

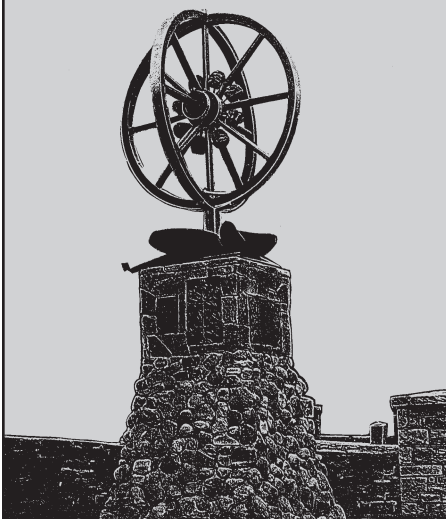
Ontario Mennonite History

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Amish Mennonites commemorate 200 years in Canada

By Fred Lichti

The Amish Bicentennial Committee, appointed by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, began meeting in March 2022 to plan one or more events to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the coming of the Amish Mennonites to Canada.

The first point of business was to decide which year to commemorate. In the early 1800s, an Amish family by the name of Troyer arrived in the Markham area with other Pennsylvania German immigrants, but there is no evidence they ever formed an Amish congregation. L. J. Burkholder lists Christian Troyer (1798-1883) as a Mennonite minister in Vaughan by the mid-19th century.

When the Sesquicentennial Committee (which included renowned Ontario Amish historians Orland Gingerich and Lorraine Roth) planned for the 150th anniversary of the Amish presence in Canada, they counted 150 years from the arrival of Christian Nafziger in 1822. Although the first Amish families didn't actually arrive until 1823, the bicentennial committee wanted to be in step with the 1972 commemoration and decided that 2022 would be the appropriate year to commemorate the Ontario Amish bicentennial.

Because of the pandemic, planning was done via Zoom. From a long list of brainstorming ideas, they settled on six priorities—heritage bus tours, hymn sings, the Indigenous story, an exhibit of artifacts and memorabilia, a thanksgiving service and opportunities to fundraise for Mennonite Central Committee's refugee and Indigenous Neighbours programs.

Hymn sings

The bicentennial celebrations in the fall of 2022 included two hymn sings, one held at Maple View Mennonite Church on Sept. 18 and the second two weeks later at East Zorra Mennonite Church. Both events were well attended

with 200 to 300 participating. These hymn sings were a cappella in hopes of appealing to a wide spectrum of Mennonite and Amish congregations, including those who do not use musical instruments in worship.

The early Anabaptist Swiss Brethren used the *Ausbund*, and Amish and Mennonites brought it to North America. Still used by the Old Order Amish, it is the oldest songbook in the world in continuous use. Mennonites and Amish Mennonites adopted more contemporary hymnbooks in the 19th and 20th centuries.

"*Das Lob Lied*," written by Leonard Clock, a Dutch Anabaptist leader in the 16th century, is a praise song with special significance for Amish worship. It is the second hymn sung in every Amish worship service, everywhere, which is why many old *Ausbunds* almost fall open to page 770. While many *Ausbund* songs focus on discipleship, suffering and the struggle of Christian faithfulness, "*Das Lob Lied*" is a hymn of praise, extolling God's love and goodness and invoking the Lord's blessing on the gathered community. The hymn includes a prayer for those who preach—that they be endowed with wisdom, truth and power to speak God's word—and a prayer for the congregation that they have hunger for God's word and the wisdom and grace to live righteously.

The *Ausbund* contains no musical notes and tunes are learned and passed down from one generation to the next. A song leader sings the opening syllable of each line, after which the congregation joins in. Singing is very slow, with each word broken into syllables with three or four notes per syllable. There are four verses, and each verse takes about five minutes to sing. Slight variations in the tune have evolved over time across the different geographic communities.

More than a century ago, most Ontario congregations of Amish Mennonite heritage gave up the

Ausbund for more contemporary songbooks and the traditional “slow tune” style of singing was forgotten. The Bicentennial Committee wanted to sing “*Das Lob Lied*” at the two hymn sings, and were fortunate to find Dale Steckly, a song leader in the Morningview Amish Mennonite Church, who served as “*Vorsinger*” at the hymn sings. He also met twice with a group of 25 singers so that a core group could carry the song at the hymn sings. The tune was difficult to learn, but Steckly was a capable teacher.

