratefully acknowledged.

ISSN 0824-5673

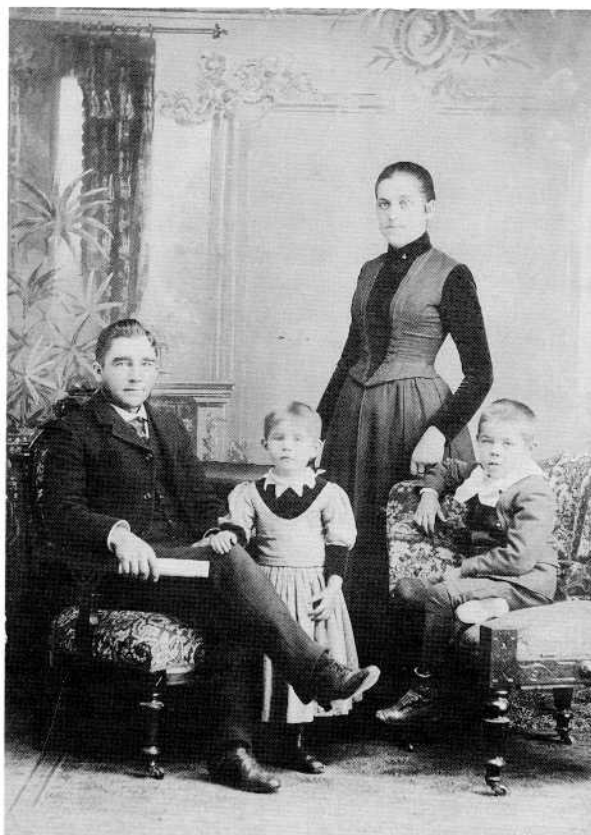
Interwoven in the descriptions of seasonal work routines and weather patterns were the recorded numbers. Mennonite farmers seem to have been preoccupied with numbers, the mark of the farm's well being; just to record labour costs, consumption rates, yields of produce, market prices and interest rates seemed to provide the diarist with a sense of control over the household. The complex process of determining income was duly quantified. When on 30 August 1900 David Bergey sold the first of the season's wheat it was more than a simple exchange; it involved taking "46 bushels of wheat to Dundee Mill, exchanging 17.9 bushels [of it] for 600 pounds of flour and 206 pounds of bran, and [getting] 64 cents a bushel for the remainder, [for a total of] \$18"; when he sold the first hogs on 8 October 1900, it was "four hogs to Baden, sold to Hall and Knupp, wt. 830 lbs. @ 5 /34 cents a lb., \$47.75." Farm yields were similarly recorded in detail; in 1900 the Bergeys harvested 69 loads of turnips, 923 bushels of wheat.

Help for a neighbour was never rendered gratis, for it too figured into the equation of household strength; when David Bergey "made some calculations for . . . father" on 26 November 1900 there was a charge—25 cents; when Moses Bowman ran out of bread on 1 August 1890 and was required to borrow bread from his son it too was duly noted: borrowed "22 pounds of bread from Aaron's to date." Even the process of payment was recorded: when David Bergey purchased a cow at D. Brennenman's sale for \$31.60 it was a sum "due in 10 months;" when Bergey paid his labourer George Bechtel on 8 March 1906 it was with "2-1/2 pounds cheese, 5 pounds beef sausage and \$3.00 cash." These farm diaries are attempts to define and make sense of the immediate world in which Mennonite farmers found themselves.

Interaction with the Wider World

The household, however, was only the most important of the different social spheres that the ordinary Mennonite encountered; important, as well, according to the diaries of Cressman, Snyder, Bergey and Bowman were the antennas that led from the household into the wider world of the market place, the kinship group and the Mennonite congregation.

