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## What Happened to the Mennonites? The Disappearing Mennonites of Welland County

By Sam Steiner

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Church, Vineland, June 2006*

Mennonite historians have long puzzled over the history of the late 18th and early 19th century Mennonites in Upper Canada. The settlement around the future Waterloo County prospered, but the Pennsylvania German Mennonite settlements on the Niagara Peninsula struggled and were overwhelmed by the end of the 20th century except for small remnants around Vineland and Stevensville. Harold Nigh talked to our Society in 1986 of the "Lost Tribes of the Niagara Plain Folk."<sup>1</sup>

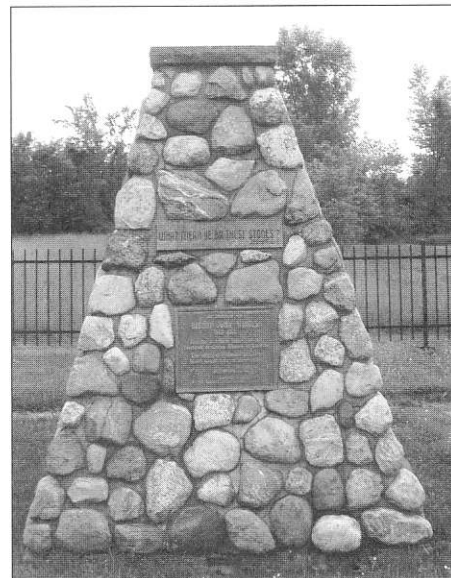
Most often the weakness of the Niagara settlements has been attributed to a combination of poor leadership or internal disagreement on how to intersect with the larger culture. Both L. J. Burkholder and Frank Epp followed this approach.

I believe Mennonite historians have not adequately considered the varied religious renewal movements within the German-speaking communities, and their impact on the Mennonite settlements of Upper Canada. The earliest divisions in Mennonite Upper Canada long preceded the better known schisms of the 1870s and 1880s.

### **The Faith of 18th Century Pennsylvania Mennonites**

Eighteenth century Pennsylvania Mennonites did not live in separatist enclaves like their Old Order descendants. They interacted regularly with their German-speaking Lutheran, Reformed and Moravian neighbors, and their shared Pennsylvania German culture shaped their daily life as well as their church life.

In the second half of the 18th century Pennsylvania Mennonites were completing their transition from the persecution self-identity that had



*This cairn stands at the Bertie Brethren in Christ Church in memory of Bishop John Winger who died in 1828, the founder and first bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church in Canada. The original gravesite is along Black Creek, east of Stevensville. (Mennonite Archives of Ontario collection 2000-1.85)*

shaped their European experience, and sharply contrasted to the prosperity and individualism of their first generations in North America. They still sang from the *Ausbund*, with its martyr hymns and clear emphasis on separation from the world, but they also read the Pietist literature they brought from Europe and began to reprint in North America.<sup>2</sup> This made them more receptive to the Pietistic renewal movements that flourished both in English and German speaking America.

The Revolutionary War (1775-1783) caught Pennsylvania Mennonites unprepared in the midst of their prosperity. This was also a time of spiritual "drought" among the traditional Mennonites. Applicants for membership in Mennonite churches, who may have experienced an emotional conversion in a traveling evangelist's revival

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service or in a prayer meeting held in a neighbour's home, were dismayed to find that Mennonite leaders remained more interested in teaching them about rules and regulations than hearing about their conversion.<sup>3</sup>

Three non-Mennonite renewal movements found their way into the German-speaking areas of Upper Canada—the Tunkers (also known as River Brethren or Brethren in Christ), the United Brethren in Christ (sometimes called Brethren), and the Evangelical Association (Evangelicals or German Methodists). The earliest “internal” Mennonite renewal movement also had an enormous impact on the Mennonite community that emerged on the Niagara Peninsula—John Herr’s Reformed Mennonite group (also known as Herrites or “New” Mennonites.<sup>4</sup> All of the Lancaster County renewal movements had their roots in European Pietism, although in the 21st century we do not generally think of the Reformed Mennonite Church in Pietistic terms.<sup>5</sup>

### **What was Pietism?<sup>6</sup>**

Classical Pietism emerged in 17th century Germany following the Thirty Years War. It influenced all the major European Protestant traditions—Lutherans, Reformed, and Anabaptist. Dale Brown, who has written extensively on Pietism, lists some components of Pietist theology: 1) an emphasis on God’s love for humanity, rather than on God’s wrath; 2) turning the church from rigid top-down doctrine, toward a very active laity (priesthood of all believers); 3) emphasis on the Bible, including devotional study in small groups led by lay leaders; 4) living a daily life that matched one’s Christian faith; and 5) an emphasis on personal conversion and a new birth, a “theology of experience.”<sup>7</sup> Pietism reduced emphasis on propositional doctrines as they might be expressed in a confession of faith, and placed more reliance on the Holy Spirit for spiritual enlightenment. Although the local church community remained important, inevitably

Pietism shifted the emphasis from the visible church toward the individual’s personal relationship with God.

One practical outcome of Pietist emphases was an increased spirit of toleration and religious freedom, with the emergence of an “invisible” church that spanned the Protestant denominations. Sometimes this lowered view of the institutional church led to a decreased emphasis on the sacraments as practiced in a particular denomination.

The central feature of all the Pennsylvania German renewal groups was the need for an explicitly personal experience of the “new birth” in Christ. With this new birth came an assurance that one’s sins were forgiven. For some leaders, if there was a doubt about one’s salvation, it was clear evidence that you was not saved. “If you have it [salvation], you can tell when and where you got it.”<sup>8</sup>

Some articulate, but more traditional, Mennonite leaders were dismayed by the religious chaos that the renewal movements generated in their churches. Christian Burkholder (1746-1809), a Lancaster County Mennonite minister and bishop, spoke approvingly of the “new birth,” but said he could not dictate to God how to create this new birth in others. For Burkholder, boasting of one’s “new birth” reflected the influence of the “old man,” not the new follower’s salvation in Christ.<sup>9</sup>

We’ll turn now to a brief review of each of the renewal movements that also became part of the Mennonite community in Welland County.

### **River Brethren / Tunkers<sup>10</sup>**

The first renewal group to influence the early Upper Canadian Mennonites was the River Brethren or Tunkers. The River Brethren emerged in the late 1770s around the leadership of Jacob Engel (c1753-1833), who arrived as an infant in Pennsylvania with his Mennonite parents. The most prominent founders of the River Brethren appeared to have Mennonite roots.

The River Brethren were first influenced by Martin Boehm, a for-

mer Mennonite bishop who became a founder of the United Brethren in Christ movement. However the River Brethren wanted to retain Mennonite doctrines not emphasized by Boehm (like nonresistance, non-taking of oaths, not holding government office, etc.). The developing Boehm group also placed no emphasis on a particular baptismal form, an ordinance that was important to the new group. Sometime in the late 1770s a group of River Brethren leaders baptized one another and began the formation of a new denomination.<sup>11</sup>

The River Brethren were the first of the renewal groups to fully “organize” as an identifiable denominational group. Of the non-Mennonite groups they were also the most theologically compatible with the Mennonites because of the core values they retained in their confession. They were likely also less flamboyant than some of the other groups in their worship and the revival style of their services.

