

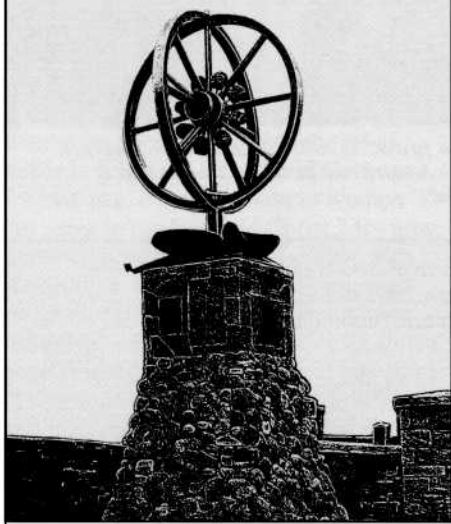
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A Brief Survey of Organized Relief in Ontario:

The Non-Resistant Relief Organization, the Sewing Circles
and the Mennonite Central Committee, 1917-1963

by Lucille Marr

In *Up from the Rubble*, Peter and Elfrieda Dyck describe their experiences serving World War II refugees in Britain, Holland and Germany. Peter tells of being in a Dutch port one day with a Red Cross worker. As the two men watched an MCC shipment being unloaded, the Red Cross worker commented that half of the people in the United States and Canada must be Mennonite. Why did he come to this conclusion? Half of the relief goods coming into Holland were from MCC.¹ In *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women*, Lorraine Roth observes that those shipments largely represented women's work. Women, including Ontario women, were the ones primarily responsible for collecting, sewing, and processing the clothing and bedding that Peter Dyck and the Red Cross worker saw unloaded in that Dutch port.

Relief is central to our understandings of our mission as Mennonites. Most of us have taken part in relief drives, and many of us have been involved with MCC relief sales. Today, when we think relief, we think MCC. But in Ontario, inter-Mennonite relief efforts pre-date MCC. Several Ontario Mennonites established the Non-Resistant Relief Organization in 1917, as a gesture of goodwill to a society that had extended to them conscientious objection privileges during the first world war. By this point, Sewing Circles in several Ontario communities had already been providing relief for needy children in Toronto for at least a decade.

In a recent issue of *Conrad Grebel Review*, historians John A. Lapp and Wilbert R. Shenk commented on Mennonite and Brethren in Christ history. In their words, "a group's identity is shaped by how it understands its past." Indeed, "Biblical faith has always been nurtured by 'remembering'."² This insight applies to the history of organized relief in Ontario. Our faith, and our identity as a people, are nurtured as we remember the men and women who established the agencies that have provided the foundations for this service to humanity.

As I have been researching the history of Mennonite Central Committee (Ontario), over the past several years, I have been impressed by the leadership the NRRO played in the early relief efforts. I have also been struck by what women were doing while men were



Noah Bearinger

planning the NRRO and negotiating conscientious objection privileges in Ottawa. I would like to look at relief work in Ontario briefly from the perspective of these three organizations in three time periods: the beginnings of the NRRO and the Sewing Circles during World War I; World War II relief; Ontario's support of the MCC Canadian office established during World War II.

Relief during World War I and afterwards

The Non-resistant Relief Organization and the Sewing Circles had existed for several years before Mennonites south of the border established the Mennonite Central Committee. MCC would not be established until 1920, three years after Ontario Mennonites had begun to discuss what they could do to show that despite their non-resistant stance, they supported their country. Noah Bearinger, a young man from the Elmira Mennonite Church, raised the issue when he was called up to serve. He shared his conflict around the problem of how he and other Mennonites could justify avoiding suffering, when their neighbours were required to make great sacrifices.

Would a "memorial gift for war relief" be an appropriate expression of goodwill, he wondered? Several groups in the Markham area responded positively to his suggestion. L.J. Burkholder of the (Old) Mennonites, D.W. Heise of the Brethren in Christ, and Thomas Reesor of the Old

Order Mennonites supported Bearer. For the first time since the splits of the previous centuries, these groups began to work together. By the end of the war, they would raise \$80,000 through their Non-Resistant Relief Organization.³ When we think of MCC today, it is important to remember these early Ontario foundations.

If the memory of the NRRO has faded, we know even less of the Sewing Circles' contributions. But it is important to remember that by 1917, when the NRRO was formed, the Sewing Circle movement was well-established in Ontario. Mary Burkhardt, president of the binational Women's Missionary Association had helped the Markham women organize a Sewing Circle during the winter of 1917. I doubt whether this was a coincidence.⁴



Women from the surrounding churches prepare clothing at the MCC offices for shipment overseas.

At the "Engendering the Past: Women and Men in Mennonite History" conference,⁵ Katie Funk Wiebe suggested that the family has played a significant part in the development of church structures and agencies. We do not know what conversations took place in Markham homes, as wives were establishing their circles, and husbands were debating how they might best contribute to Canadian society. But I have a hunch that the two developments were related.

As the NRRO collected funds, the Sewing Circles contributed material aid. L.J. Burkholder affirmed the Sewing Circles' ministry in his *A Brief History*

of the Mennonites in Ontario published in 1935. His praise of their work emphasizes its significance:

"[I]n addition to the usual work of making garments, quilts, etc., visits are frequently made to the sick, nursing is done where necessary, help is given to bereaved families, food is taken to the hungry, and other tasks that willing hands may do are performed."⁶

The NRRO's decision to assist Russian Mennonites to immigrate to Canada just after the war provides a case in point. Since the Swiss Mennonites were more integrated and had more clout with the government, Samuel Coffman responded positively to the call to the NRRO for support from the Mennonites in western Canada. With Coffman's nudging, local Ontario people backed the effort.⁷ For instance, when the train would stop in Waterloo County en route to Manitoba, many families opened their homes to the new immigrants, with women providing the necessary hospitality. Many, like Salina Shirk Shantz, provided beds and extended their tables to welcome their Russian cousins in the faith. Women also offered their support through their Sewing Circles.

In 1921, the Ontario Branch donated \$1812.30 worth of clothing to Russia and Turkey - a substantial sum for the time.⁸

World War II Relief

Relief grew to large proportions during World War II, beginning with MCC's program established in Britain in October 1940. The NRRO pledged its support to MCC's relief efforts, but the Ontario organization was also committed to working with the newly established Conference of Historic Peace Churches, in negotiating

conscientious objection privileges with the Canadian government.⁹ It was left to the Sewing Circles to respond to the urgent call for relief.

Although not directly threatened by conscription, Mennonite women were also committed to the doctrine of non-resistance. But unlike the men, they were able to respond to the nation's call for help, without violating their consciences. By sewing for relief, they could demonstrate their convictions.¹⁰ In early October 1939, three weeks after the King government had declared its support for Britain's war, the Sewing Circles approached the NRRO for advice on where they might obtain fabric wholesale. The NRRO was aging, and the executive was preoccupied with government negotiations. A year later, the Sewing Circles were still waiting to hear back. President Martha Bechtel finally took matters in her own hands, and wrote to Samuel Coffman: "Since I have not heard from your committee, I am taking this opportunity to let you know that the Women's Relief Committee intends to meet this coming week."