Most of these social interactions are recorded as a matter of fact. Visits by kin are recorded, not described; market visits are noted, but not evaluated. Even emotional church confrontations are blandly entered. Diaries of church leaders often



Diarist Isadore B. and Hannah (Bingeman) Snyder family with children Della (left) and John (right).

provide little detail of the official church story. When preacher Moses Bowman of Waterloo encountered a series of church problems following the old Order/Old Mennonite schism, his entries were couched in innuendo; his entry for 4 January 1890 read simply, "to Conestoga Meeting [sic] House About Church Difficulties." And was it possible that it was a church member's excommunication that Bowman referred to when he wrote in cryptic German, "Der Mann das Lebens weiler aufgesetzt?"⁹

If these diaries cannot provide glimpses into internal dynamics of church politics, they can provide a sense of the unending church network; they provide glimpses into the minister's visits with congregational members, his work of preaching sermons, his duties at funerals, ordinations and weddings, and travels to other congregations. Bowman, for example, spent a month visiting churches and as many as 9 members' homes per day in Franconia County, Pennsylvania, in late spring 1890.¹⁰

In the very descriptions of church events diarists sometimes do provide glimpses of religious views. References to church activity can, for example, indicate the importance of the church in the person's life; more importantly, it can suggest the nature of the church's role in everyday life. These diaries indicate that there was a growing divergence of opinion

of what the church's role in society should be: diarists holding the old view clearly felt that congregation equalled the community, meaning that what went on in the community during the week was as important as the church service; diarists holding the new view clearly saw true religion in emotional and revivalistic church services. Those of the old view deemphasized strict church attendance and in the traditional practice of rotating services from meetinghouse to meetinghouse felt uncompelled to attend church every Sunday. Farmer Ephraim Cressman, by all accounts a devout Mennonite, attended church services on only half the Sundays in 1890, on 21 of the 52 Sundays, and only when services were held at the "Cressman Church."¹¹ Another sign of the old way was a feeling of responsibility for poverty and disunity between members; farmer David Bergey exercised an old rite when as deacon in January 1900 he spent a good part of the day "at Bennel Bowman's to try to settle a difficulty between them and Daniel Wenger . . ."¹²

Other diaries, however, point to the new view that church should emphasize personal religious revival and hold more frequent meetings. Isadore Snyder, for example, wrote about the importance of revival meetings in his life in 1892; he noted how on Wednesday, 10 February 1892, he travelled to Hagey's Meeting House to hear the American evangelist J.S. Coffman who was "holding meetings this week." Snyder returned on the 17th and 18th and was clearly moved to see 10 youth "came forward to confess Christ" on one night, and eight others the next. Less than a month later, on 13 March, Snyder attended yet another series, where he once again documented that "souls came forward to confess Christ", climaxing with the last day when "Eliza Betzner [his teenaged cousin] came forward to be a child of God." Furthermore, Snyder's diary indicated a new approach to church attendance. After 1891, he attended church every Sunday, and it was not unusual for him to attend Sunday School, worship service and Young Peoples' Meeting on a single Sunday.¹³ More important than providing personal expressions of religious pilgrimage, these diaries chart the social shape of congregational life.

Social Ties and Boundaries

The central purpose of the Mennonite diary, to seek to gain a measure of control over one's life by recording the events of

the household and noting the social antennae leading into the wider community, was deeply rooted in Mennonite society. It was a literary culture that broke through lines of generation and of gender. Married and unmarried women diarists, and elderly and youthful male diarists, focused alike on the everyday life of household work routine, kinship ties and congregation. Where they differed, they provide a unique glimpse of Mennonite society from the perspective of their gender or age.

Just how early Mennonite youth began acquiring a perception of the need to control their everyday life, is apparent from the diary of teenager Moses Weber, aged 19, in 1866.¹⁴ His diary reveals a world that is strikingly similar to that of the adult—the farm's economy, kinship ties and the community—although he is obviously aware that he has not yet entered fully into the world of the adult. Moses's diary, too, begins with a daily description of weather: "a middlin clear day" or a "rough day, snowy and rainy," are typical entries. His account describes this daily work, "we did begin to plough" or "we did haul logs." His diary identifies with the farm economy; it is not unusual for him to note that his father received "\$1.04 for spring wheat and \$1.09 for foul [sic] wheat" in Waterloo or that "father [drove] to David Martins and did get five young pigs."