### **United Brethren in Christ<sup>12</sup>**

Martin Boehm (1725-1812) was the youngest son of a Mennonite immigrant to Pennsylvania in 1717 who had been a Pietist in Europe before joining the Mennonites. Martin was ordained by lot as a Mennonite minister in Lancaster County at the age of 30. He struggled as a preacher, however, and believed this struggle cast doubt on the state of his personal salvation. Boehm later said he was “lost,” a concept that came from Pietism, not from his Mennonite roots. Boehm subsequently had a dramatic conversion while plowing in the fields. This experience changed his life and enlivened his preaching, and his story of conversion and subsequent assurance of salvation spread into the Mennonite community.<sup>13</sup>

Boehm maintained his Mennonite leadership role for some years, and was even ordained as a Mennonite bishop in 1761.<sup>14</sup> He preached to audiences that went beyond his own denomination. A famous 1767 meeting in Landis Valley, Lancaster County, found Boehm preaching to a crowd of a thousand

people that included the well-known Reformed minister, Philip Wilhelm Otterbein (1726-1813). After the sermon Otterbein came forward, embraced Boehm, and said, "We are Brethren." This was later seen as the seminal moment in the formation of the United Brethren denomination.<sup>15</sup>

Since Otterbein and Boehm came from traditions with vastly differing understandings of baptism—the Reformed sprinkled infants, the Mennonites poured on adults—and other leaders in the emerging group came from an immersion background, the United Brethren from the beginning allowed flexibility in the mode and age of baptism.<sup>16</sup>

Martin Boehm did not withdraw as a Mennonite minister, but eventually the Lancaster Mennonite Conference expelled him as a Mennonite leader, likely in 1777 after the requirement of a "test oath" by the new Revolutionary Government. The other Mennonite bishops felt Boehm consorted too freely with religious leaders who neither held to nonresistance nor preached against taking the oath.<sup>17</sup>

The United Brethren remained informally structured through the 1790s, but regular annual meetings of the ministers with minutes of decisions began to be kept in 1800. Thus 1800 is often regarded as the semi-structured beginning of the United Brethren in Christ, though they still regarded themselves as nonsectarian.<sup>18</sup> This nonsectarian spirit meant United Brethren ministers spoke frequently in Mennonite, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, and is crucial in explaining the impact of the United

Brethren on Mennonites.

The United Brethren encouraged emotional expression in their revival meetings—with crying, shouting, and singing. There could also be physical emotional release through jumping or leaping around the room. This spiritual expression was an attraction for some observers, and a sign of superficiality to others.<sup>19</sup>

### **Evangelical Association<sup>20</sup>**

Jacob Albright (1759-1808) was born as a Lutheran near Pottstown, Pennsylvania, but moved to Lancaster



*This building replaced the log church at Black Creek. It was moved and dismantled in 1914. (Mennonite Archives of Ontario collection 1983-1.24)*

County after marriage. In 1790 the Albright family lost several children to illness; this tragedy threw Jacob Albright into spiritual despair. Finally in 1792 with the assistance of a United Brethren lay minister he experienced conversion. Although he maintained friendly relations with the United Brethren, he was not comfortable with their relaxed approach to discipline and to church ordinances like baptism. He initially affiliated with the new English-language

Methodist denomination, and began a Bible "class" in his community. He did so well that the Methodists licensed him as an "exhorter."<sup>21</sup>

Albright began preaching in 1796 in any Protestant setting that would receive him. The Evangelical Association first organized in 1800 with the formation of three "classes" following a Methodist model. Albright was ordained as a minister in the new group in 1803, and effectively acted as its bishop.<sup>22</sup>

Evangelical Association worship services also featured occasions of dramatic emotional display, though Albright himself was said to be more reserved in worship style, if not in his confrontational preaching. It was not uncommon for repentant sinners to be crying for mercy at the end of his messages.<sup>23</sup>

### **Reformed Mennonite Church**

The last of the renewal groups to coalesce was the Reformed Mennonite Church. John Herr (1782-1850) was the son of Francis Herr, a Lancaster County farmer. Francis Herr withdrew from the Mennonite Church in the 1790s. In his view, the Mennonites did not adequately maintain traditional Mennonite doctrine. Frances Herr began to meet in his home with a group of family and friends for worship, preaching and prayer. He preached in a seated position since he recognized he was not an ordained minister.<sup>24</sup>

The form of Herr's meetings was remarkably like the "classes" initiated by the other Lancaster County Pietist groups, and Herr's role was similar to that of the

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“exhorter” in the emerging United Brethren and Evangelical communities.

During the years of these house meetings, teenager John Herr, in a typical Pietistic manner, experienced deep emotional concern about the state of his salvation. He called on God for mercy but felt his prayer unheard. He also feared for the salvation of his brothers and sisters. Later in an autobiographical essay he recounted experiences of accident and illness and the death of his brother-in-law that underscored his awareness of his state of sin. Around 1810 after a series of personal crises, John Herr finally achieved a sense of personal salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Herr and a small group continued to meet privately for worship, but in 1812 they organized and elected Herr to be minister. A member of the group baptized him and he assumed the leadership of the group. Herr was a charismatic and influential speaker, and his movement was more dynamic and engaged with the larger society than his more traditional Mennonite contemporaries. The Reformed Mennonites were more “urban” than other Mennonite groups, and attracted more doctors and educators in its first decades than the Lancaster Conference Mennonites.<sup>26</sup>

Herr did not associate with other renewal groups because he believed they did not maintain consistency in their Christian lives. For Herr true discipleship reflected the new birth and was more important than dramatic testimonies about one’s conversion, though his own autobiography provided that dramatic type of testimony. Herr did not “fellowship” with other churches. This term generally meant not taking the Lord’s Supper with members of other churches. I suspect the practice of not attending the services of, or praying with, persons outside the Reformed Mennonite Church was not an original doctrinal position, but developed over time as a defensive mechanism.

Ontario Mennonite lay historian, J.C. Fretz, quoted an old aphorism about

the relationship of the United Brethren and the Reformed Mennonites, “It is said [the United Brethren] separated from the Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, on account of restrictions, and that the Reformed Mennonites separated from the United Brethren on account of liberties.”<sup>27</sup>

### Early Immigrants to Welland County

We’ll now look briefly at the earliest Anabaptists who arrived on the Niagara Peninsula, particularly in what became Welland County. We won’t dwell on the 1786 settlers at “The Thirty” or the later group that became the core of this settlement at The Twenty in 1799 and 1800.