The Sewing Circles' decision to sew for the Red Cross created quite a stir, for despite the other issues on their minds, the NRRO had committed their support to MCC. Further, Coffman's son John had gone to serve as a relief worker in Britain, and was reminding his father of the need there. Upon Coffman's request, Bechtel



John E. Coffman, first MCC worker in London, England fits a young girl with a donated coat during the London Blitz of World War II, 1941.

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Menno C. Cressman (right) head of the Non-Resistant Relief Organization speaks to Clara (Snyder) Nafziger (back to camera) in the basement of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario. Mrs. Aaron Weber (left) helps with the blankets.

agreed to attempt to persuade women in the NRRO constituency to support Mennonite relief work. Replies to some of the letters she wrote to local circles show that women found it convenient to sew for the Red Cross. The secular organization supplied seamstresses fabric wholesale, and shipped the finished products overseas. If Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women would choose to sew for the NRRO, they would need to find their own sources of material, and their own means of transporting the clothing to Britain.

Despite these concerns, Bechtel was successful in persuading women in the local circles to support MCC. Despite ill health, she also volunteered to serve on an NRRO shipping committee.¹¹ Within the year, Ontario circles provided 13 bales and 17 cartons of material aid. This included 1,058 comforters, quilts and blankets, along with children's and women's clothing, layettes and soap. Between 1939 and 1942, the Sewing Circles provided forty per cent of the NRRO's \$60,000 worth of material aid.

Finally, the Circles' purchase of a cutting machine in 1942 would signal their commitment to MCC's relief program, in a concrete way. At their 25th anniversary meeting earlier that spring, their guest speakers stressed the relief needs in England. Mrs. David Coffman, for instance, called on Ontario women "to serve in the Name of Christ." By now, Ontario constituents were familiar with the motto John Coffman had suggested go on all MCC material aid,¹² and must have listened closely when Mrs. Coffman posed the following theological question: "In view of the debt of human gratitude and the debt of eternal love - how much have we done - why have we not done more? Can we see Christ standing before us?" The following month, the Sewing

Circles bought their cutting machine and hired Barbara Eby to cut cloth on a piece work basis at 2c per garment. This provided local circles with pre-cut clothing to sew up. A few months later Ida Snyder took over, and would eventually hand the responsibility over to her daughter, Alice Snyder. The NRRO would be a major financial supporter of the enterprise.

Enter MCC on the Ontario Scene

Early in 1944, Orie Miller approached the

NRRO on the behalf of MCC about establishing a Canadian office in Ontario. At first some were a little skeptical. Samuel Coffman, for instance, had to assure other members of the executive that MCC would not interfere with their work; MCC simply needed a Canadian office to facilitate its relief efforts in England. The NRRO soon welcomed MCC's initiative, and, as before, the Sewing Circles supported the project, providing the bulk of the material aid.

After a brief flirtation with possibilities in Toronto, MCC wisely accepted C.F. Derstine's proposal. The dynamic and charismatic pastor at Kitchener's First Mennonite suggested that MCC rent space from Dr. J. Hett at 223 King St. East. The location was close to Kitchener's First Mennonite where the NRRO had set up its shipping office.¹³ For all 3 parties - the NRRO, the Sewing Circles, and the MCC - this would prove to be an ideal arrangement.

The first thing MCC did was to open a clothing centre similar to the one in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. They circulated their monthly Women's Activities Newsletter, and sent speakers to itinerate in Ontario, informing local congregations of relief needs. As the title of the newsletter suggests, the success of the enterprise was dependent on women volunteers in the local congregations. Strategically, MCC invited the Ontario Sewing Circles' president Clara Snider to supervise the new Clothing Depot. Snider's acceptance of MCC's proposal, and the NRRO's encouragement of the Sewing Circles to use MCC

space for their shipping centre, gave the American organization its link with the Ontario constituency. All of the churches, from the (Old) Mennonites to the more conservative Waterloo Markham and Amish, and from the Russian Mennonite immigrants to the Brethren in Christ, promoted the new office.

While MCC was developing in Ontario, the Conference of Historic Peace Churches became a strong force. The CHPC is not the focus of this article, but it is important to note that the NRRO officially merged with that body, in 1948. The aging NRRO executive sometimes felt their organization came under the CHPC and the MCC's shadow, but the NRRO did continue to be the primary agency promoting relief work in the province. The executive, especially Samuel Coffman, played a key role in garnering support for MCC. The NRRO also supported the Cutting Room in its mission. For instance, the organization rented the Cutting Room space at the rear of the Mennonite-run Golden Rule Book Store building, where it was conveniently located next to the MCC packing rooms. And the men lent the Cutting Room money to stock fabric: \$200 in 1946, \$1000 in 1947, \$1500 in 1948, and finally, a \$2000 capital advance in 1953.

The three organizations would continue to run separately, but they were inextricably interconnected. The MCC needed the NRRO and the Sewing Circle's support to succeed in Ontario. The Sewing Circles needed the NRRO's financial aid. And the NRRO needed the women's material contributions to complement their funding drives.

When the need for material aid declined post-war, MCC's scope broadened. But the NRRO and the Sewing Circles continued to provide for relief needs. By 1963, the MCC facilities had



Non-Resistant Relief Organization staff in the 1940s who worked in the basement of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario. Clara (Snyder) Nafziger (left) and Cora Cressman (right) did material aid work. Marguerite Rempel (center) did office work.



Groundbreaking for MCC Center (from left to right): C.L. Martin, contractor; Charles Kramer, Elven Shantz, T. Isaac, J.B. Martin, Harvey Taves, building committee members; Fred Nighswander, chairman; E.J. Swalm; Mrs. J.B. Martin, WMSA chair; Mrs. L. Schmitt, cutting room manager; Alice Snyder, MCC office secretary; Harry Harms, depot shipper; and Mrs. Gladys Cressman, MCC depot worker.

become inadequate, and the NRRO initiated a building program. The NRRO rounded up volunteers from the constituency to do all of the labour for the project, and helped MCC raise the capital required. When MCC (Ontario) was formed the following year, the NRRO became a section of the new organization.

The WMSA Cutting Room would remain independent, but it continued to be an important supporter of MCC. By the mid-fifties the Cutting Room had become financially stable. Much to their benefactors' surprise, the women had paid back their loans to the NRRO in 1958. The Cutting Room rented its own space in the new building at 50 Kent St., even lending MCC and the NRRO \$2000 for the building project.

Conclusion

The NRRO has been the driving force behind relief work in Ontario. The organization has focused on informing the constituency of the needs, and raising funds, from its beginnings in 1917. Meanwhile, women have showed their commitment to non-resistance by contributing the work of their hands. Over the years, the Sewing Circles have provided the majority of the material aid.

Letters of thanks highlight how significant these concrete contributions were to the war refugees. The Secretary of the Federation of Women Students in the Dutch city of Leyden, for instance, wrote to the NRRO in January 1945: "When the load of clothes reached our club and we started to unpack the cases, we were very much moved by all those beautiful children's garments, which had obviously

been made with so much care." A story recounted by Harold Bender at the 1948 CHPC annual meeting again emphasizes the love the refugees perceived. He told of an eight-year-old girl who had exclaimed to her teacher, "the daughter of Jesus was here."