When Moses records visits, it is a careful note of all comings and goings from the Weber household; his entry for 22 January was not only that "[my sister] Susan and I went to the meeting at Cressman's, and to John Webers' for dinner" but that "father [who was a Mennonite preacher] and mother went to the meeting at Martins'." And his is a mind in tune with the Mennonite community, noting the funerals of community members and the days of special church meetings when "strange preachers" from either Pennsylvania or Ohio come calling. Only the single reference for April 1866, marked by six asterisks, "President of the U.S. . . . was killed by another person," breaks the routine of household and community life.¹⁵

Similar patterns of record keeping pervade the diaries of the community's elderly. Moses Bowman in his 70s during the 1890s was still prominent in the community; he was well-to-do and a noted preacher. Yet despite his public profile, his world in 1891 was shaped by his household, and increasingly by the households of his 10 married children. By age 71 Bowman had divided his land amongst his children, with the family farm in the hands of son Aaron. His life was filled with the



Jacob and Elizabeth (Eby) Bergey Family. Diarist David and Louisa (Bowman) Bergey standing in back row (far left).

activities of settling the last details of dividing his estate; he mailed son Samuel in Michigan \$800 one day, and collected \$700 from another son, Moses Jr., two days later. His life also involved frequent visits to his sons and daughters and his social space incorporated the farms of his sons; it is a perception one senses when, on 13 February 1890, Bowman drove to Berlin via the "middle Street through [son] Aaron's Road, [and] back through [son] Noah's Road."

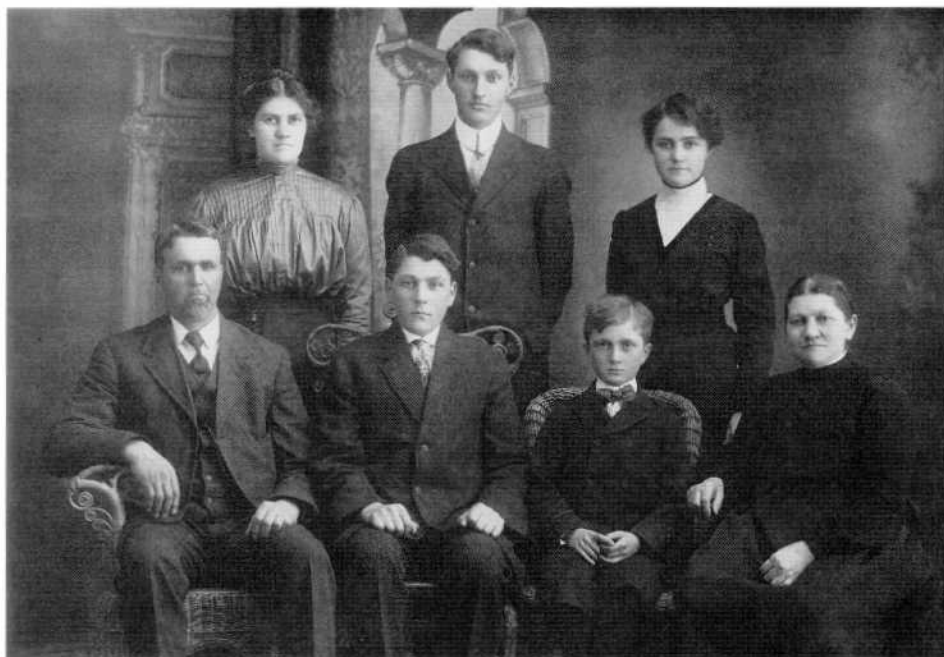
But the importance of his children's households in his life is most visible in Bowman's work routine, which frequently involved working for one of his sons, especially Aaron on whose farmyard Bowman seems to have lived. He helped Aaron "tap . . . sugar trees" in March 1891 and "lay . . . his barn floor" in July; he stayed home to "help Aaron thrash" in August 1891 and to "dig . . . Aaron's potatoes" in October. Bowman's diary reveals the perception of a church community leader, but also of an elderly, semi-retired farmer.¹⁶