Within two years of the 1786 immigrants, Pennsylvania Mennonites began to arrive in significant numbers from both the Franconia and Lancaster settlements. Christian Sevits (Zavits) (1750-1826) came to the Sherkston area along Lake Erie and apparently established a mill. Within four years his parents, Jacob (1728-1800) and Magdalene, two brothers, Henry (1748-1810) and Jacob (1752-1815), and their families came to Bertie and Humberstone Townships.<sup>28</sup> These families came from the Franconia Mennonite communities north of Philadelphia.

Other settlers began to arrive in Pelham Township in the center of the Niagara Peninsula. Three Winger siblings—John (c1750-1828), Mary (c1755-c1808) and her husband, Jacob Sider (1758-1825), and Anna (1759-1832) and her husband Jacob Damude (1758-1839) arrived in 1788. John was already a River Brethren (Tunker) minister, and probably leader of the group, but he and his sisters were of Mennonite heritage. Others with them were Groh and Steckley families. River Brethren Bishop Jacob Engle visited the new Niagara settlement already in 1789 and may have ordained John Winger as the Bishop of the Canadian Tunker community at this time.<sup>29</sup> John



*The townships of Welland County*

Winger and Jacob Sider moved to Bertie Township after 1792. Bertie Township became the core of a new Tunker settlement that became more prominent than the one in Pelham Township.<sup>30</sup>

Also in 1788 the Abraham Beam (c1723-1799), Christian Stoner (1752-1835), Christian Knisely (1757-c1836) and Abraham Neff (c.1746-?) families from York and Lancaster counties arrived in Welland. These families became the core of the later Reformed Mennonite renewal. Like the Winger clan, the Stoners, Knisely and Neff families were interrelated. Christian Stoner was married to Abraham Neff’s niece, Elizabeth (1760-1849) and Christian Knisely was married to Christian Stoner’s sister.<sup>31</sup> Abraham Beam was the brother of United Brethren in Christ founder, Martin Boehm.<sup>32</sup> Other Mennonite families who came from Lancaster County to the Sherkston area about the same time included Christopher Culp and brothers Michael and Caspar Sherch (Sherk).

By 1790 there were three Anabaptist “settlements” on the Niagara Peninsula—the earliest in the area of “The Thirty” (Clinton Township), the second in Pelham Township (between Welland and Fonthill) and a third scattered along the Niagara River and Lake Erie shore in Willoughby, Bertie, Humberstone and Wainfleet Townships. These were not “compact” settlements in any sense, with the families in many cases spread over substantial distances that would have limited frequent contact.

Since only one of the settlements had ordained religious leadership as

part of their migration, the Pelham settlement of Tunkers likely was first to hold regular worship services, followed by the Bertie Tunker community.

There were also two small Mennonite settlements in New York State on the U.S. side of the Niagara River that regularly intersected with Mennonites in Niagara. These settlements were in Erie County (Clarence/Williamsville) and Wheatfield Township in Niagara County ("The Falls" settlement).

The Mennonite communities in Upper Canada were not seriously disturbed by the renewal groups until the 1830s, except for the attraction that Tunkers held for isolated Mennonites in Welland County. But during the 1830s evangelistic efforts by the renewal groups began in earnest. The Evangelical Association and United Brethren were fully organized, and both denominations supported traveling ministers similar to the Methodist circuit riders, who visited any receptive communities and had preaching services in homes, schools, or if permitted in churches. Converts would be baptized, but often the fledgling group of new converts would be too small to organize a congregation. John Herr of the Reformed Mennonites also began to travel far beyond Lancaster County. He had cousins in the Williamsville, NY area, and by 1833 had established a thriving congregation there. At the same time he visited the Niagara Peninsula and organized churches there.

The Evangelicals began systematic missionary work among German-

speaking Protestants in Upper Canada in the late 1830s. Their efforts in the Niagara Peninsula soon made an impact on the Mennonites of Welland County as well as at "The Twenty" where there was a major division at the end of the 1840s. The earliest Evangelical Association congregation in Niagara emerged near Stevensville in Welland County.

### **Willoughby & Bertie Townships**

Willoughby Township was the location of an interesting United Brethren influence on the Mennonite and Tunker communities. This centred on an enigmatic minister named Jacob Miller (1772-1841) who lived along the Niagara River. By the 1820s he preached in the "union" Riverside meeting-house. Miller had immigrated to Upper Canada from Pennsylvania by 1804. In Pennsylvania he had been a lay minister in the United Brethren movement, but probably had a Mennonite background. In Canada he referred to his group as "Mennonite." A later local historian, M.G. Sherk, said that Miller called himself Mennonite in order to obtain military exemption status.<sup>33</sup>

Jacob Miller was married to Barbara Hershey (1771-1840), a daughter of John B. Hershey (1741-1811) who had served for a short time as a Mennonite minister near Harrisburg, PA, but by 1791 had become a United Brethren minister in Maryland.<sup>34</sup>

Even if Jacob Miller was Mennonite by self-identification in Upper Canada, he was very ecumenical and provided a preaching location for visiting United

Brethren and Evangelical Association ministers. Soon after the War of 1812 John Dreisbach, a leader in the Evangelical Association, visited two uncles in Grimsby and Ancaster, and preached in the Niagara Peninsula as he had occasion. His preaching stops included

the home of Jacob Miller, doubtless the "Mennonite" minister.<sup>35</sup> Christian Newcomer, a United Brethren leader, in a visit to Canada also mentions being hosted by Jacob Miller.<sup>36</sup>

Miller likely served as a "bridge" between the Mennonites and the renewal groups. His Riverside church remained open to Daniel Hoch after Hoch was expelled from the Mennonite Conference of Ontario, and consequently the renewal groups met with significant success among the Mennonites in Welland County.

The primary traditional Mennonite community in Bertie Township that survived was at Sherkston. Jacob Zavitz (Sevitz) had arrived in 1788, and his sons, George (1781-1858) and John (1798-1872) became leaders in the Sherkston Mennonite community. Bishop leadership for both Black Creek (Riverside) and Sherkston was usually provided by bishops from the U.S. side of the Niagara River. For reasons that are not clear, the churches in Welland County did have a close relationship with those in Lincoln County. After Vineland-based bishop Jacob Moyer's death, bishop oversight in Welland County did not come from the Lincoln County.

John Herr made his first trip into Canada in 1833. This was part of a larger tour that also took him to Williamsville in Erie County, New York. Herr's uncle, Henry Herr, had moved to Williamsville earlier, so John Herr had numerous relatives in the Williamsville area. The 1833 visit resulted in a number of converts, and the Williamsville Reformed Mennonite congregation was organized the following year with 21 members.<sup>37</sup>

While John Herr organized a larger Reformed Mennonite settlement in Humberstone Township along Lake Erie, a Reformed Mennonite group also emerged in Bertie Township near Stevensville. A log church, located west of Stevensville, was built on land donated by Benjamin Beam in 1828.<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Beam was the grandson of



*The Sherkston Church was the most long-lived "Old" Mennonite church in Welland County. It was sold to the Brethren in Christ in 1931. (Mennonite Archives of Ontario collection 1990-1.1)*

immigrant Abraham Beam and a great-nephew of United Brethren founder, Martin Boehm. I believe this was likely a traditional Mennonite meetinghouse prior to John Herr's organization of the new group, but there is not firm evidence of this.

