

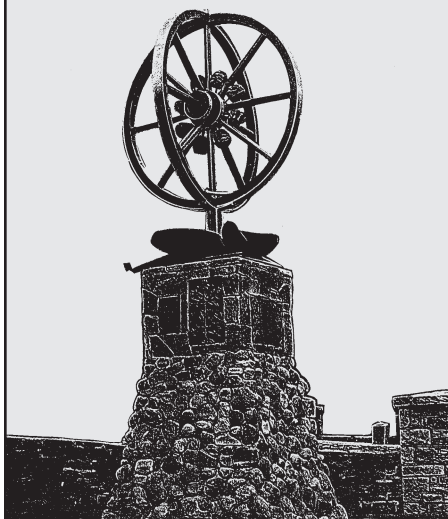
# Ontario Mennonite History

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## Old Order Amish a diverse group

By Barb Draper

The Old Order Amish in Canada are a diverse group, explained Fred Lichti at the fall meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, held on Oct. 15, 2016, at Milverton Mennonite Fellowship. Milverton is a small town a half hour west of Kitchener-Waterloo. There are 21 different Amish settlements or communities mostly scattered throughout southern Ontario. Each of these settlements has its own idiosyncrasies as buggy styles and other customs are not necessarily the same in each community.

The Amish originate from a division among Anabaptist/Mennonites in Europe in the late 1600s when Jacob Ammann's plan to bring renewal to the church in Switzerland and Alsace resulted in a church split. Over the centuries Old Order Mennonites and Amish have had little formal cooperation, but they have many similarities. They cooperate informally and sometimes live in neighbouring geographical areas.

The largest Amish settlement in Canada is in the Milverton area. When the Amish first came from Europe to Waterloo Region in 1823, they settled west of Kitchener and then spread from there. By 1874 they were moving into Mornington Township, where Milverton is located. When some Amish began building meetinghouses in the 1880s, the Amish of the Milverton area did not all agree, resulting in a split. The progressives built meetinghouses and eventually referred to themselves as "Mennonite," while the traditionalists are the people we now refer to as "Amish." They continue to meet in homes for worship on Sunday mornings and use the term "district" to refer to those who consider themselves one congregation.

The Amish in the Milverton area had little growth for nearly 100 years, but since the 1980s and 90s they have grown rapidly and their population has doubled since 1999. The Milverton Amish tend to have more traditional dress than

many other Amish communities. They do not use covered buggies and their buggy wheels have steel rims. According to Lichti, common surnames in the Milverton area are Kuepfer, Albrecht, Jantzi and Streicher, names that are not common in other Amish communities.

Other Amish groups moved to Ontario between 1953 and 1970, looking for good places to settle. In 1953 a group from Ohio settled in the Aylmer area, south of London, and today they have three districts and a daughter community in the Lindsay area.

These Aylmer Amish are probably the most open to outsiders, says Lichti. In 1964, David Wagler and Joseph Stoll began a publishing venture that doesn't use electricity from the grid. Since the beginning, Pathway Publishing House has been putting out three monthly publications: *Family Life* for families; *Young Companion* for young adults; and *Blackboard Bulletin* for teachers. These are widely read by Amish and traditionalist Mennonites throughout the U.S. and Canada. They also publish books and educational material for Amish parochial schools.



*The Clayton Kuepfer goat farm, south of Millbank, has a telephone shed along the laneway.*

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In 1954, a group of Amish families moved from the U.S. to Ontario and began a settlement southwest of Owen Sound. These Swartzentruber Amish, who separated from other Amish in 1917, are ultraconservative. They allow less technology and have no gas lamps, no indoor plumbing, no flowerbeds and no orange triangles (slow moving vehicle signs) on their buggies. In 2008, several families began a daughter community in the Iron Bridge area, east of Sault Ste. Marie.

Also in 1954 a group of Troyer Amish from the U.S. moved to the Norwich area, south of Woodstock. This group has several daughter communities. In 1973 some families moved to the area around Lucknow, not far from Lake Huron. This community has grown to become the second largest community in Ontario. According to Lichti, the Amish around Lucknow have nine schools and six sawmills. These Troyer Amish have continued to spread throughout Ontario with smaller communities near Belleville (begun 2001) and more recently in northern Ontario near Englehart and Earlton. In 2015, about 15 families of these Troyer Amish moved to Prince Edward Island to begin a new community there.

In 1958 a fifth type of Amish moved to Ontario from Maryland, Delaware

and Pennsylvania. This community near St. Mary's, south of Stratford, remains small although they also have a daughter community near Powassan begun in 2001. This Amish group is the most similar to the Amish of Lancaster County, Pa., and uses more technology than other Amish in Ontario. Lichti mentioned that part of the draw to the Powassan area, north of Huntsville, was more opportunities for hunting.

The Milverton Amish have also been spreading to new areas. New communities were established in the Chesley area in 1979, in the Kincardine/Tiverton area in 1995 and in the Clifford area in 1998. These communities are of reasonable size with 25 to 40 families each. A small community of five families has also been living on Manitoulin Island since 2013 and in 2016 six families moved to Prince Edward Island. They live on the east side of PEI near Montague.

Glenn Zehr also addressed the historical society, talking about changes he has seen over the years that he has been acting as an interpreter of the Amish way of life. Earlier in the day he had arranged to have part of the group eat an Amish noon meal at the home of Dorothy Zehr and her family just outside Milverton. Later in the afternoon, historical society members had the option of visiting two Amish farms, one with a buggy shop and the other a goat farm.

