

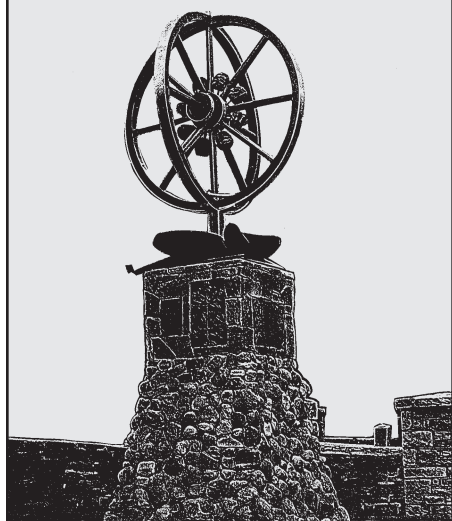
Ontario Mennonite History

THE
NEWSLETTER
FOR THE
MENNONITE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF
ONTARIO

VOLUME XXXVI
NUMBER 1

•
JUNE, 2018

•
ISSN 1192-5515



Celebrating a Century of Mennonite Sewing Circles in Ontario

By Marlene Epp and Bethany Leis

On March 14, 1917, Susannah Cressman wrote in her diary: “Sewing Circle met at M.C. Cressmans to make quilts for Red Cross Society & and wheels have started running.”ⁱ The next day Susannah gave \$2 to a “Red Cross Lady” who called at her door raising funds for “patriotic purposes.” In these two days, Susannah exhibited the two-fold response of Mennonites during wartime—how to be nonresistant and patriotic at the same time. In her first entry, what was Susannah’s meaning of “wheels have started running”? Was she referring to the increasing pace of relief work? Was she anticipating the imminent call for women’s groups to organize? Despite regular references to sewing circle meetings, Susannah’s diary does not refer to any particular day or year to mark the beginnings of sewing circles in Ontario.

One hundred years ago, Mennonite women in Ontario, with the “encouragement” of their menfolk, formally organized an activity that they had already been doing for years, indeed decades and centuries. They created a structure for doing “the work of their hands”ⁱⁱ to quote Gloria Neufeld Redekop and in so doing, brought their creative labour on behalf of those in need under the umbrella of the organized church.

Possibly since their first arrival in Ontario, Mennonite women gathered together to do good work. Was it to patch the few clothes that were brought with them from Pennsylvania? Did they weave cloth or were they able to purchase it for new clothes? Perhaps when they gathered in circles or bees, they produced food together—preserves or baking? Did they collect extra food and clothing to share with other settlers who were struggling or with their Indigenous neighbours?

The year 1917 was not the beginning of women’s work in response to need. There is reference to women organizing

to sew for the poor in the late 19th century, as well as sending cash to an orphans’ home in Ohio, and to missions in India, likely in response to severe famine at the turn of the century. As one woman said when reflecting back, “We had always done something for the needy before the circle was formed, but not in an organized way.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The first documented women’s “sewing circle” was organized with 35 members in 1908 as the Waterloo Charity Circle.^{iv} These women were sewing clothing for poor children in the city of Toronto, a need that emerged with the creation of a mission in that city the year before, and prompted by Lena Weber, mission worker and member of what is today Erb St. Mennonite Church, then called Waterloo Mennonite Church.

The women of the Berlin Mennonite Church (now known as First Mennonite) also responded to the needs in Toronto by organizing a Sisters’ Aid in 1908.^v Minutes of their first meeting stated, “A number of sisters met for the purpose of organizing to aid the poor and distressed, and to do general mission and charitable work.” Seemingly it required the active cooperation of the deacon. In the first year, four quilts were made, as well as many garments. Reflecting on their success, they said: “The work



*A sewing circle from the Biehn church, 1947.
(Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo)*

~ Continued on page 2 ~

is now carried on in a systematic way. We had a very busy year and we find that by our united efforts much more is accomplished. This fills a long felt want in our church, as from time to time there came calls for help, which are now supplied by the Sisters' Aid." Clearly, a main purpose and also result of the sewing circles was to unite women's material labour into a collaborative effort. The third circle to organize was at Wanner Mennonite Church in 1915.