Initially there were no ordained Reformed Mennonite leaders stationed at Stevensville; the ministers from Humberstone Township and from Erie County, NY, provided the necessary leadership. Samuel Beam was the first minister ordained for this field and Jacob Young the first deacon. Samuel Beam was also a grandson of Abraham Beam.

Bishop John Seybert of the Evangelical Association, who visited Upper Canada in the late 1830s, had an interesting comment about the Tunkers, Mennonite and Reformed Mennonite communities he would have encountered:

Many of them endeavored to lead a quiet, virtuous, peaceable life. But as regards the spiritual life that comes from God, the new birth and the renewal of the heart by the Holy Ghost, they are generally ignorant, knowing nothing of the blessedness of true godliness... Among the New [Reformed] Mennonites some may have had a religious heart experience, but they were very egotistical and separated from all other good men and could, therefore, do nothing for the improvement of the German people of Upper Canada, hence there was no improvement in the general condition of these unfortunate people.<sup>39</sup>

This of course reflected John Herr's refusal to fellowship with other Christian groups, even those who had experienced a measure of "awakening." The exclusive nature of Reformed Mennonite theology would have made the division within the local Mennonite community very difficult, especially

for a community that had experienced traditional ecumenical cooperation with other groups.

The Evangelical Association began its own deliberate visits to Upper Canada in 1836. Wilhelm Orwig, an Evangelical Association leader writing some twenty years later, said:

In several regions of that province of the English empire lived a great many Germans who, for the most part, had emigrated thither from Pennsylvania, and were, in a religious point of view, in a very neglected condition, having either no preacher at all, or only such as were not worthy of the name of an evangelical preacher.<sup>40</sup>

J.G. Zinser first visited Upper Canada, and preached in the homes of Mennonites Martin and Christian Shaub near Black Creek. Michael Eis also began regular preaching visits to Black Creek and Stevensville by 1838. By 1839 the Evangelical Association had agreed to establish four missions in Upper Canada — two at Berlin, Ontario and two at Black Creek.<sup>41</sup>

After the first year of the mission at Black Creek, Michael Eis reported:

... [T]he religious condition of these people in general is indeed wretched. Their religion mostly consists in the observance of some rites and plain dress. Yet I can say, that a great change has already taken place, and many begin to inquire what they must do to be saved; and already some profess to have found peace with God.<sup>42</sup>

The mission at Black Creek was so successful that by the end of 1839 it had been changed to a regular "circuit" with a membership of 84.<sup>43</sup>

In Pennsylvania the United Brethren made greater inroads into the Mennonite communities. By contrast, in Upper Canada greater influence came from the Evangelical Association. This was primarily because the Evan-

gelicals approached their mission in Upper Canada systematically, and put church structures into place at an early date. Although United Brethren circuit preachers had traveled through Upper Canada on numerous occasions, they did not establish a structure to nurture the new converts. Thus congregations identified as United Brethren in Niagara did not come until after the period of this study, although United Brethren theological influence was marked through the ministry of Jacob Miller and the visits of itinerant United Brethren ministers.

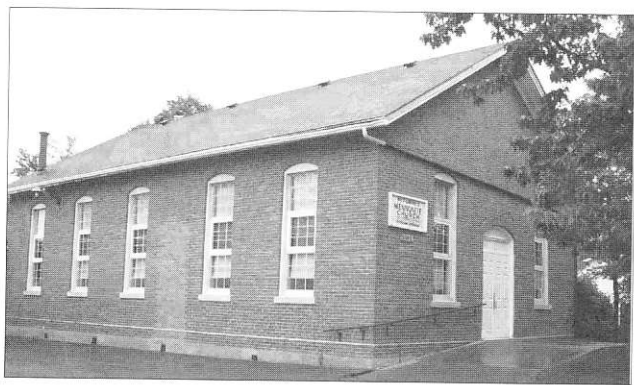
Thus the Mennonites in Willoughby and Bertie Townships were divided into three factions by the end of the 1830s—earlier than the churches at "The Twenty." Significant numbers joined the Reformed Mennonite renewal, and another faction was attracted to the Evangelical Association. As happens in any such division, this likely meant another portion simply withdrew from the difficult circumstances and participated very nominally in the church, or fellowshiped with another Protestant church nearby. Then there were the active Tunker congregations that would have provided a home for many of their Mennonite Anabaptist cousins. This left only one traditional Mennonite church in Bertie Township—the one located at Sherkston.

### Humberstone Township

Humberstone Township was the early home of the Neff, Knisely and Stoner families that came from Lancaster County about 1788. Other Mennonite family names here included Zavitz, Kinsy, Zimmerman, Hershey and Sherk.

That this community had an active Mennonite fellowship is clear from Bishop Jacob Moyer's Bible that mentions a council meeting in 1819 at Sugar Loaf (Humberstone) held on successive days at Christian Kneislis, Michael Sherks and John Wengers. This suggests there was no meetinghouse in place at the time. There are a number of traditions that suggest the early Mennonites initially may have worshipped





The Reformed Mennonite Church at Stevensville was built in 1872 and is still in use.

in schools or union meetinghouses, but there is not firm evidence of this. Even more puzzling is our inability to identify ordained Mennonite ministers in the Humberstone/Wainfleet area.

Several possibilities come to mind—the most likely is that an existing Mennonite congregation in Humberstone was almost completely converted by John Herr and simply became a Reformed Mennonite congregation in the mid-1830s. Brothers John Stoner (1780-1861) and Abraham Stoner (1796-1848) (sons of immigrant Christian Stoner) were early ministers in the Reformed Mennonite congregation at Humberstone. Is it possible one of them had been a minister in an earlier traditional Mennonite congregation? John Stoner was “relieved” as a minister in the Reformed Mennonite congregation about 1841, though this could have occurred for a number of reasons.<sup>44</sup>

### Summary

Unlike Waterloo, on the Niagara Peninsula, the Mennonites in Welland County were never a compact community. Land was purchased as it was available from Loyalists who did not want to farm the land grants they had received. Mennonites were quickly interspersed with English-speaking neighbors. The diversity within the community was great. Travel between the Mennonite settlements in the Peninsula was not easy, and the dispersed Welland County Mennonite communities were not frequently reinforced through interaction with the Mennonite folks at “The Twenty.”

The enigma of the Reformed Mennonites continues to need analysis in the absence of good church records. (There are not good church records, because Reformed Mennonites on principle did not keep membership lists.) Where Reformed Mennonite founder, John Herr, traveled he managed to establish thriving congregations.