Reaction to “*Das Lob Lied*” varied. Although the German words and English translation were projected on the screen, many people found the singing of one verse a tiresome experience. One person commented, “I am so glad we have given up that style of music.” Others who had grown up in a congregation where “*Das Lob Lied*” was in every service, spoke of a deep visceral response to the slow, unison chant-like singing which took them back to their childhoods and gave them some sense of spiritual grounding.

The hymn sings were the most popular event of the bicentennial celebrations. Singing a cappella four-part harmony with a church full of eager singers was both nostalgic and soul nurturing for many. There were many calls to repeat the experience.

Bus tours and Indigenous acknowledgement

The bicentennial celebrations also included two heritage bus tours that began in Wilmot Township with settlement and Indigenous stories. One was called “Up the Nith,” a day-long bus tour that followed the northward expansion of the Amish Mennonite community into Wellesley and Mornington Townships, exploring both “change-minded” and “tradition-minded” Amish Mennonites along the way. After lunch at either Anna Mae’s or Schmidtsville restaurant, there were visits to an Amish parochial school, a material shop and a buggy wheel shop. The entire afternoon focused on the Old Order Amish history and culture.

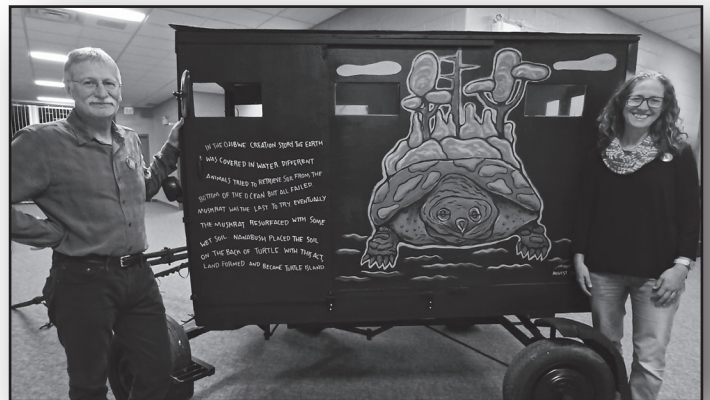
The other bus tour began in Wilmot Township and followed the 19th century westward expansion of the Amish community across the Nith River to South Easthope and East Zorra-Tavistock. There was an emphasis on influential leaders who provided strong leadership as this community navigated change and assimilation through the decades. The East Zorra congregation grew into five congregations. This half-day tour included lunch at Steinmann Mennonite Church and featured the traditional Sunday noon communal meal of bean soup, bread, apple butter, cheese and coffee/tea. This meal was served by the host family when worship services rotated from farm to farm.

From the outset, the bicentennial planning committee agreed that the celebrations needed to include the Indigenous story and how the arrival of the Amish impacted Indigenous people and their use of the land. As well as including the Indigenous story in the heritage bus tours, two other events focused on Indigenous concerns.

On Sept. 30, 2022, Canada’s National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, 120 people met at Steinmann Church to hear

David G. Neufeld speak about “What Stories Have We Not Been Telling?” and Rebecca Seiling, the MCC Indigenous Neighbours Engagement Associate, speak on “The Landed Buggy.” Both presentations helped the attendees learn more about the Indigenous story, differing attitudes toward land ownership and how European settlement affected the Indigenous people. The Landed Buggy, an Old Order Mennonite buggy that has been decorated and modified to reflect a web of connections between the land, Indigenous people and settlers, was present for people to see.

A few kilometres from the Steinmann Church, in a woodlot near the Nith River, is Crow Shield Lodge where an Indigenous Awareness Workshop was led by Clarence Cachagee on Oct. 1. To make the workshop more affordable, this event was subsidized. Participants in the workshop spoke about learning many things from an Indigenous perspective, with appreciation for the emphasis on finding reconciliation and a hopeful future.



David Neufeld and Rebecca Seiling spoke about the implications of Amish settlement on Indigenous territory using the “Landed Buggy” as an exhibit. (Fred Lichti photo)

Artifact exhibit

A special exhibit committee was appointed to put together a display of artifacts and memorabilia significant to the Amish Mennonite story in Ontario. What began as a simple display of early documents and books kept growing. Early furniture, fraktur art, quilts, fabric arts, tools, a Pennsylvania German language display and conscientious objector memorabilia were added to the exhibit and involved many donors. It seems that artifacts and antiques evoke storytelling and when news got out that we were bringing together such items, donors began calling to offer their artifacts and stories.