The girls were not far behind, when they created the Junior Charity Circle in 1916.^{vi} Their organization of 30 high school-aged members included a president, vice president, secretary, cutting committee, buying committee, shipping committee, sunshine girls (later changed to Sunshine boosters, also known as the visiting committee). The motto they adopted emerged from the first letters in charity: "Cheerful, Helpful, Active, Reasonable, Interested, Truthful, Yokebearers."^{vii}

But it wasn't until November 1917, at which time 20 circles had been formed, that the Conference of the Mennonite Church in Ontario executive committee recognized their work with the following motion: "It was thereupon moved and adopted that the Executive Committee of the Conference heartily encourages our sisters in their efforts through Sewing Circles and otherwise, to relieve the needy in their own communities." Prompting for this action came from Mary Ann Cressman, leader of the Sister's Aid at the Berlin church, after attending meetings with American women leaders in Indiana. Mary Ann appealed to the bishops and ministers in Ontario, saying "We would like to have it a Church organization, be recognized by the Church, if possible."^{viii} At the same time, the conference leaders recommended that they affiliate with the wider North American body, which in 1923 came to be called Mennonite Women's Missionary Society.^{ix}

Amazingly for us today, there may have been some opposition to this work. According to Karl Kessler's history of Erb St. church, organized women's



*Relief sale quilting day involved three quilts at Floradale Mennonite Church, 1976.
(Floradale Mennonite Church photo)*

work represented something untried by the broader Mennonite community and there were concerns about all-female groups directly involved in church work. Gender conflict was embedded in issues surrounding the "takeover" of women's organizing in the U.S. in the 1920s, which undoubtedly also affected Canadian opinions.

Today it is difficult to really imagine why there would have been opposition! Was it because women for a few hours a week devoted themselves to something other than their husbands and children and daily household tasks? Was there concern that women would not know how to handle cash or write minutes and compile reports? It is likely the issue was not that women were sewing for causes outside of their homes and churches, but that they were doing it in an organized way, and increasingly at the church and not at home. Was there a concern about women critiquing the Sunday sermon or otherwise discussing church politics? Perhaps, women acting in groups is always viewed as subversive.

The opposition was definitely more intense south of the border. Ontario leader L.J. Burkholder, for example, was strongly in favour. He suggested that Mennonite women had not had the chance that they should have.^x According to Lorna Bergey, other church leaders may have seen the upside to organized women; she said: "Church leaders found it very convenient to have

an organized group of women who were prepared to respond so willingly to needs such as providing meals for all-day conference meetings."^{xi} In addition to offering relief to those in need outside of their churches, serving the internal needs of the congregation were of course also an important activity of sewing circles, and became more so over time.

Men certainly found ways to stay involved and keep watch over these "organized" women, whether it was attending the sewing circle in order to offer a meditation or devotional (often deemed men's work) or to drive women to circle; in years of the car, male car-parkers were deemed necessary because seemingly women did not know how to park in order to maximize the space in the lot.

The first officers of the Ontario district were all identified by their husband's name, typical of that era, but making it difficult to piece names together: President Mrs. Menno (Amelia) Nahrgang (Biehn Church), Vice-President Mrs. Jacob (Ida) Snider (Waterloo), Secretary Mrs. Moses B. (Lovina) Shantz (Kitchener), Treasurer Mrs. M.C. (Mary Ann) Cressman (Kitchener), fifth member Mrs. Nelson (Martha) Bechtel (Wanners).^{xii} Mary Ann Cressman represented Ontario sewing circles to the North American Mennonite church body. In early 1918 Mary Ann invited missionary Mary Burkhart, on leave from her assignment in India, to



*Quilting at Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, 1989.
(Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church photo)*

visit Ontario churches to encourage women to organize their sewing circles and join the Ontario and thus North American body.^{xiii}

What exactly does it mean to organize, when the activity was already underway? After 1917 sewing circles took on names – Dorcas, Sunshine, Willing Workers, Mary-Martha, Ladies aid—they elected women to executive positions, collected fees, articulated terms of membership, and documented their meetings. In 1918 the Ontario district had its first annual meeting, with contributions from 19 sewing circles that stretched from Markham to Vineland to Waterloo, Wellesley and Wilmot townships.^{xiv} Agenda items included relief to war sufferers overseas, to victims of the Halifax explosion, and to overseas and home missions. The minutes of some groups were explicit about the need to send material goods to Belgium and France. They reported on the production of quilts, bandages, clothing, and other items for soldiers and civilians alike. Only a few years later

they would also be collecting funds and sending food and clothing to Mennonites in Russia.