The attraction of a warm conversion experience combined with a certainty of personal salvation attracted many Mennonites in Niagara. Another series of divisions a generation later underscored this attraction. Only after a significant minority of Mennonites left to form the Old Order Mennonites in the 1880s/1890s, did the Mennonite majority embrace the revivalism and assurance of salvation it had resisted for so long. By then it was too late to revive the Welland Mennonite community.

### (Endnotes)

- 1 Harold Nigh, “The Lost Tribes of the Niagara Plain Folk,” *Mennogespräch* 4, no. 2 (September 1086, 1986), 13-18, <http://www.mhso.org/>.
- 2 For background on 18<sup>th</sup> century Mennonite piety see the chapter on “Religious Inner Life: Mennonites and Pietism” in Richard Kerwin MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790*, Vol. 1 (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1985), 157-182.
- 3 John L. Ruth, *The Earth is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference*, Vol. 39 (Scottsdale, Pa.; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2001), 317-318..
- 4 These groups all continue in Canada in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in modified names and forms. The Tunkers in 1933 took the more formal Brethren in Christ name of their sister denomination in the United States. The United Brethren and Evangelical Church (as it became known in 1922) first merged into the Evangelical United Brethren (E.U.B.)

denomination in 1946. In 1968 the E.U.B.'s merged with the Methodist Church in the United States to form the United Methodist Church; in Canada it joined and became part of the United Church of Canada at the same time. The Reformed Mennonite Church has maintained its name and discipline since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but is considerably smaller in size than it was in 1840. Only two Reformed Mennonite congregations remain in Canada in 2006—one in Stevensville and one near Amulree in Pert County.

- 5 Stephen L. Longenecker, *Piety and Tolerance: Pennsylvania German Religion, 1700-1850*, Vol. 6 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994).
- 6 A good introductory text on Pietism is Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, Rev. ed. (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Pub. House, 1996), 125.
- 7 Brown, 21-22. Although the Pennsylvania German Pietists sometimes denied a “crisis” experience was necessary to salvation, in practice it was very highly valued and expected. Longenecker, 106ff.
- 8 Quoted in Carlton O. Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1978).
- 9 Translated and reprinted in Christian Burkholder, “Useful and Edifying Address to the Young, on True Repentance, Saving in Christ Jesus, Pure Love to God and our Neighbor, Obedience to the Word of God and a Full Surrender of the Soul into His Hands in Questions and Answers” in *Christian Spiritual Conversation on Saving Faith, for the Young in Questions and Answers, and a Confession of Faith, of the Mennonites, with an Appendix* (Lancaster, PA: John Baer's Sons, 1878), 179-257.. See 183, 220-221. See also Ruth, *The Earth is the Lord's*, 373-377.
- 10 The source for this section unless otherwise noted is the standard history of the Brethren in Christ, Wittlinger, *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ*, 580
- 11 Wittlinger, 23. E. Morris Sider says this baptism took place between 1778 and 1780 in the Conoy Creek near Jacob Engel's farm, a short distance from the Susquehanna River and

the Village of Marietta in northwest Lancaster County. E. Morris Sider and Brethren in Christ Church. Canadian Conference, *The Brethren in Christ in Canada : Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change* (Hamilton, Ont.: Canadian Conference Brethren in Christ Church, 1988), 3.

12 The primary source on the early history of the United Brethren is A. W. Drury, *History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ* (Dayton, Ohio: Otterbein Press, 1924), 821..

13 Drury, 95ff; Ruth, *Earth is the Lord's*, 287ff. The timing of Boehm's conversion is not clear. John Ruth suggests it took place "around" 1756. The United Brethren historian, A. W. Drury, dates the conversion to 1758, up to two years after Boehm's ordination.

14 Different dates have also been given for Boehm's ordination as bishop. John Ruth suggests 1761, based on research by Noah Good, but without providing a further source. A.W. Drury says this ordination took place in 1759. Ruth, *Earth is the Lord's*, 292, 1139; Drury, 98.

15 Drury, 88-90, 101-102; Ruth, *Earth is the Lord's*, 307ff

16 Drury, 102. The "Virginia preacher" at Isaac Long's barn was presumably from among converts of George Whitefield's preaching in Virginia. These lay ministers were known as "New Light" preachers.

17 Ruth, *The Earth is the Lord's*, 322-324, 333-334; Drury, 105-106. The complete text of the expulsion letter is contained in English translation in {Funk, John F. 1878 /s43-56; }

18 Drury, 158, 183-185

19 Longenecker, 108.

20 The primary sources on the Evangelical Association's early history are Wilhelm W. Orwig and Evangelical Church, *History of the Evangelical Association*, 1st ed. (Cleveland, Ohio: Charles Hammer, 1858), 404.. Raymond Wolf Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Evangelical Press, 1956), 501. and A. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association of North America and History of the United Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, Penna.: Publishing House of the United Evangelical Church, 1900), 665.

21 An exhorter was a lay minister in

the Methodist church, who did not "preach" but sometimes through very emotional appeals tried to bring listeners to a conversion experience. Stapleton described Riegel as an "independent" preacher which perhaps reflects the nonsectarian stance of the United Brethren group at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Albright was attracted to the more clearly articulated theology and discipline of the Methodist Church. Stapleton, 18-19.

22 Albright, 58-71. Albright's ordination was a full ten years before the United Brethren had any formal ordinations of ministers in the United Brethren Church. Up to 1813 the United Brethren were run by lay preachers, with Otterbein and Boehm serving as the only formal leaders.

23 Albright, 52, 80. On one occasion in a street meeting Albright told the Mennonites and Dunkards (Church of the Brethren) in the audience, "... with your peculiar dress and outward plainness, by which you comfort yourselves, you will be lost without the new birth, notwithstanding you have large farms and earthly possessions. Be not astonished that I said unto you, 'You must be born again,' ...."

24 Ruth, *The Earth is the Lord's*, 355-357.

25 John Herr, "Appendix" in *The True and Blessed Way which Leadeth Beneath the Cross to Heaven, Or A True Doctrine from the Word of God*, ed. Daniel Musser, 1875th ed. (Lancaster, PA: Inquirer Printing and Publishing Co., 1875), 342-345, 348-349.

26 Ruth, *The Earth is the Lord's*, 548. Political involvement continued in Herr's family. One of his non-Reformed Mennonite sons, John Forrer Herr, was elected to the Pennsylvania State Legislature in 1854. Wilmer J. Eshleman, *A History of the Reformed Mennonite Church*, Rev. - ed. (Lancaster, Pa.: S.N., 1969), 15.

27 J. C. Fretz, *The Early History of the Mennonites in Welland County, Ontario* (Kitchener, Ont.: J.C. Fretz, 1953), 23..