This history reminds us of the important work MCC is doing still today in hurting parts of the world. These stories remind us also of the significant role that the NRRO and the Ontario Sewing Circles have played in MCC relief overseas. Returning for a moment to Lapp's and Shenk's comments on Mennonite history, I'd like to emphasize that a group's identity is shaped by how it understands its past. When we think relief, we tend to think MCC. For a truer, more inclusive identity, we must look back to MCC's forerunner in Ontario, the NRRO, and we must also celebrate the contributions of the Sewing Circles.

SOURCES:

Interviews with Eddie Bearinger and Lorna Bergey by the author; Interview with Dorothy Swartzentruber Sauder by Linda Huebert Hecht.

WMSA files, NRRO files and CHPC files, Mennonite Historical Archives of Ontario.

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- 2 *Conrad Grebel Review* (winter/spring 1997), 1.

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- 4 Lorraine Roth, *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women* (Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1992), 40-42.
- 5 This conference took place October 16-17, 1998 at University of Winnipeg.
- 6 I would like to thank Lorna Bergey for pointing me to L.J. Burkholder's succinct summary of the history of the Sewing Circles in *A Brief History of the Mennonites in Ontario* (Mennonite Conference of Ontario, 1935); reprinted by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1986, 170-72.
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Three York County Leaders of the N.R.R.O.

by Paul H. Burkholder

I have been asked to give a very brief reflection on the lives of three local men who played a very significant role in the early formative years of the Non Resistant Relief Organization (NRRO). They are D.W. Hiese, Thomas Reesor and L.J. Burkholder.

David Witmer Hiese

I will begin with bro. Hiese, who lived from 1860-1935. David Witmer Hiese was born on one of the old Hiese homesteads on the fourth concession of Markham (now Woodbine Ave.). He was a very gifted young man with a wide variety of interests. Throughout his life he was a carpenter/builder, woodworker and bee-keeper. He became the postmaster and storekeeper in the hamlet of Bethesda. At one stage of his life he served as the local Justice of the Peace. He married Susannah Shefer, and they had one daughter, Buelah. The turning point in his life came when he was converted to faith in Christ at the age of forty. "D.W." as he was known, was soon ordained to the ministry in the Brethren in Christ church, and became active and useful in many areas. He was a fluent speaker, very persuasive! During discussions and debates he would listen attentively, and when others had given their opinions and suggestions, "D.W." would form a response or rebuttal, that was so rational and sound that there was nothing left to be said, and the matter was concluded. He served on the Foreign Mission Board of the B.I.C. denomination, and accompanied Bishop Hostetler on a visit to their mission field in Africa. "D.W." who had lost both his sense of

taste, and his sense of smell, made the comment on their return, that these deficiencies were probably an asset on that African trip. The Hieses were once visiting in the George Cober home and he commended sister Cober on her fine meal. She said, "You can neither smell nor taste, how do you know it is good?" "D.W." answered, "It looks very nice, and so it must be good!" How do we remember D.W. Hiese? Is it for the fine home he later built in New Gormley? Or the well crafted pulpit he made for the Hiese Hill B.I.C. church? Was it the respect he was accorded by the local community, as a long time director of the Stouffville and Bethesda Telephone Company? These are all very worthy accomplishments but probably his wise council and conciliatory skills have made the most telling impact in his church and community.

Thomas Reesor

The second individual I will talk about is Thomas Reesor (1867-1954). He was the only son of Bishop Christian Reesor and Esther Hoover. He was a young man at the time of the division of 1889, when his father remained as leader of the more conservative, Wisler branch of the Mennonite church in the Markham area. Thomas leaned toward a more conservative view on many matters, however he was astute, and possessed a keen sense of values. He was a good manager and a very successful farmer on lots 1 & 2, concession 5, Scarborough Twp. at the very northeast corner of what is now Metropolitan Toronto. In 1891, he married Adeline Grove, and they had five children: Martha; Esther, Mrs Aaron Weber; Elizabeth, Mrs. Allen Wideman; Annie, Mrs. Isaac Baker; and a son Amos. After his ordination in 1916, he was thrust into the dilemma of the conscientious objector issue, and he represented Mennonite young men, who were being conscripted into the military. He became active in negotiating with the authorities, and because of his strong support of the 'peace witness', he was the logical person to represent his church in the organization of NRRO. Thomas served as treasurer in the early years.

In the 1920's Thomas helped place a sizable colony of Mennonites who were fleeing the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, at a settlement in Northern Ontario, near Hearst. These people named their community Reesor, in his honour.



Thomas Reesor holding the Froschover Bible, brought from Europe to Pennsylvania by the Reesors in 1739. The photo was taken about 1930.

Thomas had a unique style of preaching. He would walk back and forth behind the pulpit as he spoke. He could read and speak easily in German, and it was only later in life that he changed to English preaching, as there were a few in their group who did not understand the German language. The influence of Thomas Reesor reached far beyond his immediate church and community, and today we recognize his important contribution to the newly formed NRRO.

Lewis Josephus Burkholder

The last person I will speak about this morning is my father, "L.J." Burkholder. Lewis Josephus Burkholder (1875-1949)



D.W. Hiese, taken about 1928, as a director of the Stouffville and Bethesda Telephone Co.



L.J. Burkholder and Lucetta High, wedding picture taken in 1904.

was the eldest son of Abraham G. Burkholder and Elizabeth Reesor, and was born at their home, lot 9, con.9 Markham Twp. He was converted under the preaching of John S. Coffman and ordained in 1896, by Bishop Elias Weber, to serve in the Mennonite churches in the Markham area. His interests were much broader than the local district, and he was active in all sectors of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario, until 1939. At that time he suffered a slight stroke, and over the next several years lost his eyesight completely. During his active ministry, "L.J." preached nearly 3000 sermons, was involved in young peoples 'Bible meetings', Bible conferences, mission outreach and countless committees. He traveled by foot, bicycle, rail, boat and car, across Ontario and western New York state in church work.

In 1904, "L.J." married Lucetta High (1870-1923) of Vineland, and they built a home on an acre, severed from his parents farm. They had one daughter, Luella, Mrs. Alvin Reesor. To make a living he worked as a carpenter, beekeeper and market gardener. In 1925 he married

Emma Meyer (1884-1944) and they had one son, Paul. "L.J." was a systematic and well organized person. A favourite slogan was, "Plan your work, and work your plan." He was very punctual, to him time was important. His sermons were never long. "If a preacher can not say it in 20 minutes, it isn't worth saying." To him time was very important. He was impatient with those who he felt were doing less than their best. He was an easy speaker, and an outgoing conversationalist, calm and cool headed. Once while shingling on a barn roof, he hit his thumb, and when he came down for noon lunch, the carpenter boss looked at the mashed thumb, amazed that he had heard no outburst. "If that had been me, you would have heard me half way across the township!"

What do we remember of L.J. Burkholder? He had a keen interest in genealogy and church history. MCO commissioned him to write the story of our denomination in this province. This involved a great amount of research,

interviews with older persons and visiting neglected cemeteries. When *A Brief History of the Mennonites in Ontario*, was finally published in 1935 it was in the middle of the Great Depression and \$3.50 was a major expenditure for many households. It was years after his death until they were all sold. Then they became a rare item, much sought after. Our society did a reprint in 1986.