As Mennonite church identities and structures changed in Ontario, so did women's organizations. A significant challenge came with denominational mergers and church splits with which women may or may not have aligned themselves. Amish circles began joining already in 1921,^{xv} before the Mennonites and Amish officially joined hands, and for at least a short time in the mid-1920s newly arrived Mennonites from Russia participated in the so-called "Old Mennonite" gatherings, even while Swiss Mennonite women were still sending relief overseas to Russia. In fact, the 1924 minutes of one group referred to a 'Russian' in attendance at the meeting, and German translation was provided.^{xvi}

Sometimes the alliances between women's groups reflected denominational patterns, but not always. For example, it seems that good relations continued between sewing circles at First Mennonite and Stirling Mennonite

after those congregations split in 1924. In fact, the men may have intervened to separate women while women preferred to stay together. The women from First Mennonite sent to the Stirling women the gift of a "walrus grain boston bag."^{xvii} On the flip side, many decades later, when three Mennonite conferences decided to merge in the 1980s, women's organizations were not so eager and maintained their separate identities for some time after.

Larger bureaucratic shifts beyond their control also led to frequent name changes: initially, the Sewing Circles were called the Ontario Branch of the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Committee, then becoming the Ontario Women's Missionary Society. Although, in the early years they also referred to their organization simply as "Sisters of the Mennonite Church." In 1955, it became the Women's Missionary and Service Auxiliary (WMSA). The auxiliary identity was reinforced, perhaps not coincidentally, in an era when societal tensions between female domesticity and the modernization of women's roles was growing. Auxiliary was dropped in 1971 in favour of Commission, a name that lasted until the late 1990s.

The number of sewing circles ebbed and flowed over the years; perhaps a height was 1970 when there were 92 in the Ontario conference, reaching as far north as Red Lake.^{xviii} Today there are a dozen or so. The Erb Street church group, still active, has met for 100 years, as has Wideman's, Kitchener First Mennonite, and others.

Within the Mennonite church sewing circles functioned as a "parallel

~ Continued on page 4 ~

Ontario Mennonite History is published semi-annually by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6, and distributed to all members of the Society. It is distributed free of charge to public libraries and school libraries in Ontario, upon request. Back issues available at mhso.org.

Editor: Barb Draper

Editorial Committee: Bethany Leis, Marion Roes, Herb Schultz, Ruth Steinman

Financial assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture is gratefully acknowledged.

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

church” in which women could exercise leadership in performing some of the roles that were historically unavailable to them in the main institution.^{xix} This was reflected in the worship-like atmosphere of their meetings, with devotionals, prayers, singing. As Karl Kessler has said, “while constrained from having an audible voice in the church, the work of their hands on its behalf spoke clearly of their minds and hearts.”^{xx} Some groups spoke explicitly about their ministry character. For example, in 1911, the women of Berlin Mennonite church, on reevaluating whether they should continue for another year, reflected on the impact of their work: “The thought was expressed that by helping others we help ourselves. Christ came not to be ministered unto but to minister; so should we follow His example.”^{xxi} Naomi Martin of Erb St. stated it succinctly when she said: “All of our work should be done because of a conviction that it is an expression of Christian love”^{xxii} — the heart of ministry.

Mennonite women used their sewing circles as a way to express their nonresistance. It is not a coincidence that sewing circles received a stamp of approval and a boost of activity in the years of World War I. In fact, they formally organized in the same year that conscription laws were passed by the federal government. This challenged Mennonites to articulate their CO position, especially with regard to men. It also prompted Mennonite women to consider how they might express their nonresistant, or pacifist, beliefs in the midst of war. Sewing clothing, quilts, knitting socks and bandages, and raising funds for food distribution, all served to alleviate the suffering caused by war.