28 Harold Nigh, 13-14; Fretz, 4. Two sisters, Barbara Zavitz Ott (1765-1845) and Mary Zavitz Minor (1768-1844) also migrated. David A. Zavitz, "Zavitz, Savitz, Sevits, Sevit, Zewitz, Augustine, Stoner, Sherk, Fretz," RootsWeb.Com, <http://wc.rootsweb.com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/cgi-bin/>

[igm.cgi?db=dzavitz](http://igm.cgi?db=dzavitz) (accessed 30 Aug, 2005)..

29 Ruth, *The Earth is the Lord's : A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference*, 362; Nigh, *The Lost Tribes of the Niagara Plain Folk*, 17 ; Asa W. Climenhaga, *History of the Brethren in Christ Church* (Nappanee, Ind.: E.V. Pub. House, 1942), 92.; Sider and Brethren in Christ Church. Canadian Conference, *The Brethren in Christ in Canada : Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change*, 9-10; Daniel Wenger, "Welcome to the Hans and Hannah Wenger Genealogy Project," Daniel Wenger, <http://www.wengersundial.com/wengerfamily/index.html> (accessed August/11, 2005).

30 Sider, 10-11. The Pelham settlement would also have suffered when Minister Christian Stickly moved to the Markham, Ontario area by 1800. Sider, 11.

31 John F. Murray, *Neff Families and their Descendants in the 1700's and Early 1800's* (Kouts, IN: J.F. Murray, 1991), 43, [1].; John F. Murray, "A1-Line Dr. Francis and Barbara Neff," RootsWeb.Com, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~neff/a1-line.htm> (accessed August 30, 2005).; Violet Goold, "More on the Knisely Bible Story," *Mennonite Family History*, April 1988, 1988, 65.; Wayne Beam, "Beam Family of Canada," GenCircles, <http://www.gencircles.com/users/beams-of-canada/1> (accessed 30 August, 2005).

32 Ruth, *The Earth is the Lord's : A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference*, 362-365

33 "Meetings were held regularly in the old meeting-house by an early pioneer named Miller who resided beside the river. It is said he belonged to the church of the United Brethren in Pennsylvania which at that time was distinctly German, and that when he came to Canada he formed a little communal society which he called Mennonite, and thus they were not required to do military service. My grandmother was one of his adherents. Mr. Miller had a brother living on a neighbouring farm who was quite musical and who led the singing when his brother preached. Mr. Miller baptized his converts in the river." M. G. Sherk, *Reminiscences of the Upper*



*Part of the Old Niagara River Road* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1929), 10-11.. Mennonite Archives of Ontario, J.C. Fretz collection Box 1, folder 30.

34 Judith Hart, "Descendants of Christian Herche (Hershey)," Judith Hart, <http://www.myancestralfile.com/hershey/index.htm> (accessed August 16, 2005). Barbara Hershey Miller is no. 236. That John B. Hershey was originally a Mennonite minister is confirmed in Noah Good's list of ordinations in the Lancaster Conference found in Ruth, The Earth is the Lord's, p. 1149.

35 Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association of North America and History of the United Evangelical Church*, 109, Orwig, 84; Albright, 420; for Dreisbach's relatives in Upper Canada and quotations from his diary about an 1816 visit to Canada see "Descendants of Johannes George Buchs," <http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~mcclell2/homepage/buchs.rtf> (accessed August 16, 2005). For a biographical sketch of John Dreisbach

(1789-1871) see Stapleton, 525-528. 36 Newcomer, 308.

37 Burkholder, 244-245; Herr Genealogy for Henry Herr. The first Reformed Mennonite minister at Williamsville was John Reist (1800-1879). Reist was related by marriage to the Long family in Williamsville, who were also related by marriage to the Herrs. Reist and his family had actually immigrated to Bertie Township in 1800, and owned land where Fort Erie is presently located. When the War of 1812 broke out, they felt threatened by their location, and moved back across the Niagara River to Williamsville, N.Y. Henry G. Reist, *Peter Reist of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and some of His Descendants* (Schenectady, NY: H.G. Reist, 1933).

38 James A. Galloway, "Bicentennial Celebration," Boehm's Chapel Society, [http://www.boehmschapel.org/gene/%5Cdata%5CGalloway\\_1991.PDF](http://www.boehmschapel.org/gene/%5Cdata%5CGalloway_1991.PDF) (accessed May 18, 2005). The early date of this land donation would suggest the initial log church "may"

have been a Mennonite meetinghouse that became Reformed Mennonite when a majority of the congregation favored that affiliation after John Herr's visit to Canada in 1833.

39 Quoted in Albright, 410.

40 Orwig, 188.

41 Albright, 410-411. Martin Sheup was identified as Mennonite in Michael Gonder's 1837 Memorandum of Assessment for Willoughby Township. See J.C. Fretz, *The Early History of the Mennonites in Welland County*, p. 21.

42 Quoted in Orwig, 274.

43 Albright, 412.

44 Richard Rimmel, "'Ministers and Deacons of the Reformed Mennonite Church from the Time of John Herr'" (Photocopy of typescript, Waynesboro, PA, 1959)., Fretz 18, Burkholder, 246, Jill Fyffe, "Cowan/Stevens/Sisson/Gray/Halladay/Howell/Troup/Zavitz/Pendergast/Scarlett/Steele/Doan," RootsWeb's WorldConnect Project, <http://wc.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=saby&id=I5473> (accessed 30 December 2005, 2005).

## Elmira Farmers' Shed

By Marion Roes

When Mennonite farmers want to leave their horse-and-buggy sheltered from the elements while they do errands in Elmira, they can still use the Elmira Farmers' Shed. The steel shed of today is adjacent to the municipal parking lot just west of the main street in Elmira.

The Elmira Farmer's Shed has a long history. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hotel accommodation included stables for farmers' and travellers' horses. John Studdick, proprietor of the Floradale Hotel, advertised, "Good stabling. Good Livery in connection" in the 1899 Elmira newspapers. Ads for the Zilliax House in Elmira boasted, "The best accommodation for the travelling public. Good meals at all hours. Large Stables. An attentive hostler always at hand."

In 1920, the *Elmira Signet* reported that there were 139,288 motor vehicles owned in Ontario.<sup>1</sup> Garages to service

the automobiles were being built and in some cases were remodelled from former stables and liveries. In general, the need for public stables had diminished. Not so in Elmira. A large number of farmers, Mennonite and non-Mennonite, regularly brought their produce and trade to this community, especially for the monthly Pig Fair. When C. W. Quickfall purchased the Zilliax hotel barn on Church Street West in early 1920, he promised to "leave the shed open as long as possible for the accommodation of our farmers." However, the need for a replacement was inevitable. A committee was formed and members called a meeting for January 24, 1920. Farmers who made Elmira their marketing centre attended.