Lauren Harder-Gissing, archivist at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, brought a number of documents, including a 1744 Froschauer Bible brought to Ontario by Joseph Ruby, the first bishop of the East Zorra congregation.

For the first weekend in October, display tables covered the perimeter of the Steinmann Church gym with more than 200 artifacts and items from the Ontario Amish tradition. Each item was identified and dated along with other pertinent information. Hundreds of people came to see the exhibit, and many responded by sharing their own memories and experiences.

One of the most valuable artifacts was a “birth record” by Amish folk artist Barbara Ebersol and was discovered just in time for the exhibit. On Sept. 18, 2022, I preached at East Zorra using the bicentennial as my theme. Sharing about old books that had been salvaged from the attic of an 1855 house, prompted Connie Yantzi, a member of the congregation, to tell her family’s story of discovery.

Connie reported that her aunt had recently moved into a retirement home and while cleaning out her old house, family members found something which no one knew was there, nor did they know what it was. She held up a photo of a framed piece of fraktur with the name Catharina Brenneman, her birth date and the name of Barbara Ebersol. Through consulting David Luthy and his book, *Amish Folk Artist Barbara Ebersol*, the art piece at hand was confirmed to be an authentic “birth record” by Barbara Ebersol.

Born in Lancaster, Pa. in 1846, Barbara Ebersol had a disability and some physical limitations. However, she had a gift for art and went from home to home in the Amish community, “decorating” people’s special books—Ausbunds, prayer books, Bibles—with their names and birth dates. To her beautiful fraktur lettering, she added flowers, birds and decorated borders.

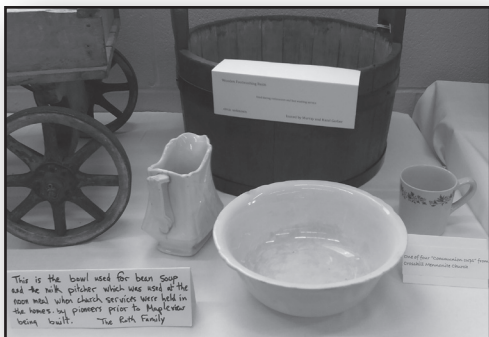
Barbara had relatives in Canada and occasionally visited her Jantzi cousins near Wellesley. David Luthy collected many

Ebersol art pieces for the Heritage Historical Library in Aylmer, including those painted for the Jantzi family. Now it appeared hitherto unknown Ebersol art had surfaced on a farm south of New Hamburg. In recent years, Barbara Ebersol’s artwork has become popular and increasingly valuable at auction sales in the Lancaster area. Through the kindness of the owner, the 1895 Brenneman birth record was on display at Steinmann Church for the Amish bicentennial weekend.

Giving thanks

A worship service of thanksgiving capped the bicentennial weekend. The service involved people across the spectrum of Mennonite and Amish Mennonite congregations. Kyle Gerber, recently ordained as a pastor from the Faith Mennonite Church near Wellesley, preached and the youth choir from Fair Haven Amish Mennonite Church from Milverton sang four songs. Ken Kuepfer, bishop of the Morningview Amish Mennonite Church near Newton dismissed the congregation with a benediction.

Due to a generous grant from the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario and good response from the businesses solicited for support, expenses for the celebrations were covered. Offerings taken at the hymn sings and thanksgiving service raised more than \$6,000 for Mennonite Central Committee.

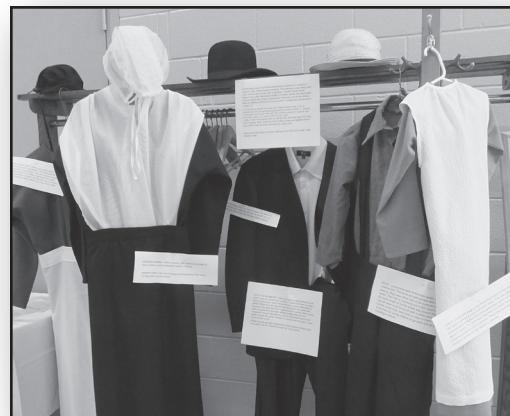


Pic 1: Items on display at the Amish Bicentennial included a wooden footwashing basin, a milk pitcher and bowl used by the Roth family for bean soup when they hosted worship services, and one of four communion cups used by Crosshill Mennonite Church (right). (B. Draper photo)

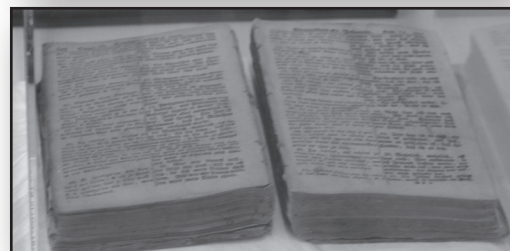


Pic 2: The most valuable item on display was this “birth record” made by Amish folk artist, Barbara Ebersol. (Fred Lichti photo)

Pic 3: The exhibit included examples and explanations of Amish dress.