This mandate became even more important in the Second World War, when conscription was passed much earlier in the conflict. In 1939, Ontario women organized sewing circles into “Nonresistant Relief Sewing Organization,” a companion organization to the Nonresistant Relief Organization, and adopted the slogan, ‘Non-Resistant Needles Knitting for the Needy’.^{xxiii} Clara

Snider, secretary of NRSO, wrote: “We are representing a common cause and stand for the same principles...United we stand, divided we fall.”^{xxiv} During the war, collecting new and used clothing, sewing and mending, knitting, assembling care packages, and canning food became a giant undertaking for Mennonite women across Canada. It was wartime need that also led to the establishment of the “cutting room” whereby women centralized the cutting and distribution of clothing patterns to sewing circles, managed by Ontario Mennonite women from 1942 through 1996, an important forerunner of the material aid room located at the Mennonite Central Committee Ontario headquarters.^{xxv}

Sewing circles also suffered from hierarchies and segregation in their own midst; sometimes the differentiation was practical, but not always. What about women who couldn’t sew or were not interested? They could often pay a fee in lieu of contributing sewing items. The marital status of women created a divide. For example, at First Mennonite, single women or widows had their own group, the Dorcas circle, in the 1920s.^{xxvi} Single women who had jobs could not meet in the daytime and hence this group was formed to allow for evening meetings, but it was also a way of categorizing women by marital status. This segregation continued into the 1970s.

Over time young married women also differentiated themselves from older women, because of the need to incorporate children into the routines and schedules of sewing circles. For some groups it also created an opportunity to get away from the children. As one of these women said: “We were an



*Bethel Mennonite Church near Elora is one of the congregations that still makes quilts.
(Bethel Mennonite Church photo)*

ambitious group. We quilted a quilt in one evening, even if it took till midnite to finish. It was our nite out, so why not, eh! ... let our husbands baby sit. Our nites out were few in those days. In those days we looked forward to going to circle.”^{xxvii} However, in one circle in 1917, older women separated themselves from girls and young marrieds so that the latter could stay home and ensure that husbands and families were fed. The president of this society, however, took her daughter along saying that father could fry his own potatoes.^{xxviii}

These specialized groups also reveal the social need that sewing circles filled. They brought women (often isolated in their rural homes, or urban households) together, to be productive for causes beyond themselves, but also for spiritual nourishment, laughter, emotional support, and just plain sociability.

In some ways we think of “sewing circle” as a phrase for a bygone era. It sounds quaint and doesn’t really depict the wide range of activity that happened when Mennonite women gathered to do good. The sewing circle language was gradually replaced by women’s auxiliary, society, or organization. Auxiliary became problematic because it made women’s work seem like an attachment to the more important work of the men. On the other hand, society

or organization sounds bureaucratic and involves fees, minutes, reporting, accountability.

Today the idea of a circle has new meaning; it is a method for teaching and learning that is very common in Indigenous education. Circle is used in University classes at Conrad Grebel University College. The meaning of circle is that there is no hierarchy, that

everyone has a chance to speak, that everyone is equal, that there is not a beginning or end, but just a continuous thread of relationships and productive activity. A sewing circle is just that, women sitting together to sew and to visit, with the intent of sharing with others. Given that today many women are inundated with bureaucracy in their professional and volunteer lives,

they might be drawn to a church group characterized by an informal circle rather than a formalized organization. Perhaps the church has come full circle.

ⁱ *The Diaries of Susannah Cressman, 1911-1946*, selected and prepared by Anne Eby Millar, and edited and annotated by D. Douglas Millar (Kitchener, ON: N.p., 1997).

ⁱⁱ Gloria Neufeld Redekop, *The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women's Societies in Canada* (Waterloo: ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996).

ⁱⁱⁱ Karl Kessler, *Path of a people: Erb Street Mennonite Church, 1851-2001*. (Waterloo: Erb Street Mennonite Church, 2001): 69.

^{iv} Kessler, 67.

^v *Ladies Aid minutes*, 1908. (First Mennonite Church (Kitchener) collection, III-12, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo, Ontario).

^{vi} *Junior Charity Circle minutes*, 1916. (Erb St. Mennonite Church collection, III-26.1, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo, Ontario).

^{vii} Kessler, 72.

^{viii} Lorraine Roth, *Willing service: stories of Ontario Mennonite Women*. (Waterloo: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1992):3.

^{ix} Alice Koch, Margaret Brubacher, and Lorna Bergey, *History of Ontario W.M.S.A., 1895-1967* (Ontario: W.M.S.A, 1967): 2.

^x Sharon L. Klingelsmith, "Women in the Mennonite Church, 1900-1930." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54 (1980): 193-194.

^{xi} Lorna L. Bergey, "Changes in Cultural Symbols for Ontario Mennonite Women of the Swiss Tradition during the 1950s & 60s: Stories we need to hear," *Mennogespräch* 8,2 (September 1990): 2.

^{xii} Amelia Nahrgang, "The Sewing Circle Work," Manuscript, [1930], Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo, Ontario.