The tradition of diary keeping in rural Mennonite communities crossed not only lines of generation, but lines of gender. Women, as well as men, kept journals that dispassionately documented the day to day work routine within the household as well as the social network in which the household was set. Seemingly, so long as the farm was a family-run, mixed operation, women diary keepers were preoccupied, not with themselves, but with the family farm and the Mennonite community, in which women and men shared common pursuits, and oftentimes similar viewpoints. The diaries of Laura Shantz, a 34 year old spinster in 1918, and her mother Susanna

Cassel Shantz, in her 50s, are both primarily public, family records.¹⁷

It is true that the view of the household there is clearly a woman's. Laura Shantz sees her world from within the house. Her diary reflects a preoccupation with children, health, other women, and the domestic duties of cleaning and baking. There are fewer references to weather and season. When Laura notes weather patterns it is a view of someone inside the house. The February 1918 cold snap was so cold that it froze the "water pipes . . . from tank to house," the "ice storm" of March so severe that "telephone wires broke." There are regular references to domestic work: typical entries are, "Minnie came to clean and help wash" or "I scrubbed big porch." There are notes of women gathering in common interest: "nurse and I were to Edna's quilting" or "sewing circle at Ed Witmer's" reflect female networks. There are notes of food preparation that included references to "Aunt H. help[ing] peel onions for pickling" or the accomplishment of "6 jars . . . apple molasses boil." There are concerns about clothing that include mention of the "Jew dress goods peddler [who was] here" or the simple entry, "we washed."¹⁸

Different too from the diaries kept by men, is the preoccupation with matters of life and death. Laura Shantz's references to the tragedies of farm accidents, of suicide, of deaths of children and deaths of elderly neighbours are similar to notations made by men. Not as frequently found in men's diaries, however, are the regular records of births in the community, notes on marriages, and the health of neighbours. Laura Shantz is especially con-



Noah and diarist Susannah (Cassel) Shantz family. Diarist Laura Shantz standing (far left).

cerned with health. She regularly records the state of health of her neighbours; her entry for a single day in February 1918 was that "Elvin Shantz has mumps and Moses B congestion of the lungs"; for another day it was that "Mary Tohman had operation, for appendicitis was burst, Wesley Battler [has] scarlet fever." The health of her family was especially important for Laura: her notes for March 1918 range from "Walter, a sore ear," to "Dr. Gillespie ordered me into bed," to "Grandma came downstairs this P.M. for the first time [since falling ill]." And she monitors their health; for example, she regularly notes the weight of each of the women in the house: on 17 March 1918 it was "Grandma . . . 188, Ma 154, Nurse 161, Laura 144."¹⁹

Like the diaries of the men, however, Laura Shantz's carefully documents the economy of the farm household. She notes the work routine of both the men in the fields and markets, and her own in the farmyard and garden. She notes the first day that the "men worked on land" and the day "the men finished seeding." She records with detail the process of "thrashing" and "silo filling," noting both the times of speedy execution and times of problems; on 14 August 1918 the problem was that the "separator [broke] at noon" and the problem the very next day that the "engine leaked [forcing us] to start again the next day." She notes the men's participation in the public sphere; it was "Walter [who] took a load of pigs out to Baden" on 22 March 1918, "Pa [who] fetched new Ford" a month later on 20 April, and "Pa and Linc [who] went to Kitchener for seed corn" on 3 May.