The *Elmira Signet* reported that:

Elmira has of late years had a steady growth. It has an industrial population that requires a larger

supply of natural products. Hence a larger number of farmers bring in their produce and trade in this community....This is a question affecting both the farmer and our citizenry. In the matter of shed accommodation Miss Elmira needs a new overcoat....It was agreed that the supplying of ample driving shed accommodation in Elmira—a neighborhood question—in which Elmira is as fully concerned as are the farmers; and that the two parties most directly interested can best solve it by together undertaking the provision of the desired shelter.<sup>2</sup>

At the meeting, 25 to 30 farmers heard that a sub committee had already looked at Linwood's metal clad skating rink building, which was for sale, but decided it would be too expensive to

~ Continued from page 9 ~

dismantle, move and rebuild. Henry Klinck and George Miller were appointed to meet with town council and ask for assistance. Council heard the representatives on January 27 and appointed a committee consisting of Messrs. Winger, Allgeier and Small to meet with the farmers' committee and make a decision.

### Joint Stock Company

On February 14, 1920, 40 persons elected Henry Klinck to be chairman of the meeting and Henry B. Eix secretary. A committee had viewed available sites and selected the one to the rear of the Genz and Hahn properties on Arthur Street, recently purchased by Mr. G. O. Wahl.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Wahl agreed to sell 105 feet at the rear of the property and a right-of-way 16 feet wide on the south side of the former Hahn property at the price of \$1,000. If a right-of-way was wanted on the north side, the cost would be \$1,300.

The plans were to erect a closed shed 180 x 57 feet and 28 feet high with an open shed on the south side 180 x 25 feet. Together they would accommodate 90 teams, or motor cars, figuring six feet to a team. The cost would be \$7,148, not including the land.

Councillor Allgeier reported that Mr. Winger already had subscriptions from local business men for \$450 and hoped to raise it to \$500 or more. Speaking on behalf of the Elmira council, Mr. Allgeier said that "while the Council could not give a driving shed company exemption from taxation, it was ready to give it a low assessment. And further it would, had it been legal to do so, make a grant toward building a shed."<sup>4</sup> A few men favored an open shed, but the motion to "build a shed on the Wahl property as proposed was passed." The driveway was to be on the south side and 18 feet wide.<sup>5</sup>

The Farmer's Co-operative Drivingshed Limited was the approved name of the joint stock company. Shares were to be \$25 each with a

limit of four to one person. Provisional directors and officers elected were: Benjamin Brubacher (president), Henry Klinck (secretary-treasurer), John Geisel, Adam Mattusch and David Brubacher.

### Elmira Monthly Fair

The Elmira Monthly Fair (Pig Day) is unique, [in] that it is the only one of its kind in the Dominion of Canada. Established in 1865, it is held the first Monday before the second Tuesday of each month, rain or shine. Auction centres are the Steddick Hotel and the front of the Farmers' Shed. Mennonite farmers and others come from the communities of three townships, with from 600 to 700 horses and buggies and cars, making the day more of a community get-together.<sup>6</sup>

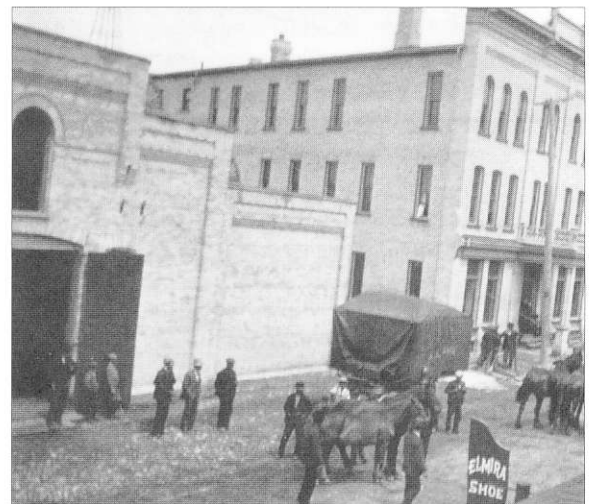
Sheep, cows, dogs and little pigs were traded or sold at the monthly fairs as well as anything second hand or homemade: furniture, farm implements, harnesses. Until sometime in the 1930s, Fair day business transactions—except pig sales—took place in front of Ruppel's store at Church and Arthur Streets. It had become a traffic hazard but police weren't able to disperse the crowd. Perhaps it was then that one of the auctioneers set up in front of the farmers' shed. Other auctioneers followed and the old custom was finally changed.<sup>7</sup>

### Shed collapses

Early Saturday morning, on January 26, 1952, the Elmira Farmers' Shed collapsed under tons of wet snow. From January 31 to March 13 that year the *Elmira Signet* reported on the collapse and the building "bee" for the new driving shed. Although it was the centre section which collapsed, "the standing end sections of the shed...will have to

be removed and the shed re-built from the foundation up."<sup>8</sup>

Serendipitously, the annual meeting of the shareholders had been scheduled for that Saturday morning. Directors elected by 160 shareholders present were: Israel Bearinger, Anson Gingrich, Cyrus Bowman, Enos M. Martin and Josiah G. Martin. The shed was insured against loss by fire and wind only. After a great deal of discussion, it was decided that a joint meeting was needed with the directors of the Farmers' Driving Shed of Elmira Ltd., the Planning Board of the Elmira Planning Area, the Elmira Town Council and building Inspector Norman Hipel. At this meeting, held on February 5, 1952, "Everyone agreed that shed accommodation was a necessity in Elmira and should be provided without delay."<sup>9</sup> Discussion included repairing the shed



*The Elmira Farmers' Shed replaced hotel livery stables such as these (left) at the Zilliax Hotel in Elmira about 1910. (Mennonite Archives of Ontario collection – Digital 122)*

and using salvaged material, however "since the shed was a public building, repair plans would have to be prepared by an architect and submitted to the department of labor for approval before the local building inspector could issue a permit."<sup>10</sup> If rebuilding was required, it would be more costly.

In the meantime, up to 40 farmers at a time worked at clearing twisted and broken arches, framework and metal roofing from the site. When it was de

cided that a new shed would be built on the existing foundation, another group of farmers, mostly Mennonite, took down the end sections.

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, [March 5, 6, 7] the gang swelled to 80 amateur carpenters who prefabricated the nine trusses on the ice-covered ground, laid the wood "plate" on the foundation walls, cut the inter-truss bracing to required length and made other preparations for Saturday's raising.<sup>11</sup>

On Saturday, March 8, 240 area farmers held a traditional "bee" and raised nine main trusses for a new building on the foundation of the old one. The first one was hoisted at 9:45 a.m. and the last went up in the early afternoon. Trusses, made of laminated wood and weighing about two tons each, were shoved into position with long, spiked poles. Clayton Martin of Floradale had the contract and the only others paid were carpenters Amon Bowman, RR 1, Wallenstein and Amos Martin, Floradale. Bowman proved to be "an expert in organizing and directing the labor force."<sup>12</sup>

Net cost of the new structure, which had a gable roof lower than the previous shed, was expected to be \$8,000. The company planned to pay for it through the sale of additional stock and hoped-for cash donations. Enos M. Martin, company president, expressed heartfelt appreciation:

The directors and officers of the Farmer's Driving Shed of Elmira Ltd., and all the farmers who regularly trade in Elmira, sincerely appreciate the co-

operation they have received in town during the past few weeks. We have felt that the people of Elmira were really anxious to help us. We especially appreciate the generous donations we are receiving from merchants and businessmen. Without all this help we ourselves couldn't have replaced the very necessary farmers' shed.<sup>13</sup>

#### Annual Meetings

The *Elmira Fair Dealer* reported the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the Elmira Farmer's Driving Shed in 1962:

Re-elected were: Enos M. Martin, R.R. 1, Elmira, president; Ephriam L. Martin, Drayton, R.R. 2, secretary-treasurer; Josiah G. Martin, Wallenstein, R.R. 2, vice-president; Cyrus Bowman, Elmira, R.R. 3, and Moses Eby, Elmira, directors.