^{xiii} *WMSA*, 1.

^{xiv} *WMSA*, 2.

^{xv} *WMSA*, 2.

^{xvi} *Mission sewing circle minutes*, 1924. (The First Mennonite (Vineland) collection, III-24.1, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo, Ontario).

^{xvii} *Ladies Aid minutes*, 1925.

^{xviii} Florence Schlegel, Verna Jutzi, and Vera Snyder. *History of W.M.S.C., 1968-1983* (Ontario: W.M.S.A, 1983): 13.

^{xix} Redekop.

^{xx} Kessler, 67-68.

^{xxi} *Ladies Aid minutes*, 1911.

^{xxii} "Naomi Collier Martin," http://www.wpl.ca/sites/default/files/waterloo_150/collier_martin_n1.pdf

^{xxiii} *Missionary News and Notes*, April 1941, 61.

^{xxiv} Clara Snider to Workers of the Nonresistant Relief Organization, 16 December 1942. John Coffman letters, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo, Ontario.

^{xxv} Alice Koch. *Mennonite Cutting Room, 1967-1983* (Ontario: W.M.S.A, 1983): 17.

^{xxvi} *Dorcas Circle minutes*, 1918. (First Mennonite Church (Kitchener) collection, III-12.1, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo, Ontario).

^{xxvii} *Eventide Sewing circle minutes*. (Breslau Mennonite Church collection, III-10.1, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Waterloo, Ontario).

^{xxviii} Roth, 40-41.

The 'Bender Bible' comes home

by Virginia A. Hostetler

On May 12, some 125 people gathered at Conrad Grebel University College for an unusual homecoming celebration—for a Bible. This large, centuries-old book has a fascinating background, a part of the Ontario Amish Mennonite history.

The “Bender Bible” arrived in the wilderness of Upper Canada in 1832, with the Amish Mennonite immigrant family of Jacob and Magdalena Bender, who brought it from their home in central Germany. They and their children settled near what today is New Hamburg, Ont.

Published in Strasbourg, Alsace, in 1744, it is called a Froschauer Bible, named after Christoph Froschauer, the Swiss printer who produced the first complete edition of this translation in 1529. This translation was favoured by reformer Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich and by the early Anabaptists of Switzerland and southern Germany.

The Bender Bible is one of only seven known copies of the Froschauer Bible brought to Upper Canada by Amish Mennonites. It is unique in that it includes extensive, hand-written inscriptions that tell how Jacob Bender came to possess this Bible, where the Benders originated, when the family immigrated to North America, and marriage and birth information about that first generation. As a testament to his faith, Jacob also included a prayer of blessing for each child.

Jacob and Magdalena had eight surviving children, and the Bible was eventually passed on through the generations, as a family heirloom and reminder of their faith.

The Bible remained with Jacob's descendants until 1928, when Harold S. Bender, a prominent Mennonite historian and professor at Goshen College, in Indiana, U.S.A., received it from Noah J. Bender and took it to the Mennonite historical library there. There was no



Descendants of Ivan and Beatrice Bender pose with the Bender Bible, a family heirloom, and the passport of their ancestor Jacob Bender, who brought the Bible to Canada in 1832, along with his wife Magdalena and their children. Adults, left to right: Geoline Bender, Richard Bender, Grace Bender, Daniel Bender, Mary Ann Bender, Laurel Bender-Lloyd, Sarah Clemmer; children: Oliva Clemmer, Mason Clemmer, Benjamin Bender (Photo by D. Michael Hostetler)

written documentation at the time of its transfer, and the question as to whether the transfer was a loan or a permanent donation to that library arose from the start. The oral tradition of the Ontario Benders through the generations has maintained that it was loaned.

In 2017, conversations began between Mennonites in Ontario and the Mennonite Historical Library in Goshen to bring the Bible back to its first North American home. Thanks to the collaboration and co-operation of Laureen Harder-Gissing, archivist of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario and John D. Roth, director of the Mennonite Historical Library (jointly owned by Goshen College and the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary), an agreement was reached to return the Bender Bible to Ontario in May 2018, for an initial 10-year period.

At the homecoming event, Harder-Gissing and Catherine Schlegel gave historical background on the Bible and the Bender family.