But she also describes her own work in

the farmyard and garden. Records such as "Buzzard cow, calf" or the "Mooly heifer, calved," reflect her activity in the dairy; references to "set six hens in the corncrib" or "sow has eight pigs in sheep pen" indicate her work in the pursuit of food self-sufficiency; notes that "Ephraims butchered five pigs, one for Mother Shantz" manifest a similar interest for the households of her relatives; the note, "took up potatoes in truck patch", mark her work in the garden.²⁰

Like the diaries of the men, Laura Shantz's reflects an identification with the wider Mennonite community. She notes in October 1918 how neighbour "Coris filled silo and Bings also." She records in February how "Uncle Ephraim Cassel sold his farm for \$7500" and in March that "Amos Goods moved on M. Groff's farm." There are references to private farmers' markets, to the barns that were struck by lightning and burned, and to barn raisings. She mentions special church services, Bible conferences, baptism instruction meetings, singing hour and revival meetings: in January it was to hear Ed Hess at the Geiger Church, in May to hear David Garber in Blenheim, and in June "to Kitchener to Rev. C.F. Derstines meetings." True, there are references to the invading outside world: the notes of "the death of Private Elvin Eby in Action overseas, 71 Battalion, machine gun section," or even of "young Howling [who] stole cigars . . . at Kavelmans store" reflect a Mennonite community open to the "outside world." Still, her diary is a record of the social ties and boundaries that allowed a Mennonite community to survive a time of rapid urbanization.²¹

There are few differences between the

diaries of Laura Shantz and her mother, Susannah Cassel Shantz. Shantz's diary is sketchier and kept year after year within a Dr. A.W. Chase's Calender Almanac. Despite the fact that the Almanac regularly reminds Susannah Shantz that "Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills" have a "wonderful combined action on kidneys, liver and bowels" or that "Dr. Chase's Nerve Food" can guard against "the nervous breakdown" her diary has few entries about health. Her concerns as a married woman seem to tie her indelibly to the self-sufficient household, rooted in a Mennonite community. She notes the marketing of all cattle and hogs, the birth of both calves and foals, the work of clipping sheep and setting hens, the use of day labourers to haul sugar beets and demolish the old barn. Her wider world, too, is a Mennonite one—shaped by barn raisings, neighbours' sales, church meetings, funerals, the constant comings and goings of close relatives for tea, dinner or night, and visits from guests from Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio and the West.²²

Conclusion

There were few changes in Mennonite rural life between the 1890s and 1920s. So long as a landed existence was maintained and a relatively unmechanized, mixed farm economy continued, the focus of the Mennonite diarists seemed to remain on the family farm household, set in an intricate circle of relatives and church members.

More important in bringing a change to the tradition of Mennonite diary keeping than the simple passage of time from one century to another, was the social setting of the diarist. The diary of Gordon Eby reflected a growing individualism associated with a life no longer rooted in the Mennonite community; the diary of Jacob Epp suggests an ability to distance oneself from the immediate community and analyze it. The diaries of most Ontario farm men and women in the 1890s reveal a different perspective; they reflect a preoccupation with the household's economy and a reliance within a social network comprised of the extended family and the church community. The deeply rooted nature of this kind of diary is reflected in the fact that both old men and teenaged boys, married and unmarried women, and farmers of both the 1890s and 1920s, kept diaries of a similar nature.

This "poor stuff" of Mennonite diary writing provides few direct glimpses into colorful Mennonite consciousness and few analyses of the development of Mennonite community. Except for entries about community tragedies, church upheavals, or weather aberrations these diaries make for dull reading. But in their very dullness, in

their descriptions of mundane routines and predictable social patterns, they offer an invaluable glimpse into the everyday lives of rural Mennonites in Canada.

NOTES

1. Robert Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (London, 1974), p. 2.
2. Fothergill, pp. 2 & 10.
3. James Nyce, ed., *The Gordon C. Eby Diaries: Chronicle of a Mennonite Farmer, 1911-1913* (Waterloo, ON, 1982); Harvey Dyck, ed. & tr., *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880* (Toronto, 1991), p. 5.
4. Ephraim Cressman, diary, 1875-1911, Mennonite Archives of Ontario (MAO); Isadore Snyder, diary, 1880-1881, 1883-1888, 1892-1894,