I have given you very brief character sketches of three local men, who possessed the vision and the vigor to follow their beliefs, and support not only the young men who were conscientious objectors, but gave leadership in organizing the collection of money and goods, that became the Non Resistant Relief Organization. May God bless us as we follow their example!

Paul H. Burkholder lives in Markham, Ontario. This essay is based on a talk given to the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, June 12, 1999 at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church, Markham.

Nicholas Fehderau in Canada

My First Impressions and Experiences in my Adopted Land.

by Nicholas Fehderau

Translated by Herbert Enns

It was on the 17th of July, 1924, when we first set foot on Canadian soil. Although we had entered the harbour of Quebec City the night before, we were told to remain on board our ship "Minnedosa," and sleep the night in our cabins.

Next morning, early, we left the ship and were ushered into a huge immigration hall. The 1200 immigrants who gathered there created an impression of utter confusion as papers and passports of each immigrant were processed.

From Quebec two trains were to take us to Waterloo, Ontario. It took some time before the trains were ready for us and we were given instructions to board the train. Each train was made up of ordinary passenger cars with wooden seats and no upholstery, with overhead sleeping facilities. Although these were no luxurious passenger cars, nevertheless they were much more comfortable than the freight cars which we had occupied when we departed from Russia.

In the huge waiting room in Quebec, a number of men mingled among the immigrants, searching out certain families, who would go to Vineland and work there.

One of these men was identified as a Mr. Fretz from Vineland. Persons/families which he had chosen were identified by a green ribbon which was pinned on the immigrant's suitcoat. This selected group, destined for Vineland, were ushered into special passenger cars, and when the train arrived in Toronto, these cars were uncoupled and attached to another train bound for Vineland. These immigrants worked all summer long in the orchards of Vineland, picking strawberries, later cherries, peaches, plums, pears and other fruit. This Vineland group may have numbered about 200, and the rest of us were perhaps somewhat envious, since they were going to a designated location, and the promise of a job. The rest of us continued our journey, with a seemingly uncertain future. Ontario, Kitchener, Waterloo, for us they were strange names and expressions, and the people who receive us were also strange. On the map we had been able to identify the area as being located near the Great Lakes, but that was all. Just before I left Russia one of my teachers asked me, "Do you know where you are going?" "Well," I replied, "I was going to Canada, and once we got

to Canada I was going to Ontario," but that was all I knew. The teacher (Mr. Wiens) went to a large map of North America and pointed to a dot on the map where Kitchener-Waterloo was located and said, "That is where you are going."

As soon as we entered the large immigration hall in Quebec City we were offered treats to eat, and it was there that for the first time in my life I had a taste of bologna, and I was not impressed. On the train we received sandwiches, sausages, etc. It was enough to satisfy our hunger. In fact I had little hunger because of the uncertain future. The night on the train with its hard sleeping facilities did not give the refreshing sleep one expected. My courage for a bright future in Canada on that first day was seriously eroded. The area through which our train passed, consisted mainly of bush, lakes and rocks, hardly ever did we get a glimpse of a nice farm with level land.

As immigrants, we had received permission to emigrate to Canada on condition that we would settled on farms. Canada, we were informed, did not need industrial workers, Canada needed farmers, that was our future. Was it any wonder,

after traveling a whole day and seeing nothing but wilderness, rock and lakes, that some of the immigrants became a bit squeamish about their future, particularly those who had worked the rich soil of the Steppes of the Ukraine?

Even the next day the scenery from the railway window did not seem to improve greatly. Although here and there we did pass through cleared land and farm homes. And thus we arrived in the afternoon in Toronto, where we said good-bye to our friends who were traveling to Vineland, while our train hastened to its destination - Waterloo. As we came closer to Waterloo the faces of the immigrants seemed to brighten, for the train passed through hilly land with lovely fields of various crops and in between there were stands of bush. The average farm homes and barns seemed to indicate comfort and prosperity for its people. One thing which soon caught my eye, and which seemed to be present at every farm we passed, was a grey tower located beside the barn. Later I learned they were silos, and of their purpose on the farm.

The train entered a city, we were told it was the city of Kitchener. Switches were changed and our train passed across King Street of Waterloo to Erb Street. The brakes screeched and our train came to a stop. We had arrived at our destination, after a trip which had lasted 25 days. Of what was to take place in the next little while, we had not been prepared for; in fact I had not been able to picture for myself how and what our arrival would be like. When I, with my bag in hand, and my two sisters left the train an unforgettable scene unfolded before me. Along Erb Street, from where we had left the train, to the Erb Street Mennonite Church, on both sides of the sidewalk, throngs of people from the Twin Cities stood pressed together looking over the new arrivals as they passed by. From all over, Mennonites and non-Mennonites, had come to Waterloo to witness the arrival of the "Russian Mennonites." Newspaper articles and announcements from the pulpits of the churches had alerted the people of the immigrants' arrival on Saturday, July 19, 1924, on at least one train, perhaps more. This spectacle no one wanted to miss, and it had brought the people out in droves.

When I saw that mass of people and the many cars on the street, I wanted to hide. But there was no escape, and so we, my two sisters and I, made our way to the sidewalk for the walk up to Erb Street. The scene reminded me of running the gauntlet, the chain of immigrants burdened with heavy luggage and children



Curious onlookers watch as the new immigrants make their way from the Waterloo train station to Erb Street Mennonite Church.

around them, or in their arms, marching along the sidewalk to the church, proceeding slowly and with much effort. Some carried their babies in self-made and primitive cribs, which they had made before leaving Russia. The procession must have been a sorrowful sight to the bystanders, for what they saw was a tired and poor group of people with the clothes they wore having experienced civil war, revolution and a long journey.

With bowed head I walked the long way to the church, as I felt peoples' stares directed at me, and often I sensed scornful glances directed in our direction. Everything in life has an ending, and so too this spectacle ended, as we arrived at the Erb Street Mennonite Church.

The church yard was filled with people, mostly immigrants, but also Mennonite farmers. The yard resembled a nest of ants. We were ushered into the horsesheds, which at the time were set along the boundary line of the church property. In these sheds planks had been placed so we could sit on them. Then the ladies came and offered us sandwiches, coffee and cake. It was much appreciated by the immigrants, for it brought the weary travelers and hosts closer together, as well as refreshing the spirits. I can testify to the fact that the Mennonites in Ontario did a lot for the immigrants who arrived here poor and without any means of support. A committee looked after the placement of the arrivals, all of whom were assigned to farms. It is doubtful that anyone was placed in the city. Any farmer who was prepared to accept a family/person, went inside the church where he was given the name of a family, or person, which appeared on the list. For some farmers this presented a sacrifice to accept a

complete family, often with a number of small children. Although a set time of how long the immigrants were to stay with their hosts was not clear, some remained over the winter months.