Pic 4: On loan from the Mennonite Archives of Ontario was a parallel New Testament in German and French, brought to Ontario by Bishop Joseph Rudy.



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Mennonite Missions in Quebec

By Barb Draper

Included with the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario fall meeting was a book launch of *Menno's Descendants in Quebec: The Mission Activity of Four Anabaptist Groups 1956-2021* by Richard Lougheed. The author came from Montreal to talk about his book.

Although he did not talk much about himself, Richard Lougheed tells us in his book that he first got to know Mennonites when Robert and Lois Witmer came to Rouyn-Noranda in northern Quebec and a French Mennonite congregation began meeting there in the United Church where Richard was the pastor. After many conversations with Robert Witmer, Richard decided to study at the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana in 1989.

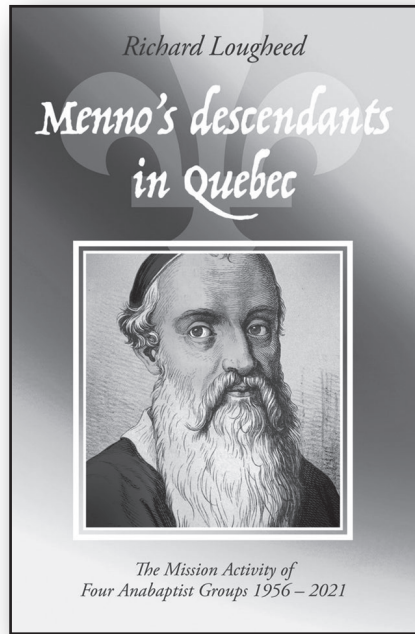
After moving back to Montreal with his family, Richard became a specialist in French Protestantism in Quebec and became very involved with Mennonites in Quebec. Since 2008 he has been teaching at the Mennonite Brethren seminary in Montreal, École de théologie évangélique du Québec. He was chair of the Conseil Mennonite du Québec, an organization of French congregations of Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

At the book launch, Richard said it has been a long project, ten years in the making, and studying Mennonite missions was part of his larger project of studying Protestants in the province. While there had been Protestants in the Montreal area 100 years before Mennonites arrived, they had dwindled considerably when the Mennonites began planting churches.

There were four groups who began Mennonite churches in Quebec: Mennonite Conference of Ontario; Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches; Brethren in Christ; and Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (often referred to as Holdeman). Each of these groups emphasized a different aspect of mission, said Richard.

The Holdemans were strongest on peace, but they combined evangelicalism with a dress code and limited education. After 30 years, they have virtually no converts, but they have a stable community of Holdeman people who have settled in Quebec, coming from Ontario and Manitoba.

The Brethren in Christ had American sponsorship and they ended their mission without real consultation with the missionaries living in Quebec. They have no churches remaining.



Richard Lougheed's new book about Mennonite Missions in Quebec.

The Mennonite Brethren were more entrepreneurial and had a lot of success. When a revolution happened in the Congo, missionaries there fled for safety. They were looking for an alternate place to use their French language skills and came to Quebec. In the 1980s the MBs had a lot of success with 80 percent of their members under 30 years of age, but in recent years membership has been declining.

Richard spent most of his time talking about the missionaries from Ontario. Tilman and Janet Martin and Harold and Pauline Reesor felt called and began language training in 1956. A few years earlier, J. B. Martin of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario was chatting with W. J. Klink, a Plymouth Brethren missionary in Lennoxville, Que., who encouraged sending Mennonite missionaries to Quebec.

Quebec was a very closed society when Tilman and Janet Martin settled in Montreal North and Harold and Pauline Reesor in Joliette. They did what they could, inviting people to worship in their homes and organizing boys clubs. Although they were virtually the only families, they worshipped in the French language. There were individuals and families who came, but often there were more English members than French and rarely did membership pass on to the second generation.