- 1900, MAO; David Bergey, diary, 1866, 1881, 1900-01, 1906, 1909, 1911, 1913, MAO; Moses Bowman, diary, 1871, 1875, 1889, 1890, MAO.
5. Cressman, diary, 1892, throughout.
6. Cressman, diary, 1892, throughout.
7. Snyder, diary, 3 Nov. 1892.
8. Cressman, diary, 1892, throughout; Snyder, diary, 1890, throughout, Bowman, diary, 1890, throughout.
9. Bowman, diary.
10. Bowman, diary.
11. Cressman, diary.
12. Bergey, diary, 2 January, 1900. See also, 28 Jan. 1900; 26 March 1900; 12 April 1900; 17 June 1900; 1 July 1900; 18 October 1900.
13. Snyder, diary.
14. Moses Weber, diary, 1862-1866, MAO.

15. Weber, diary.
16. Bowman, diary, throughout.
17. Laura Shantz, diary, 1917-1918, MAO; Susanna Cassel Shantz, diary, 1904-1920, MAO.
18. Laura Shantz, diary, 1917-1918.
19. Laura Shantz, diary, 1917-1918.
20. Laura Shantz, diary, 1917-1918.
21. Laura Shantz, diary, 1917-1918.
22. Susanna Shantz, diary.

Royden Loewen is a post-doctoral fellow in Canadian history at the University of Manitoba.

People and Projects

Elizabeth Bloomfield, with the assistance of Jane Forgay and Linda Foster, is compiling a bibliographic database of published works dealing with the history of Waterloo County to 1972. **The Waterloo Regional Project**, as it is called, will be completed in May, 1992.

Edna and Paul Hunsberger, hosts at the **Brubacher House** historic site in Waterloo since 1986, have been succeeded by Carol and Howard Gimbel. Both couples are members of Erb Street Mennonite Church.

Hildi Froese Tiessen has received a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to study **Canadian-Mennonite literary tradition** and compile a bibliography of Canadian-Mennonite writing. In this connection, she is trying to track down the manuscript of a novel written by **Ephraim Weber**. Weber mentions it in correspondence with Lucy Maude Montgomery of *Anne of Green Gables* fame.

The **Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association** is establishing a museum and archives in a housing complex now being developed by the Leamington Mennonite Home. About \$45,000 of the required \$80,000 cost has been donated or pledged.

Sam Steiner returned from a six-month sabbatical in October to resume his responsibilities as Librarian/Archivist at Conrad Grebel College. He spent his sab-

batistical researching and writing a book on this history of **Rockway Mennonite School**. He hopes to complete the manuscript in the next couple of years.

A fund-raising effort has been undertaken this year by the **Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund Committee** in commemoration of the fifth anniversary of Epp's death. The objective is to increase the amount in the endowment fund, which currently stands at \$43,812.30. The fund generates financial assistance for research and work projects relating to Epp's historical and pacifist interests. A 1991 commemorative edition of Epp's selected writings will be given to persons making new donations. Donations should be directed to the Mennonite Foundation of Canada, #4-117 Victor Lewis Drive, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 1J6.

Leonard Friesen has begun to transcribe the diaries of **Lewis J. Burkholder**, a prominent church leader and author of *A Brief History of the Mennonites in Ontario*, 1935. He hopes eventually to write a full-length biography of Burkholder.

Linda Huebert Hecht is updating a data base on Canadian Mennonite institutions begun by Marlene Epp for the **Mennonite Historical Society of Canada**. Epp has resigned as staff person for the society to pursue Ph.D. studies in history at the University of Toronto.

Marlene Epp has submitted a draft for an updated version of *Mennonites in Ontario*, a booklet originally written by Winfield Fretz in 1967 as the Mennonite Historical Society's Centennial project. The booklet should be available in 1993.

Marcus Shantz is researching the impact of World War II on Mennonite worldviews, under the auspices of Mennonite Central Committee Ontario and Rockway Mennonite School, Kitchener, Ontario. Shantz has conducted oral interviews with refugees, soldiers, non-combatants and **conscientious objectors**. He intends to develop this information as a curriculum at the Secondary School level.