The placement of the immigrants seemed to run smoothly, but before they left the church yard, our belongings which we had brought, but were too heavy to carry, were brought to the church yard in large wagons and unloaded. All went there and searched for what belonged to him. Once everything was found, the host loaded family and belongings onto his wagon and away they went to the farm at Elmira, St. Jacobs, New Hamburg and goodness knows where.

I noticed wagon after wagon leave the church yard, and I stood there and still had no place to go. Two well-dressed gentlemen came and spoke to me in German, they looked me over from top to bottom, and finally one said, "Wart mal hier, ich hol dir einen Kittel." ["Wait here, I'll get you a jacket."] I didn't know what the word "Kittel" meant, only later I discovered that it referred to a jacket. After a little while one of the gentlemen returned with a jacket and vest - the trousers very likely had been worn out and discarded. He told me to put them on, which I did, and they fitted quite well. I was dressed in a shirt which was not tucked into the trousers, but worn over top and held in place by a belt. This was the Russian custom. Some time later I put my hand into the jacket's pocket and I pulled out a small object wrapped in paper. I examined it and smelled it, it smelled like peppermint candy, but it was not candy, at least in Russia I had never seen such candy. Later I discovered that it was a piece of gum, which you put in your

mouth and chew, but you don't swallow it. Pretty soon I saw some of these "chewing" people and was amazed at how long they could chew on that little piece of gum. I put my piece in my mouth, but after only a short while all the taste was gone and I spit out the sticky object. This was my first encounter with the American chewing gum phenomenon. In Russia we had never seen or heard of it.

Time passed. Since our arrival several hours had gone by. It must have been after 6 o'clock, when a small, but strong looking man loitered by giving this immigrant a searching eye. His big hands were buried deep in his pockets as his searching eyes passed over me. The slaves in the southern United States slave market couldn't have had any better feelings as I did then, as this man examined me from head to foot. Finally, he approached me, and without introducing himself or anything, he asked, "Kanscht die Geil treibe?" ["Can you drive a team of horses?"] It sounded strange to me, because we called "Geil" "Pferde", but I calculated quickly and concluded that the name "Geil" must be the plural of "Gaul." "O yes," I assured him, "I have worked in the past with horses." On our estate in Russia we had over 100 horses of which a large number were purebred horses. Every year we would sell at least a dozen or so of these select horses to the Russia cavalry. When I was 10 years old my father bought me a pony, and all day I would either ride my pony or hitch him to a wagon and drive around. Therefore I could emphatically state that "I could drive horses."

But the next question from him was more difficult to answer, "Kanscht auch a Kuh melke?" ["Can you milk cows?"] O dear, during the last year at the agricultural school our class had received theoretical instruction on milking a cow. The teacher had explained and demonstrated how to milk, but none of us had ever milked a cow, and in addition, I left the school in May of 1924. My experience on milking, at best, would be of little value to the farmer, but I assured him I was convinced I could learn quickly. Apparently I had passed the test, for the farmer mumbled something, which meant I was to follow him. He took me to another farmer, who sat in a Ford car (1920), and said something in English to him. Later I discovered that the man in the car was a brother to the farmer who had interviewed me, that they lived in the vicinity of Kitchener, and that they were neighbours.

Irwin greeted me very friendly and said he would take me in his car to his brother's place. When we finally got into the car, ready to leave, it was already dark

and we turned from Erb Street onto King Street and drove through Waterloo, Kitchener, out of Kitchener in the direction of Preston. I marveled at all the lights on King Street and the beautifully lit stores. In the last six years we had not seen anything like this, our electricity system, which we had on our estate, we had already lost in 1919, and since then it was impossible to buy kerosene for our coal-oil lamps. The only oil we still had was sunflower oil, and even that was hard to get. We would pour a little bit of that oil into a saucer, place a strip of flannel on one end of it into the oil and light it, this had been the only source of light for the last several years - a very meager source of light, indeed. As I now drove along King Street with its many lights I was reminded of those spindly oil lamps - what a difference. I was also reminded of the time, in 1910, when our new large house was built in Halbstadt and the electrical system was built right into it, and how bright it was when the lights were turned on. Then the revolution came with its horrors, and it was in February, 1919, that the murderous bands ascended onto Halbstadt, and we fled from our house that night. In our haste we packed some things together and fled. All the lights had been turned on, and when we were all seated in the wagon my sister got up, went back into the house and turned all the lights off and locked the door. That was the last time we had electricity in Halbstadt. The station was also destroyed by the bandits.

And now I was again driving through electrically lit streets and enjoying its brilliance. But then the lights stopped, we were outside the city limits and we continued to drive in a south-easterly direction. We crossed a long bridge, and soon after we reached our destination. The car left the road and entered a dark lane, into an equally dark yard, and I could only distinguish the outline of a two-storey house and a large barn. A barking dog greeted us, but soon calmed down when he recognized familiar voices, only he studied me a bit more cautiously. During the drive the farmer had not spoken much, he had not asked how the journey had gone, or what were my first impressions of Canada. I had the impression these people were quite dull, and showed little interest in the welfare of others. When I remarked about the many cars on the road, and that he too as a farmer was driving a pretty good car, he countered with, "Wart zuscht, es nimmt net lang und du faerscht auch so a car." ["Just have a little patience and in a little while you too will be driving such a car."] That remark seemed overstated to me, I, a poor immigrant with a

travel debt of \$130.00, without proper clothes, or goods of any kind, and to drive my own car? Yes, there had been a time in 1913 when a big "Opel" car came onto our estate "Seljanoje." The salesman had taken the trouble of driving 50 miles to our estate with the intention of selling the car to Dad. I remember as a 9-year-old the bargaining that took place and dad bought this "wonder" for \$5,000.00. For a year-and-a-half we were able to enjoy this car, until World War I broke out, and the government came and confiscated the car for war purposes, and that was the end of our "Opel." Since that time I had not driven in a car, from 1914 - 1924 there were no cars in our region. And now, I should become the owner of a car, seemed unbelievable to me. Well, in truth, it took all of 27 years, until 1951, before I bought a new Dodge car. Family circumstances and the depression years did not permit me to buy a car earlier.

I was taken into the house, and soon a slim dark-haired woman welcomed me in a friendly manner. In her youth she may have been an attractive woman, but now, with her 6 children, her beauty had faded. In due time my host appeared and I was taken to my room. My room was located in an adjoining building, over the kitchen. It was an unfriendly, dark room with two double beds and a small table. Along the one wall there came through the floor a stovepipe, which provided warmth during the winter months.

In the room, on one bed, lay Bill, an older labourer, who had worked for this farmer for a number of years, and a younger Swiss man, who was departing at the end of the week. I was hired to replace him. The company into which I was put was not exactly according to my liking, but one had to make adjustments. For the night I shared the bed with the Swiss man. Despite war and revolution and famine I had always managed to live in a nice house in which I had my own room and my own bed. Well, yes, now I was a "proletarian" [plain labourer], and I could not make any demands. My hosts did not treat me as one of their kind, as a co-Mennonite and a brother in the faith, they treated me as a labourer from the street. During my time with them they only treated me as a labourer, never did they attempt to enter into any friendly dialogue.

I was already in bed in my room when a phone call from my sisters, in Breslau, awakened me. My sisters had discovered where and to whom I had gone, and now called me to the phone. It was very kind of my sisters' hosts to do this, for now I was able to exchange a few words with them.