Schlegel traced the family back to its early Anabaptist origins. Harder-Gissing evoked the sights, smells and sounds of the Bible's origins and its trip across the sea to a new land. “So this book is not just an object, it vibrates with layers of history and meaning and possibility,” said Harder Gissing. “How will you, this Bible's community, contribute to this ongoing story?”

Representatives of Ivan and Beatrice Bender family expressed their thanks, guests sang a hymn of gratitude, and were led in a prayer of thanksgiving for the faith heritage of this unique book.

After the official program, guests examined the Bible and Jacob's passport. They browsed through genealogy books and made connections with each other, identifying how they were related to their common ancestors, “Jecky and Lena.”

The Bender Bible is available for viewing at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Grebel, in Waterloo, Ont.

—With files from Fred Lichti.

Virginia A. Hostetler is executive editor at Canadian Mennonite.



A historic Froschauer Bible, printed in 1744, found its way to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, thanks to the efforts of archivist Laureen Harder-Gissing and historian Fred Lichti. Catherine Schlegel was also an important advocate in getting the Bible back to Ontario after it spent 90 years in an archive in the U.S. (Photo by D. Michael Hostetler)

The Story of an Old Book

By Barb Draper

Laureen Harder-Gissing, the archivist at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, took on the role of president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario (MHSO) in June 2017. Reflecting on her vision for MHSO at a subsequent board meeting, Laureen brought with her a very old book published in 1836 by Heinrich (or Henry William) Peterson. She commented that this 1836 Mennonite songbook, the *Gemeinschaftliche Liedersammlung* (community songbook) is believed to be the very first book ever published in Berlin (now Kitchener) and may well have been the first book published in “inland” Canada.

In the 1830s publication was not simple as all paper had to be imported. William Lyon Mackenzie, an early reformer and newspaper publisher in York (Toronto), wanted to build up publishing in Upper Canada by encouraging a local paper industry. A tariff on paper led to the construction of paper mills on the Don River and also at Ancaster. It is possible that the paper from this 1836 volume came from one of those mills.

Heinrich Peterson was born in Germany and learned his trade there as a boy. First in the United States and later in Ontario, he was both a printer and a lay pastor. He had been living in the Markham area, but came to Waterloo County in 1832 as an itinerant Lutheran minister. In Berlin, he almost immediately formed a close bond with Bishop Benjamin Eby and the two men worked together to put this early songbook into print.

Peterson imported his press from Pennsylvania by ox cart. But the press alone was not enough to start his printery. His biggest expense would have been the sets of typefaces, the little metal letters needed to arrange the text on the pages. He would also have had to employ a bookbinder and source the leather for the covers, as each book would have been sewn and bound by hand. To kick-start his business, he sold \$20 shares to those interested in having “a German paper and German books...

printed in this country.” Beginning in 1835 he issued the first German-language newspaper in Canada, the *Canada Museum*.

The songbook was edited by Benjamin Eby and he took hymns from two song collections used in the Franconia and Lancaster Conferences in Pennsylvania. “Old” Mennonite congregations used this book until at least 1902 when the English hymnal, *The Church and Sunday School Hymnal*, was published. The *Liedersammlung*, which has undergone various printings, is still being used by the horse-and-buggy Mennonites in Ontario.

Laureen commented that the 1836 volume looks small and unassuming, but still has an interesting story to tell about technology, community, faith, history and culture. Like this book, the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario may seem small and unassuming. “Yet look at all the things we’ve been able to do,” she reminded the board, reflecting

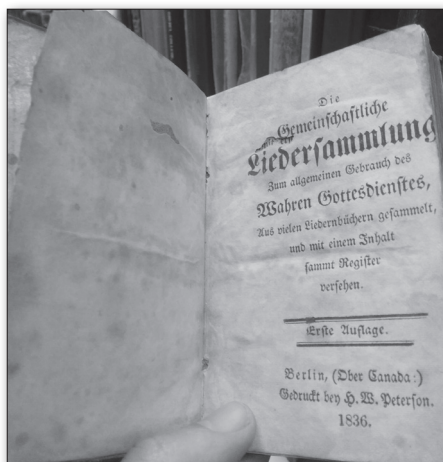
on all the events and trips and speakers as well as the books and newsletters that have been published and the on-going work at the Brubacher House. “Over time, we have told a lot of great stories, and we still have lots of great stories to tell,” she concluded.