Reg Good has succeeded Sam Steiner as editor of *Mennogespräch*. The editorial committee of the newsletter has been restructured. There is now a book review editor, Linda Huebert Hecht, and a German translation editor, Herbert Enns.

The editor would like to correct an error in the last issue of *Mennogespräch*. The Teen Girls Home in London, Ontario, was founded by a group of young business and professional women, rather than men. Thanks to **Alvin Roth** for bringing this information to our attention.

Book Review

By Ilse E. Friesen



"Making Watermelon Syrup" by Henry Pauls (1984) Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Tiessen, Hildi Froese and Paul Gerard Tiessen, eds. *A Sunday Afternoon: Paintings by Henry Pauls*. With an historical preface by Leonard G. Friesen. Institute of Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies and Sand Hills Books, 1991 – \$60.00.

The folk artist Henry Pauls has created a unique pictorial record for Mennonites who came from Russia to settle in Canada. This book fills a gap in the historical records of Mennonite life before the Russian Revolution. Creatively and lovingly, the artist involves us in a form of visual story-telling which, in part, is like a childhood fairy tale that ended all too suddenly.

A Sunday Afternoon shows only the bright side of life before the Mennonite community was plunged into "the shadow of death". The paintings are delicately crafted and show a good sense of balance, a fine feeling for pictorial space and a delight in festive colours. They are often large, depicting details which are of historical interest. The artist re-creates a world which he had experienced as beautiful, happy and safe.

Henry Pauls' artistic talent was fostered in his high school days, but then lay dormant for many decades until, at the age of 70 and after retirement from a life as a farmer, he allowed himself the leisure and luxury of becoming immersed in a world of colours and memories. He comes from a

19th Century tradition of art education where neatness and accuracy were more highly valued than spontaneity and imagination. An exhibition of the works of Cornelius Krieghoff inspired Henry Pauls to develop his own cheerful style of picturesque realism; the works of William Kurelek, in comparison, are usually more sombre and troubled. Pauls began his artistic career by creating albums for his six grown-up children in an effort to preserve their heritage and to communicate to them his unshakeable belief in the goodness of life.

Pauls' visual documentation has been well received: 73 of his paintings hang in public institutions such as Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, and the National Archives in Ottawa. *A Sunday Afternoon* shows forty of his paintings, of which the first thirty depict life in Southern Russia before the 1917 Revolution. The remaining ten pictures depict the harsh realities of pioneer life in Saskatchewan during the 1920's and the Depression years, as well as the slow but increasing material success of the settlers in Southern Ontario in the 1940's and 1950's. All of his paintings have autobiographical relevance: Henry Pauls came to Canada in 1923 at the age of 19, moving first to the prairies. He now lives in Leamington, Ontario.

Each painting in the book is accompa-

nied by the artist's own commentary. He is sometimes laconic, sometimes more comprehensive, providing anecdotes which at times reveal a wry sense of humour. The artist has left it to others to narrate the traumas experienced by Mennonites during the Russian Revolution in greater depth. His commentaries only briefly touch upon the tragedies that devastated his community and family. He once said in an interview that "terrible things are very difficult to paint"; we cannot blame him for largely avoiding it. His art is intended to be recreational rather than revolutionary, and his figure painting, in particular, does not lend itself to portrayals of violence. The people depicted are toy-like and their movements occasionally appear a little awkward.

In rare instances where confrontation is depicted, for instance in "*The Broken Violin*" (Illustration 30) where a musician is bullied by two men, or in "*Hildebrandt's Flour Mill, Einlage*" (Illustration 26), where two little girls are frightened by dogs, the figure-scale is kept so small, and the landscape scene so idyllic, that the overriding visual message is that all will be well. Indeed, the commentary assures us that there is a happy ending. In all of the paintings which depict early childhood memories, the skies are always blue, the trees lush and green, the river sparkling, and even the under-privileged Russians are shown in their Sunday best.

The book is beautifully designed, beginning with a historical preface and an introduction, followed by a brief sketch of the artist's life. The forty full-page colour illustrations constitute the bulk of the book. This work is intended for leisurely "Sunday afternoon" browsing and might awaken a precarious sense of nostalgia for the "good old days".