I had a disturbing night. I am not used to sharing a bed and blanket with someone else. It was still dark (July) when a voice called up from downstairs, "Alright boys, time to get up." "What was that?" I wondered, I didn't understand a word. Later this became my morning greeting and soon I learned what it meant. The two hired men got up and went downstairs, and so I too got up and went into the barn. There, my host received me, telling me to feed the cattle. That was no difficult job, I also helped at cooling of the milk.

At 7:30 a.m. we returned to the house and a big breakfast was served - fried potatoes, summer sausage, and all kinds of other things. Never in my life had I eaten fried potatoes for breakfast, and that summer sausage, I had never tasted anything like that before. In time I got used to this menu, and really began to like the summer sausage. My host, before breakfast, conducted a brief devotional, reading of a scripture passage and ending with a short prayer. This was practiced every morning, regardless of how much work there was to do.

The first day on the farm was a Sunday, and after breakfast we went to church. My host asked me whether or not I too wanted to go to "Kerk" [church]. Since I was used to going to church, I went along. My first worship service in a Mennonite Church in Canada left unforgettable impressions, I remember exactly what happened, even though I could not understand a word. I was surprised when I saw my host step into the pulpit and preach the sermon. I didn't know he was a minister, and I would never have guessed he was one by his appearance and behaviour. His brother, who lived across the road was a friendly and affable man, and quite often he and I would have a discussion, whereas my host never bothered to talk to me. To him I was the hired man on the farm.

My host was a hard worker, and in addition he had to prepare a sermon for Sunday. I often saw him on Saturday evenings with his Bible and books in the dining room, studying. At times, while he was studying, he would fall asleep, and when I would walk through the room in order to get to my room, he would wake up with a start. I can't imagine he was able to offer the congregation much spiritual food. Only once, on my first Sunday in Canada, was I in his church, after that I was offered opportunities to worship elsewhere.

Every morning we rose before 6 o'clock. About 24 cows had to be milked and fed, as well as the horses. At the beginning I helped with the feeding. The milking was done electrically, and that the host performed himself and his 17-year-old

son. However all the cows had to be milked dry, and that was done by the hired man and some times his wife assisted in this. The milk had to be delivered to the "Creamery" by 8 o'clock, or, sometimes it was delivered to the Freeport Sanatorium. The son usually delivered the milk immediately after breakfast. My host supplied all the milk needed at the Sanatorium.

After a few days my host told me that I was to begin milking, since my predecessor had done it before. So, one morning I sat down by the cow and began to milk, the host had previous to that given me a brief demonstration. Even as I prepared to milk the cow, it looked around and seemed skeptical of the person trying to milk her. Well, I had learned it in school, to first press the forefinger, and then the next, and so on, and then the milk would come out. However it is more easily said than done. My first attempt failed, the milk did not come. It seemed the cow was holding the milk back. And, in addition the cow became agitated, and I tried to calm her. The second effort seemed somewhat better, and the third more so, the milk flowed almost always into the pail, sometimes I missed. I thought I was beginning to get along quite well, and was satisfied with my progress. But then something happened for which I was not prepared. The cow suddenly got tired of the whole thing and in a flash lifted her hind leg and with one "schwups" the leg was in the pail where the milk was. Now, what does one do to extract a cow's leg from a pail? What happened next can be compared to an explosion. I never thought a cow could react so quickly. In a split second the cow lifted the leg and tossed the pail against the wall. I stood there helpless, not knowing what to do. When I glanced to the side my host was standing there; he had witnessed the whole thing. This experience ended my career as a milker!

Right after breakfast my host asked me whether I had ever hoed before - weeding. Well, that I had done extensively, although as a 16-18-year-old it had never been my favorite work. Following the revolution we lost all our land, but every year the local Soviet authorities would designate a few acres to be used for planting vegetables, potatoes, etc. This acreage I would plant and hoe. I could tell my host I had a lot of experience in hoeing. So, together with the host's 16-year-old son we were sent out to weed the corn. It was a very large field and the rows seemed endless. My comrade soon tired of the work and hid under a bush where he slept the sleep of the righteous (untroubled sleep). I did not dare do the same, and so I continued to work alone. From the kitchen window my host's

wife had a clear view of the field, and later when I got to know her better, it became apparent that she had watched us. I can't say that my first workday in Canada had proved to be an inspiration for me, at times my thoughts raced across land and sea to my old homeland. Over there I worked for myself, here I worked for a stranger for \$25.00 a month - not even a dollar a day!

At 5 o'clock in the afternoon my host called me into the barn. There I had to help with the milking and feeding of the cattle. This continued for about a week, when a new phase of work began - the harvesting of hay. This is a chapter in itself. For lack of nourishing food in Russia and the long and tiring journey to Canada, I had not fully recovered my full body strength, and as a result was not as strong as some of the boys here, who had never experienced undernourishment. This was followed by the grain cutting season. In the fall, the potatoes were harvested, as well as the beets. It was hard work if you weren't used to it.

After that there was the fall plowing and hauling manure. I was hired for \$25.00 a month, but since we worked so hard together loading the manure onto the spreader, I thought perhaps this might be a good time to approach my host for an increase on my monthly stipend. When I took my concern to him I was amazed at his immediate willingness to increase my monthly rate by another \$3.00.

Soon after I began to work for my host he spoke to me about his Pennsylvania Dutch language. This language (dialect) is so strongly interspersed with English words that quite often I failed to understand what he was saying. It may have happened during my first week on the farm, we were bringing in the cows to the stable for milking. Each of the 24 cows has its own stall and my host knew each cow and where its stall is. For me they were still only black and white cows. There was a mixup in the stable, and it may have been my fault, but the host was quite agitated and shouted something to me in his "gibberisch" German, which I failed to understand. He got very angry and shouted: "Can't you understand German?" ["Kannst du nett Deutsch versteh?"] "Oh, if you would speak to me in German I am sure I would understand," I replied ["O, ich wuerde schon verstehen wenn du Deutsch sprechen wuerdest."] He made a strange face and walked away. After one month on the farm it was no longer so difficult, the only complaint I had that everybody, my host, his wife, the hired man, all spoke Pennsylvania Dutch to me, and I thus had no chance of learn-

ing to know the English language. Only later did I have the opportunity to learn to speak English.

In the fall I worked a few days on the highway with a team of horses. In the vicinity of the farm there was a "gravel pit" [Sand Grube], where my wagon was loaded with gravel and then I had to take it to the road where it was spread on the roadway by a scraper. The scraper was also driven by a team of horses. This was not hard work and during nice weather I enjoyed driving back and forth.

But now a new phase of my life was about to begin. My host had already informed me he didn't need me during the winter months, and as a result I had to search for work elsewhere. This was more easily said than done, since we "Russian Mennonites" were not permitted to work in the city. This promise we had given on our arrival in Canada, and it was hoped that if one farmer no longer needed the worker, another farmer would come along and make a job offer to him, even for as little as food and lodging. I really didn't fully grasp the seriousness of the situation, I was young, only 20 years of age, to me it seemed a way would open.