Finding pastoral replacements was always a challenge. The Joliette congregation was at its peak in 2007, but it closed in 2018 after 60 years. Montreal North had a shorter time span, closing in 1972 after 15 years. The Rawdon congregation opened in 1980 and lasted 31 years while Rouyn-Noranda opened in 1985 and lasted 16 years. None of these French churches were ever really self-sufficient financially except Joliette for a brief period of time.

Although the missionaries went to established French-speaking churches, it is the English language congregation that has thrived. The Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal was established in 1978 and continues a stable congregation today. There are some new French-speaking Mennonite congregations in Montreal, mostly made up of immigrants to Quebec.

"Quebec is a lab of post-Christendom," said Richard. While evangelism works well with ethnic groups, it is much more difficult with Quebecois. Richard concluded with the comment that the story of planting French-speaking Mennonite churches in Quebec is not a success story.

What I should have added

By Richard Lougheed

While driving back home to Montreal, Lucille Marr suggested to Richard Lougheed that he was too negative about the legacy of Mennonite missions and so he wrote the following:

When I presented my book on the Mennonite French mission to Quebec at the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario meeting, and aided by Lucille's hints, I feel that I was too negative. It is true that there was little permanent church establishment after the investment of many, and that the first missionaries, Tilman and Janet Martin and Harold and Pauline Reesor, felt like failures. It is also true that the Mennonite Brethren established more obvious accomplishments with more churches and a theological college.

However, I myself and quite a few others, including in the Mennonite Brethren church, are Anabaptist or even Christian because of the witness of the Martins, Reesors, Bob and Lois Witmer, David and Suzie Shantz, Mel and Leeta Horst and other Mennonites from Ontario. In my case, the soft-spoken wise counsel of the Witmers led me to joining the Mennonites.

The same kind of humble, evangelical, rooted, practical, peaceable, compassionate, centred-on-Jesus approach shown by all of these has attracted many to Christ and to the Mennonites. Some have moved on to other, more dynamic groups, others have only stayed in the Mennonites or Mennonite Brethren because of their witness.

The missionaries and their children fostered Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), prison work, victim-offender reconciliation, refugee care, camp ministry, vacation Bible schools and other youth ministries, the House of Friendship and the English Mennonite Fellowship. They all moved out of their zone of comfort to a very different and sometimes hostile culture and established their families in Quebec. They did not impose and rule over local ideas. They prayed, studied the Bible in French, visited, hosted, exerted great patience, spoke quietly and influenced towards discipleship. They were big on hospitality. They lived in a way that Jesus became more real and more central for those around. They were influencers, not charismatic personalities in general, accomplishing solid, invisible results which are only apparent to God. Creating disciples is less visible, but more efficacious in the long-term than enhancing church growth statistics.

So, from the Quebec perspective, thank you to Ontario for bringing MCC and encouraging these Mennonite church leaders to go, rather than to be your local leaders. Their history needs retelling in Ontario and in Quebec to promote what they wanted—to encourage others to go and make disciples.

Enduring witness

By Lucille Marr

Today (Oct. 16, 2022) was House of Friendship Sunday at the Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal. It was a beautiful service where we celebrated the 400-plus volunteers who keep the ministry of House of Friendship afloat as well as the administration and staff, few of whom are Mennonite. They serve hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people who benefit from the ministries at Maison de l'Amitié (MA, House of Friendship).

Luke Martin, recently retired and son of Tilman and Janet Martin, took part in the service, introducing the new director, a Quebecois man, and the fundraiser, a Quebecois woman, both of whom are eager to learn more about the Mennonites who still own our building. Another second-generation leader, my daughter, Dora-Marie Goulet (who was the first graduate from Conrad Grebel's peace and conflict studies program), organized the service and preached.

To be sure, this wasn't exactly what the Martins and Reesors had envisioned when they came to Quebec, but it is a powerful witness and manifestation of Mennonite presence in Quebec, continuing the work of those early pioneers.

I was touched by the service more deeply than I might have been, having just been at the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario meeting and hearing Richard's helpful presentation that clearly placed our work here in the context of the vision of those early Ontario missionaries.



*Harold and Pauline Reesor and Janet and Tilman Martin studied the French language in Longueuil in 1956-57.
(Tilman Martin photo)*

The Banking Bookseller: Abraham Peter Regier

By Callum Rempel

The Mennonite Archives of Ontario recently received a collection of documents, mementos, books and images relating to the extended family of Abraham Peter Regier. Providing an in-depth look into the lives of his family and their path from Chortitza, South Russia, to Virgil, Ontario, it also contains Abraham's opinions and personal ventures.