The business was reported to have a total income for the year of \$2,032. The price of all-day accommodation for horse-drawn vehicles had remained at the historic price of 10 cents—"the only thing in life which hasn't increased in cost through the years," as one member remarked.

The capital of the business was placed at \$11,175, representing a total of 447 shares issued.<sup>14</sup>



*When the shed collapsed under the weight of heavy snow in 1952, it was rebuilt with a "shed-raising" bee. (Mennonites Archives of Ontario collection – David Hunsberger 955)*

The financial report of the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting in 1963 was similar:

Most of the present directors have been in office for about 10 years....The shed is believed to be one of three of its kind in Ontario. The other two are in Waterloo and St. Jacobs. The Elmira shed is under the supervision of a caretaker, who is Elam Gingrich of Elmira. One of Elmira's senior citizens, Mr. Henry Klinck, was treasurer of the company for 30 years. The prices for accommodation have remained unchanged through the years. These charges are 10 cents for a horse in the shed, 25 cents for all-day stabling, plus feed, when horses are unhitched.

The shed continues to be busy with as many as 50 to 60 buggies on the premises at one time. The traditional purposes of the building have also been maintained. These are to provide accommodation for horses, and for farmers to keep warm and meet their neighbours. "It is also a place where a lot of news gets spread around," remarked a member.



*Today the Elmira Farmers' Shed is made of steel. (Photo by Marion Roes)*



~ Continued from page 11 ~

The farmers' shed warrants almost a full page of description in the 1973 reunion book for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Elmira. Information is mostly anecdotal but indicates the importance of the shed to the community:

The doors of the Farmers' Shed stand wide open as they do all the time except for several occasions during the year when damage by pranksters is feared. The manager of the Shed is James Ertel and he is eager to point out that he is the "boss." The rates are very modest with a day's board amounting to only thirty-five cents... Sunday the shed is closed. There are fifty-five season ticket holders who may come from as far away as Conestogo, Erbsville, Linwood, St Jacobs, Winterbourne and Wallenstein. Mr. Ertel knows every one of these men.<sup>15</sup>

Over 40 years later, in 1998, the shed was once again destroyed, this time by fire and under suspicious circumstances. Once again a shed-raising bee was organized in the Mennonite community, but this time the building was made of steel.

Today the Elmira Farmers' Shed is still run by a five-man board appointed by the various farmers who own the shares. The doors are still always open; a caretaker cleans the shed morning and evening and the office and washrooms are locked up overnight. The rates, either daily or yearly, are still modest but cover the cost of taxes and upkeep. Today the Elmira Farmers' Shed is probably the only one of its kind in the province.

#### (Endnotes)

- 1 *Elmira Signet*, "Farmers Ask Aid In Providing Ample Drivingshed Accommodation," January 29, 1920
- 2 *ibid*
- 3 "Farmers Favor Building Shed on Wahl Property," *Elmira Signet*, February 19, 1920, pg 1.
- 4 *ibid*
- 5 *ibid*

- 6 *Souvenir of the Elmira Old Boys and Girls Reunion 1948*, Souvenir Booklet Committee (Elmira ON, 1948) pp. 35, 36.
- 7 Isaac R. Horst, *Up the Conestogo*, (Mt. Forest, ON, 1979) p. 201.
- 8 *Elmira Signet*, "Remove Wreckage of Driving Shed, Plan Replacement," February 14, 1952, pg 1.
- 9 *Elmira Signet*, "Shed Facilities are Needed Here Joint Meeting Agrees," February 7, 1952.
- 10 *ibid*
- 11 *Elmira Signet*, "Volunteers Stage 'Bee' To Raise Framework for New Driving Shed," March 13, 1952.
- 12 *ibid*
- 13 *ibid*
- 14 *Elmira Fair Dealer*, "Re-elect Farmers' Shed Directors," February 7, 1962, pp. 1, 5.
- 15 *The Elmira Old Boys & Girls Reunion 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, June 29 - July 2, "A Visit Into The Present," Anniversary Booklet Committee, (Elmira ON, 1973), pg. 47.*

## Alsace ancestors

Alfred Kleitz is researching families who emigrated from Dettwiller, Alsace, to Ontario. He would like to update his information and will give details he has found if you contact him at [alfred.kleitz@wanado.fr](mailto:alfred.kleitz@wanado.fr).

Please write to him in French if you can, or he will have your message translated. Alfred will send a 16-page chart of immigrants with their families. Marion Roes has the chart as an e-mail attachment and will forward it on request ([mlroes@sympatico.ca](mailto:mlroes@sympatico.ca)).

## Catharine Rittenhouse Coverlet discovered

By Larry Rittenhouse

One of the few Rittenhouse ancestors that Larry Rittenhouse had very little information on was his great-grand aunt, Catharine Rittenhouse (1838-1872), older sister of Moses F. Rittenhouse and Larry's great-grandfather, Rev. Abraham F. Rittenhouse.

All he knew was her birth and death dates and that she had been married to Jacob Swartz. There were no photographs or a family Bible. Very little is known about her husband, either. Catharine died young at the age of 34 years and is buried in the Vineland Old Mennonite cemetery. They had no children and no records have been found on Jacob's later life, but we believe he remarried at least once.

It was certainly a very pleasant surprise when Jane and Gil Pether of Port Elgin visited the Jordan

Museum in September, 2005 with a beautiful black and white (summer/winter) reversible coverlet, originally belonging to Catharine. It has her name in full, on a corner with the date, 1857. After a lot of research, it still is not known how the coverlet ended up in a Pether family blanket box. The family originally lived in the Beamsville area and have connections with the Simpkins, Masales, Hendershot, McCallum, Ball and Swackhammer families.

Based on similar designs on a Christina Rittenhouse 1870 coverlet and a Garner 1860 coverlet, it is almost certainly a coverlet woven by Moses Grobb, Catharine's uncle and was likely made for her trousseau.

It is hoped that the Pethers will donate the coverlet to the Jordan Museum collection in the near future.