Soon I found out that at the Freeport Sanatorium one of the kitchen staff had quit and left, and there was an immediate opening for a replacement. A friend, Mr. Rempel, spoke to the manager on my behalf and soon I was asked to come for an interview.

Mr. Rempel met me at the Sanatorium and took me to the manager. She spoke to me and asked me several questions. Unfortunately my English was very poor, but I understood what she was asking, and I answered as best I could. Astonishingly, I thought, I can make myself be understood. She dismissed me after a short time, but told me before I left, I could start to work tomorrow morning. With a glad heart I left, my wages would be the same - \$30.00 per month, and free meals and lodging, very short hours, a two hour midday break from 1 to 3 o'clock and some other good benefits.

With quick steps I returned to the farm and told my host the whole story. He didn't say very much, he just mumbled something into his beard. He could at least have expressed some joy in the fact that I, a poor immigrant, had found work for the winter. He was familiar with my circumstances that I had no money, no clothes and a debt of \$130.00. Well, I didn't carry any grudge against him then, only now as I write down these thoughts, it gripped me how heartless people can be.

I packed my few belongings that evening after the evening chores, took my

leave from the family and carried my few belongings over to the Sanatorium. My host owed me approximately \$80.00, and as I left he said he would bring the money to the Sanatorium, since they bring the milk to the Sanatorium each morning anyway.

When I arrived at the Sanatorium I was received by the lady who looked after the workers' quarters (which included cleaning and care), which meant a great deal to me, and I was ushered into my room. The lady showed me the bathroom facilities, where I could wash and bathe. Although the room was very small, and one wall consisted of boards which divided one large room into two, I felt very satisfied in the fact that I had my own room and I could take a bath. Since the end of July until the end of October I had never had the opportunity at the farm to take a decent bath. From time to time I was permitted to take a few pails of hot water, take them into the summer kitchen, pour them into a barrel in order that I might take a meager bath. I was not permitted to use their bathroom facilities, which was located outside anyway. My natural inclinations I had to perform in the barn, the toilet facilities were designated for the ladies and gentlemen.

I don't think that I ever enjoyed a bath as much as I did that first evening at the Freeport Sanatorium, hot water as much as I wanted, and such a wonderful bathtub. Unfortunately I overdid the act of cleanliness, I bathed every night until the overseer informed me that each employee is granted two baths a week.

With a deep feeling of comfort and gratefulness to have a room all to myself, I went to bed rather early since I was to start my job at 7 o'clock in the morning, and I wanted to be wide awake.

I went into kitchen at 7 o'clock and there the cook showed me my first job; for 8 o'clock I had to slice about a dozen loaves of bread and toast the slices. At that time (1924) sliced bread was not yet popular. I had to be careful that the slices were not scorched. It was not an automatic toaster, it was an oven-shaped toaster into which one placed up to half a loaf of bread at a time. Naturally the experience did not pass without incident, but on the whole nothing serious happened. This became my first duty every morning the first month I was there. After I had my breakfast the cook showed me other assignments, wash dishes, then a man from outside brought in a small bag of potatoes, and I had to peel them. There were vegetables to be made ready, help the cook at the stove, and much more. The work was not hard and for the winter months it was

acceptable work. The cook could be a bit rough at times but on the whole was a good man.

In 1925-26 a number of our Mennonites moved into the cities of Kitchener-Waterloo, the congregation on Chapel Street allowed us to use their church on Sunday afternoons, and in addition we were able to conduct German services during the winter months of 1925-26.

At first the General Conference and Mennonite Brethren denominations held combined services, the services being conducted by ministers of both denominations. In the fall of 1926 we began to conduct separate services. We were able to rent a hall on the third floor on King Street in Kitchener, and the Waterloo church (General Conference) rented a hall on King Street North, Waterloo. In those early years the youth of the two denominations would meet together, and we had a choir that would sing at some of the services.

It was in the fall of 1924 that we Russian Mennonites began to meet in the churches of the Old Mennonites. Through our hosts we learned where ever such services were held. A number of times we met in the East End (First) Mennonite Church in the afternoons. A number of times we met at Breslau and other area churches. Usually these were combined services (G.C. and M.B.). We had excellent ministers who spoke a perfect German.

Usually we tried to get to these services early in order to meet other friends and relatives. It was so heart-warming to be able to talk to fellow immigrants. We would relate our experiences to each other, shared our griefs and felt drawn to one another, because we all shared the same destiny.

Soon we also discovered each other for social reasons. We began to know where so-and-so lived and we would arrange get-togethers. An unusually nice get-together was arranged for Christmas, 1924. A lady-friend of mine whom I had befriended while we were still in Russia, was working at a family named Shuh, on a farm near Kitchener (now it is Sheldon Street). Her hostess had granted her permission to invite her friends for the evening, and about a dozen of us showed up. We were lonely for company, to be with people with whom we shared a similar past. The Shuhs had prepared for us a turkey dinner. Until late in the evening we sat together, played games, sang Christmas carols and chatted.

A second Christmas party we had at the Goods. She had decorated her home

for Christmas and arranged a whole program of songs, poems and monologues, and we enjoyed ourselves. Thus we experienced diversity in our otherwise drab lifestyle. Often we would get together simply to chat. Without these get-togethers our lives would have been quite lonely. I was all alone on the farm and had very little contact with my hosts. Man must have diversity otherwise he might lose his sanity.

My English improved slowly. During the winter of 1924-25, we met at a service, a young man named Boyd Cressman. He had a good education, and showed a definite interest and sympathy toward us. In order to assist us with our language problems he organized week-day evening classes. These were held at the East End Mennonite Church. I too, attended a

number of these classes, but couldn't always be present since I had to work until 7 o'clock at the Sanatorium and thus could not get there in time.

At the conclusion of his study period he would invite us to his house where we experienced good fellowship. Here and there were local Mennonites who showed genuine interest in our well-being, being aware of some of the difficulties we had to face in order to make a new start in a new land. For all their efforts I am extremely thankful.

After I had moved to Kitchener, and I had received employment at the Kaufman Rubber Co., my sisters and I rented an apartment with four rooms on 313 King Street East. Here we lived until May, 1926, when we purchased a house on Weber Street, which was our own.

In November, 1925, my mother, another sister, and a niece, arrived from Russia, and, thus our whole family was together again, and I had a home.

I am very thankful that I can reside in this wonderful Canada, and that it has become my homeland for me. In these 46 years I have endeavored to be a true and loyal citizen in my country.

Nicholas Fehderau lived in Kitchener until his death in 1989. The original copy of this essay in German is in the archives. This translation is only a portion of the original text.

Herbert Enns of Waterloo, is a founding member of the MHSO. Over the years he has done many translations for this newsletter.

Book Notes

- The Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association, in *The Mennonite Settlement on Pelee Island, Ontario* (Leamington: Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association, 1999), 120pp. tells the story of the 1925-1950 settlement on Pelee Island with words and illustrations using the memories of the island settlers.
- Reg Good, author of *Detweiler, Detweiler's Meetinghouse: A History of Mennonites near Roseville, Ontario* (Roseville, Ontario: Detweiler Meetinghouse Inc., 1999), 96 pp. tells the history of this rural congregation near Roseville, Ontario from its beginnings in 1855 to its disbanding in 1966. There is an account of how the church building was eventually taken over and preserved by the Detweiler Meetinghouse Inc. It also includes a detailed cemetery list.
- Royden Loewen, author of *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863 to 1929* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 400 pp. uses diaries of the time period to show how life was for rural Mennonite households in Manitoba and Ontario from 1863 to 1929.