Abraham had a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of his community and stepped up to lead regardless of the situation. He was involved as a leader in the Mennonite community, emphasizing the importance of responsible Christian stewardship. For example, following his retirement from the Niagara Credit Union in 1965, Abraham engaged in a one-man charitable enterprise aimed at getting books about Mennonite culture and history into the hands of Mennonites. Between 1974 and 1982, he acted as an intermediary, receiving orders from customers and then conveying them to a bookstore which would take care of shipping. Abraham provided his services free of charge.

Abraham (1895–1955) was born in Chortitza, South Russia, to Peter Regier (1865–1920) and Katharina (Koop) Regier (1872–1920). From an early age Abraham excelled in his classes, completing primary school, attending Halbstadt College and partially completing a Mechanical Engineering degree at the Ekaterinoslav Mining Academy. This educational mindset, as well as valuing Christian stewardship, coincided with the beginning of Abraham's relationship with Margaretha Kroeger of the famous Kroeger clock family. They were married in 1920 and lived together for more than 60 years.

Unfortunately, due to the beckoning of military service, his time in school was cut short as he took up a position with the Russian Red Cross as a conscientious alternative to active duty. Following his eventual discharge, World War One began, and Abraham progressively held a greater role in the leadership of his community. He was elected secretary of the Chortitza Organization of Citizens of Dutch Origin, acting as a delegate to the OCDO assembly and elected to work within the Chortitza regional government.¹ He also worked as a factory foreman, working closely with labour unions. He played a significant role in the Mennonite mass migration from Chortitza to Canada, acting as an intermediary with authorities. Abraham's time in southern Ukraine established a leadership-oriented mindset that he would hold for the rest of his life.

Fleeing from the Soviet Union post-First World War, the Regier family eventually landed in Lymburn, Alberta in 1923, one of the first settler families in the area. Throughout his time in Alberta, Abraham served as a leader within his Russian Mennonite community, spearheading the construction and establishment of the local school, and being a founding member



of the local grain cooperative.² Abraham was also appointed a district man by the Mennonite Board of Colonization to ensure the rest of his group on the train paid their 700-dollar promissory dues to the railway, and served as a representative for Lymburn at the 1936 meeting of Mennonite District Representatives at Didsbury, Alberta.³

Abraham also managed and assembled a small lending library of 79 German-language books out of his home, 48 of which were acquired from Germany. Following their time in Alberta, the Regier family travelled to Ontario in spite of having few connections. They hoped for a richer future for their children in the form of better schools and a larger community of faith.⁴

Arriving in Ontario in 1943, the family settled in Virgil. The Regiers first rented and then purchased their own home and farm. For Abraham, life in Ontario began with doing manual labor then a job at the local fruit cooperative, eventually rising to a managerial position. Here he came to recognize a deficit within the financial services sector of his newfound home.

After taking a class on cooperation at the local Agricultural College, Abraham played a central role in the creation of the Niagara Credit Union, becoming its first general manager. His time at the Niagara Credit Union afforded him a long-term stable income while also providing his community with an essential service. Under his purview, the Niagara Credit Union grew to hold almost one million dollars in assets as of 1957.⁵ Since his retirement in 1965, the organization has become Meridian Credit Union, the second largest credit union in Canada with over \$28.8 billion in assets.

Abraham's book distribution efforts began in 1974, nine years into retirement, with the distribution of *Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia*, rapidly expanding to a catalogue of more than ten different English and German-language books. The most popular of these by far was *The Martyrs Mirror* written by Thieleman J. van Braght, selling 85 copies by early January of 1979. Because of this success, Abraham decided to write an advertisement in the Winnipeg-based German language newspaper *Der Bote* which provided a short story surrounding the book, a few testimonials by close friends, and a pricing scheme.⁶ Beyond this attempt at advertisement, book distribution took place within an unofficial system of written communications between himself, his buyers and four different bookstores, three in Winnipeg, and one on King Street in

Kitchener, Ontario. Additionally on a much smaller scale Abraham sold a couple copies of a book by B. H. Unruh (who had been his professor while at Halbstadt Kommerzschnule) through the intermediary of Unruh's daughter Liese Quiring Unruh.