The paintings which are illustrated originated in the years from 1974 to 1989. The book ends with an image of prosperous farmland in Leamington, accompanied by a guardedly cautious commentary concerning the preoccupation with making money in contemporary Canadian society.

There is, however, no conclusion to the book. One might wish for a deeper analysis of the style of the artist, or a dis-

cussion of the ambiguous relationship between word and image, or between perceived reality and memory. We are grateful to the artist for his happy pictures, but we are also uneasy about this fairy-tale world which excludes the shadow-side of individual and communal life which must have existed even before the Revolution. We may wonder, for example, how many musical talents were "broken" together with violins, or how many visual artists might have been discouraged from developing their talents. In a larger context, one might ask if the images of happy cooperation between Mennonites and Russians do not obscure a number of the tensions which existed between the two communities.

We do, however, experience an occasional shudder in comparing images and

words—for instance, the depiction of the "Home of Kornelius and Ida Hildebrandt, Einlage" (Illustration 27). After seeing a painting of a model farm with fruit trees, flower gardens and playing girls, we read that the train bridge in the background became a mass grave when it was bombed during the Revolution, and that the father of the household (the artist's father-in-law) was murdered; also, three sisters of the artist's wife Sara died in one year (1919). Finally, the whole site was buried when a dam was built.

Henry Pauls has recreated a garden of paradise before "the Fall". Perhaps, the artist is re-building his faith in humanity through his art; by re-constructing the idyllic world of his childhood, he has found a healing way in which to relate to the past.

If Americans have their Grandma Moses, Canadian Mennonites have their "Grandpa Pauls". Like him, she also painted childhood memories and found "always something pleasing and cheerful", preferring to use "bright colours and activity" (*Grandma Moses: My Life's History*, edited by Otto Kallir, Harper 1948). She found the pace of life during her childhood to be slower and happier than it is today. She was almost 80 when her talent was discovered in the 1930's. Henry Pauls, now 87, has already been well known for over a decade, and this book will contribute to the recognition he deserves.

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Book Notes

A Polish/Ukrainian/North American Mennonite furniture-making tradition is surveyed by Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John M. Janzen in *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 1991), 231 pp. The Janzens treat furniture as a decorative art which mirrors culture.

The Swiss experience in Ontario is chronicled by Joan Magee in *The Swiss in Ontario* (Windsor, Ontario: Electra Books, 1991), 271 pp. Chapter four deals exclusively with the settlement of Pennsylvania Mennonites and European Amish in Ontario. Magee includes a photograph of Amos and Ada Reesor looking at their sixteenth century Bible published in Zurich, Switzerland.

Isaac Horst has translated, annotated and published the *Canada-Iowa Stauffer Letters* [Mount Forest, Ontario: I.B.

Printing, 1991], 28 pp. These letters deal with the organization of a Stauffer Old Order Mennonite church in Waterloo County in 1882 and the migration of the church to Osceola County, Iowa, in 1887.

The second volume of Donovan Smucker's annotated bibliography of sources dealing with *The Sociology of Mennonites, Hutterites & Amish* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1991), pp.194, is now available. This book provides descriptive and critical comments on nearly 800 items generated between 1977 and 1990.

Elizabeth Bloomfield, with Jane Forgay and Linda Foster, has published the *Waterloo Historical Society Bibliography* (Guelph: Waterloo Regional Project, 1991), 390 pp. This is an annotated bibliography of articles appearing in the annual volumes of the Waterloo Historical

Society, complete with an every name index. There are eighty-eight references to Mennonites.

The proceedings of a 1991 symposium on Pennsylvania-German decorative arts at the Joseph Schneider Haus historic site have been edited by Susan Burke and Matthew H. Hill and published under the title *From Pennsylvania to Waterloo: Pennsylvania-German Folk Culture in Transition* (Kitchener, Ont.: Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus, 1991), 148 pp. The book is beautifully designed and profusely illustrated.

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