Read more about the *Gemeinschaftliche Liedersammlung* in *Ontario Mennonite History*:

Lawrence Martin and Mark Diller Harder, “Sing it again: a brief survey of two centuries of Mennonite Church music in Ontario,” *Ontario Mennonite History* XVI (1), May 1998.

Barb Draper, “The effect of revivalism on worship in the (Old) Mennonite Church of Waterloo Region,” *Ontario Mennonite History* XVII (1), May 1999.

To read these articles online, go to <http://mhso.org/content/ontario-mennonite-history-periodical> and search for “*liedersammlung*.”



J. Winfield Fretz Publication Fund in Ontario Mennonite Studies Sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

Dr. J. Winfield Fretz was the first president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.
This fund is named in his honour.

The fund is available to any individual or charitable, church or community-based organization that requires financial support for the publication of research as a book, film or other form of media.

Projects should illuminate the experience of Mennonites in Ontario.

Normally up to \$2,000 is available per project. Applications are accepted twice yearly, May 1 and December 1.

More information: mhso.org/content/fretz-publication-fund

Acknowledging the work of Linda Huebert Hecht

Linda Huebert Hecht has been a long-time supporter of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. She began working on the newsletter committee in 1991 and by the following year she is listed as the chair, a role she carried for the next 25 years. Linda was a constant as editors came and went and as the newsletter changed its name from *Mennogespräch* to *Ontario Mennonite History* in 1993.

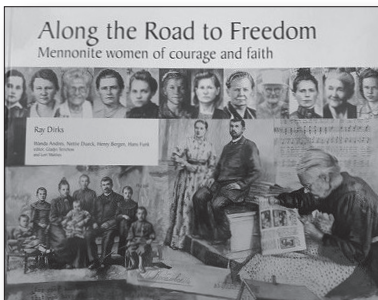
“As chair of the newsletter committee I learned much about local Mennonite history and the many Mennonite groups in this province,” said Linda. “It was a pleasure working with the different editors during the more than 20 years when I was chair, but my work was miniscule compared to theirs in putting the newsletter together.”



Linda also did a lot of work in the archives. In 1992 she began working on a photo database for photos from *Canadian Mennonite*. She worked full-time for nine months and then continued in 1994 when a grant paid for her to process some Mennonite Central Committee photos. In 1999 Linda began working on the Frank H. Epp collection, mostly on a part-time basis, organizing and cataloguing the material to make it more accessible for researchers. The collection takes up 27.4 metres of archival shelf space. She completed the project in 2013.

We appreciate Linda’s faithful and careful work in the archives and with the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. She served on the board of directors for many years, providing an important link with the Mennonite Brethren denomination. She has now retired from that role but continues to work on the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) committee for Ontario.

NEW BOOKS



Along the Road to Freedom: Mennonite Women of Courage and Faith.

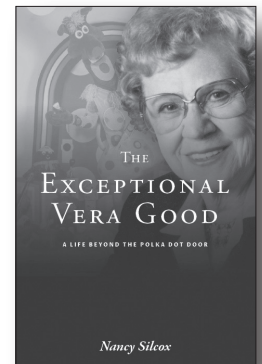
Ray Dirks. CMU Press and Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, 2017, 132 pages, full colour, hard cover.

This coffee-table book includes 26 full-colour prints of Ray Dirks’ paintings that made up an exhibition of the same name that has travelled across Canada. The collage paintings tell the story of individual women who persevered through many difficulties to settle their families in Canada. As well as the story of each of the featured women, Dirks gives an account of his journey with each painting and the sponsoring family.

The Exceptional Vera Good: A Life Beyond the Polka Dot Door.

Nancy Silcox. CMU Press, 2017, 264 pages.

Vera Good was born in 1915 and raised on a farm on Bearinger Road in what is now the city of Waterloo. She did not have the traditional life as a Mennonite wife and mother, choosing to attend high school when she was considerably older than her classmates. She worked as a teacher and spent a few years doing voluntary service in India. She went on to become a school inspector and worked at TV Ontario, initiating the Polka Dot Door program.



The Russian Mennonite Story: The Heritage Cruise Lectures.

Paul Toews with Aileen Friesen. Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies, Winnipeg, 2018.

For 16 years, Paul Toews, professor of history at Fresno Pacific University, interpreted Mennonite history for those participating in the Mennonite Heritage cruises to Ukraine. This coffee-table book, edited by Aileen Friesen, brings together his lectures and nearly 100 historic photographs to tell this story of prosperity, sorrow and rebirth.