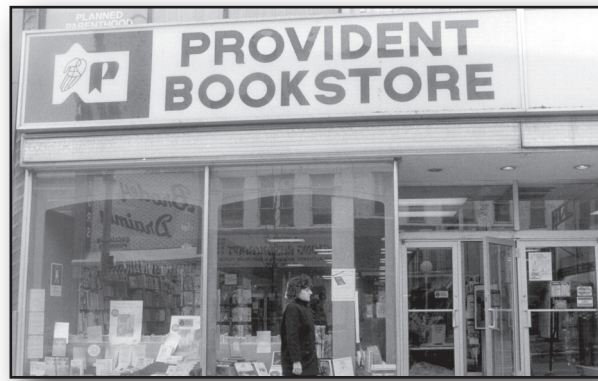
The books Abraham distributed consistently reflected the Mennonite experience and discussed Mennonite history.

He chose books such as *Miracles of Grace and Judgement* by Gerhard P. Schroeder, which provides a detailed account of the Makhno anarchy years, or *Open Doors: The History of the General Conference Mennonite Church* by Samuel Floyd Pannabecker. In a letter to Dale Wagler, manager of Provident bookstore in Kitchener, Abraham expressed the belief that Mennonite church leaders were failing to pass on their heritage and that more effort was needed.

Abraham built a strong relationship with Provident Bookstore, formerly known as Golden Rule Bookstore, on King Street in Kitchener. The Provident Bookstore chain was run by Mennonite Publishing House based in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania. By placing most book purchase orders with this company, he was afforded additional time to make payments and received 10-15 percent discounts on some book purchases. There were a series of written conversations between Abraham and Dale Wagler over the course of their search for new books to promote and sell.

News of Abraham's charitable book distribution spread via word of mouth in such a way that by 1975 he had an ongoing conversation with Gerhard Lohrenz, a prominent Canadian Mennonite educator, who inquired about his "bookstore" and was wondering if Abraham would be interested in selling two of his books. This exchange resulted in Abraham selling several dozen copies of *Heritage Remembered*.

Records of book sales and distribution ending in 1982, show he succeeded in selling hundreds of books relating to Mennonite history and culture. With upwards of 120 copies of



The Martyrs Mirror sold alone, he aided in the book's moderate resurgence in popularity. Abraham's books spread across North America and reached as far as Ghana and Papua New Guinea.

Over the course of his life Abraham served in a wide variety of community service-oriented positions. He served as an employee of the Niagara Township Fruit Cooperative, the head and partial founder of the Niagara Township Credit Union, an adult Sunday school teacher, the chair of the Niagara Mennonite Church Council, a member of the finance committee of the Mennonite General Conference, and a member of the board of Silver Lake Mennonite Camp.

One of the largest subsections of the Regier fonds have been Abraham's thoughts on theology and Christian stewardship. These musings are best shown in a speech made to the Delegates and Congregations of the United Mennonite Churches of Ontario in 1971, where he expressed his perception that the Mennonite church and its members had been failing in their duty of Christian charity.⁷ This perception of lacklustre Christian stewardship likely contributed to Abraham's tendency to take positions of leadership to ensure that things were done properly.

Abraham also spent a significant period studying and copying verses of biblical scripture and religious poetry. His religious scholarship show he was deeply concerned with the conception and interpretation of God.

Abraham spent his final years taking a modicum of rest at the Vineland United Mennonite Home from 1984 onwards, dedicating his time to his family. His wife died in 1988, while Abraham lived until 1995, the year of his 100th birthday. The decision to spend the middle years of his retirement giving back to his community by selling and distributing books for no personal gain is consistent with the values he espoused throughout his life. There is always a way to make a difference, and his example would serve well to be remembered.

¹ Abraham Peter Regier, "Personal Responsibilities With Various 'Organizations' In The Ukraine 1920-23," ed. Henry Abraham Regier, trans. David Regier, 1989, 1-2, Abraham and Margarethe Regier Fonds, Hist.Mss.1.275.2 /6, Mennonite Archives of Ontario. Hereafter MAO.

² Abraham Peter Regier and Norm Wilson, "Profile of a Pioneer," n.d., 3-4, Abraham and Margarethe Regier Fonds, Hist.Mss.1.275.2 /6, MAO, accessed August 14, 2022.

³ Abraham Peter Regier, "Report of the Lymburn District for the Meeting of Mennonite Representatives at Didsbury, Alberta, 23 and 24 July, 1936."

⁴ Abraham Peter Regier, "Once And Now," December 10, 1977, 7, Abraham and Margarethe Regier Fonds, Hist.Mss.1.275.2 /24, MAO.