Mystery Photos ?

Over the past several years Linda Huebert Hecht has been cataloguing the *Canadian Mennonite* photo series at Conrad Grebel College. Most the numerous photographs in the collection have now been identified and recorded. But there are still a few mystery photos, some that even Lorna Bergey can not identify. So now we offer them to you for your help.

All we know about these two photos is that it is the "Guelph Unit." Is it MCC or VS, and where was it located? And if you know the names of the people in the photos, let us know.



If you have any information on these photos please contact Linda Huebert Hecht at (519) 885-0220 ex.253 or email her at lhhecht@watserv1.uwaterloo.ca.

Or contact Brent Bauman at R.R. #2, Drayton, Ont. N0G 1P0 or email him at merlane.farms@sympatico.ca.

People and Projects

FRANK H. EPP PAPERS

Now that storage space has been created, Linda Huebert Hecht has begun the task of processing the Frank H. Epp papers at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. Due to the size of the collection (22 file cabinets in all), some additional shelves were installed at the library. Grants have been received in order to carry out this important project on a man who did so much research into Canadian Mennonite History.

THE AMISH IN WOOLWICH

The Amish in Woolwich was the theme of a meeting sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society at Martin's Meetinghouse in Waterloo on July 4, 1999. A goodly number of Markham-Waterloo Mennonites, persons from Steinmanns and other former Amish Mennonite congregations, and other interested persons turned out for this Sunday afternoon meeting in spite of the very warm temperature.

Alvin Gingerich, who was largely responsible for planning the program, discussed the meeting. Sam Steiner, on behalf of the Society, made some announcements and introductions. Abner Weber gave a brief history of Martin's Meetinghouse and Cemetery.

Lorraine Roth gave a presentation on "The Amish Presence in Woolwich Township." Two Amish men, Christian Stoltzfus and Christian Koenig, invested in five lots, a total of 1050 acres, of Block 3, purchased by the German Land Company in 1807. Neither of these men or their children settled in Canada. A few other Amish families did settle in Woolwich Township, most of them only briefly. Among these were the Joseph Zehr and Jacob Kropf families. Kropf had been ordained deacon for the new Amish settlement which was taking place mostly in Wilmot Township. The Zehrs first appeared in the 1827 census, remaining in Woolwich for the better part of two decades. Joseph Zehr died in 1845, and the family buried him at Martin's Meetinghouse. His widow, Barbara Kennel Zehr, wound up the family affairs in the township in 1854 and moved to Wilmot to be with her married children. Orland Gingerich gave the meditation, titled "Remembering and Giving Thanks." The meeting closed with a brief service at the Joseph Zehr gravesite.

THE ALTONA MEETINGHOUSE

On September 12, a thanksgiving and remembrance service was held near Stouffville at the Altona Meetinghouse. This historic building has been preserved as it was built in 1852. Speakers for the afternoon service were Lou Geense, pastor

of the Stouffville Missionary Church, and Lorna Bergey of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

THE DETWEILER MEETINGHOUSE

The Detweiler Meetinghouse near Roseville was rededicated on September 26. An 1860s-style worship service was held at 11:00 am at the meetinghouse with nearly one hundred people in attendance. In the afternoon service there was music from the 1860s, and reflections on the Detweiler congregation by former members. The highlight was a presentation by Pennsylvania Mennonite historian Dr. John Ruth, on the links from Franconia, Pennsylvania to the Detweiler community. This reconstruction project was made possible by many donations, and the major donors were recognized. The launch of the new history book on the meetinghouse, *Detweiler* by Reg Good also took place that afternoon. Copies are available from the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario for \$20.

LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS

The Conrad Grebel College Library often receives donations of old books and Bibles. It was not until they were catalogued for the archives that it was discovered how rare the gift from Ivy Kipfer of Tavistock was. Ivy had the books for many years before a move to a seniors home forced her to relieve herself of some of her possessions. The two books given to the library included a Dutch Mennonite Hymnal printed in 1633, bound together with another hymnbook by Dutch Mennonite pastor Pieter Jansz Twisk with a printing date of 1634. The other book, also in Dutch, was a copy of the New Testament printed in 1697. It is the Biestkens version known to be very popular amongst the Dutch Mennonites of the time. It was thought no copies of this edition remain outside of Amsterdam, Netherlands. Sam Steiner is attempting to discover how these rare publications found their way to this part of the globe. All that is known so far is that these books have been in the family for many years.

LONGTIME HISTORIAN DIES

Douglas Millar died July 26, 1999, at the age of 79. Douglas was a member of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church and very involved in recording its history. He was also a longtime member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, the Waterloo Historical Society and the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario. His other involvement's included being a founding board member of Conrad Grebel College. Douglas Millar is survived by his wife, Anne, and their children, Blaine and Christine, and their families.

CANADIAN MENNONITE ENCYCLOPEDIA ONLINE

When Sam Steiner added the text and commentary for *A declaration of Christian faith and commitment with respect to peace, war, and nonresistance* to the Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (CMEO) (<http://www.mhsc.ca>), it became the Encyclopedia's 2000th article. The article refers to a peace statement approved during the Korean War by the joint U.S.-Canadian Peace Problems Committee of the Mennonite Church.

About half CMEO's articles provide information on Canadian Mennonite congregations; the remainder are source documents, biographies, conferences, institutions and theological/historical subjects. Many of these have been adapted from the five-volume Mennonite Encyclopedia published by Herald Press in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania.

Jon Harder, the manager of MennoLink, an independent inter-Mennonite Internet information service, says the Encyclopedia is "one of the top 5 Mennonite sites online." He adds, "I refer people with specific questions to it all the time."

The Britannica Internet Guide describes CMEO as "noteworthy" and the Netscape Open Directory has awarded it an "editor's choice." Sam Steiner, CMEO's managing editor, reported the site receives over 1000 unique "hits" per month.

The Encyclopedia is sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, and is hosted on the Conrad Grebel College server. An editorial board of nine persons, chaired by Bert Friesen of Winnipeg, provides oversight for the project. - from press release

FRETZ AWARD

Pamela Albrecht and Donald Martin are winners of the 1999 **J. Winfield Fretz Award** for studies in Ontario Mennonite History. Pamela Albrecht won the award for undergraduates with her essay **Modernization and Meeting Houses: The Old Order Amish Division, 1886-1891**. Donald Martin won in the local historian category for his essay **Marred Relations: Old Order Mennonite Divisions in Woolwich Township**. Submissions for next year's award should be made by May 31, 2000.

GLEN ALLEN CHURCH CLOSES

Began as an outreach of the Floradale Mennonite Church in 1944, the Glen Allen Mennonite Church officially closed on August 31, 1999 due to declining membership. The building has been sold to the New Covenant Mennonite Fellowship, a new independent congregation.