⁵ Abraham Peter Regier, "Statistical Report Niagara Township Credit Union Limited (since Incept.)," 1957, Abraham and Margarethe Regier Fonds, Hist.Mss.1.275.2 /18, MAO.

⁶ Abraham Peter Regier, "Ein Angebot Der martyrspiegel," *Der Bote*, January 7, 1997.

⁷ Abraham Peter Regier, "To the Delegates and Congregations of the United Mennonite Churches of Ontario," November 21, 1971, Abraham and Margarethe Regier Fonds, Hist.Mss.1.275.2 /14, MAO.

Bechtel Lecture explains origins of Pennsylvania Dutch

By Barb Draper

Mark Loudon, a fluent speaker of Pennsylvania Dutch who teaches Germanic linguistics at the University Wisconsin-Madison, presented the 2022-23 Bechtel Lecture in Anabaptist-Mennonite Studies at Conrad Grebel University College on Oct. 20, 2022. A member of the Milwaukee Mennonite Church, he is recognized as the foremost academic on the Pennsylvania Dutch language and serves as an interpreter and cultural mediator for Amish and Old Order Mennonites in legal and health care systems.

Loudon opened his remarks with the comment that this lecture comes as a response to a question from Fred Lichti who asked why his ancestors, who came to Ontario directly from Alsace, spoke a German language that is very similar to that spoken by Mennonites who settled in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. After all, the Mennonites of K-W came to Ontario from Pennsylvania where they had lived for about a hundred years. The Amish of Wilmot Township were a community separate from the K-W Mennonites, so why would their languages be so similar?

The Thirty Years War, which ended in 1648, was very destructive for an area along the Rhine River in Germany called the Palatinate (*Pfalz* in German). Many Anabaptists, fleeing persecution in Switzerland, settled there on both the west and east sides of the Rhine River. There they picked up Palatine German, the language from which Pennsylvania Dutch is descended. This is a language still spoken by the Amish and Old Order Mennonites of Waterloo Region and counties to the west and north such as Perth and Wellington.

Palatine German is one of many German dialects that are divided along the Speyer Line. South of the line, words like *Pferd* (horse), *Apfel* (apple) and *Kopf* (head) are pronounced with a simple “p” without the “pf” sound. In Pennsylvania Dutch, “apple” and “head” are pronounced “Appel” and “Kopp.” Palatine German is a west-central dialect with longer, broader vowels than many other German dialects.

When Anabaptists moved to the Palatinate, they soon began speaking Palatine German instead of Swiss German. There is something called the “founder principle” explaining that the language of a community is determined by the people who



Mark Loudon is an expert on the origins of the Pennsylvania Dutch language.

were there first. Later arrivals assimilate and adopt the language used locally. Anabaptists moved to southern Germany from a variety of places, but within two generations they were all speaking Palatine German.

The one Swiss way of speaking that has endured is the use of “li” as a diminutive. Loudon used the example of “Muesli” (a breakfast cereal) which comes from a Swiss word meaning “little mush.” Pennsylvania Dutch regularly uses “li” at the ends of words to form a diminutive meaning “little.” Loudon’s examples were calf (*hompli*), young boy (*bouvli*) and young girl (*maedli*).

Using his expertise as a linguist, Loudon also explained that short vowels can be pronounced with the tongue higher or lower in the mouth. The short “i” has the tongue high, short “e” is middle and short “a” is lower.

Pennsylvania Dutch tends to pronounce vowels with the tongue lower, giving more of the “ah” sound.

When Anabaptists moved to Alsace, they were virtual “speech islands” because many of their surrounding neighbours spoke French. Speech islands tend to preserve traditional ways of speaking. This would help explain why the Amish of Wilmot, many of whom came from Alsace, speak a slightly more traditional version of Palatine German than the Mennonites of the former Waterloo or Woolwich Townships.

While Pennsylvania Dutch has borrowed many English words, that doesn’t change the grammar, said Loudon. Although there can be intonations that remind people of other German dialects, such as that found in Swabia, Loudon was definite that the language spoken by the Amish and Old Order Mennonites of North America is a form of Palatine German.

Although the language is called Pennsylvania “Dutch,” it has no connection to the Netherlands. “Dutch” is an English corruption of the German word for “German” (*Deutsch*). In Pennsylvania Dutch, the language is pronounced “Deutsch” with a long “i” sound.