According to Glenn Zehr, the style of worship among the Milverton



*An Amish parochial school near Milverton. Notice the scooter which children use instead of bicycles.*

Amish has not changed much. They continue to read the Bible and sing in High German while preaching is done in Pennsylvania German. They sing slowly, using the *Ausbund*, a songbook dating back to the 1500s. The Sunday morning service, held in a home, or sometimes in a barn or buggy shed in the summer, lasts about three hours, from 9 a.m. to noon. The host family provides a light lunch of bread and butter, cheese, jams, spreads and pickles for the 75 to 100 people in attendance.

The children are educated in Amish private schools where the language of instruction is English. High German is taught in the schools, but the children find English much easier to read, said Dorothy Zehr. The Amish community of Milverton has eight parochial schools.

Glenn also discussed other changes he has seen, living among them for many years. In the old days they were primarily farmers, but now with farmland hard to access and very expensive, many of them do work such as construction. Where they used to do field work with horses, today they often hire custom workers to do the planting and harvesting. Although the Milverton Amish do not own cars or tractors, some contractors own trucks that are driven by their non-Amish employees. Glenn wouldn't be surprised if they change their position so that tractors are allowed within the next ten years or so, since they



*James Ebersol has solar panels on his buggy-wheel shop to help power his tools.*





*The interior of an Amish house is fairly plain. Benches provide seating for a large group.*

are hiring so many custom operators to do the work in the fields.

Since the 1990s, telephones have come to the Milverton Amish, but not in the houses. Little telephone booths are near the end of the lane or at least some distance from the house. They usually have some type of message system since there is rarely anyone available to answer the phone directly. Glenn also thinks that there are cell phones or maybe even smart phones among the Amish, but probably

they are not carried openly. He assumes their position on cell phones is changing.

Another change in more recent years is the amount of travel done by the Amish. In earlier years Amish families would only hire a driver for long-distance health appointments, but these days they frequently hire drivers to visit relatives, to go shopping, or even to travel as tourists. Like other Old Order groups the Amish do not fly, but recently a group travelled to Europe by ship to participate in a heritage tour.

Although the Amish do not use electricity from the grid, they find ways to generate power to operate their tools. James Ebersol, who makes buggy wheels, uses solar panels to charge his batteries, but when the sun is not shining, or if he needs lots of power to do welding, he uses diesel power to create DC power.

Ebersol, who used to make buggy wheels out of wood, now imports fibreglass buggy wheels from Fort Wayne, Indiana. In his shop he inserts metal hubs and puts a half-inch steel tire around the rim of the wheel. These days most new buggy wheels are made of fibreglass. Because wood expands and

shrinks with the temperature, wooden-spoke wheels don't last as long as fibreglass ones. The buggy boxes, shafts and seats are now also made of fibreglass and Ebersol has gone from making complete buggies to replacing wheels. He ships the wheels to many places, but most of his customers are Amish.

Because the Amish have a lot of congregational autonomy, there are slight differences between the settlements in their styles of dress and where they draw the line on technology. Some are more isolationist and less willing to accept government allowances or insurance plans, others are more open to outsiders. The Amish tend to be entrepreneurial and are generally happy to sell their products to non-Amish neighbours. They tend to have a high retention rate and their communities are continuing to grow.

Many thanks to Fred Lichti, pastor of Elmira Mennonite Church, and Glenn Zehr, retired (Amish) Mennonite pastor, for maintaining connections with the Amish community and sharing their insights with the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

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

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

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

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# Old Order Amish in Canada – 45 Districts

Compiled by Fred Lichti

## Milverton/Millbank and daughter communities:

1. Milverton-Millbank: 10 districts (265 families). 1886; descendants of the original Amish immigrants from Europe 1822-1860.
2. Chesley: 2 districts (26 families). 1979, Milverton Amish.
3. Kincardine/Tiverton: 2 districts (40 families). 1995, Milverton Amish.
4. Greenbush (Clifford): 1 district (31 families). 1998, Milverton Amish.
5. Manitoulin Island: 1 district (5 families). 2013, Milverton Amish.
6. Montague, P.E.I.: 1 district (6 families). 2016, Milverton Amish.

## Aylmer and daughter communities:

7. Aylmer: 3 districts (96 families). 1953, Amish migration from U.S. (operate Pathway Publishing House and Heritage Historical Library).
8. Lindsay: 1 district (27 families). 1998, Aylmer Amish.

## Swartzentruber Amish:

9. Desboro (southwest of Owen Sound): 3 districts (67 families). 1954, Swartzentruber Amish migration from U.S.
10. Iron Bridge (Blind River): 1 district (12 families). 2008, Swartzentruber Amish.

## Norwich and daughter communities:

11. Norwich (south of Woodstock): 4 districts (90 families). 1954, Troyer Amish migration from U.S.
12. Lucknow: 5 districts (100 families). 1973, Troyer Amish from Norwich.
13. Belleville: 1 district (24 families). 2001, Norwich Troyer Amish.
14. Englehart: 1 district (18 families). 2009, Norwich/Lucknow Troyer Amish.
15. Earlton: 1 district. 2013
16. Langton: 1 district (4 families).
17. Summerville, P.E.I.: 1 district (15 families). 2015, Norwich Amish.

## St. Mary's/Lakeside:

18. St. Mary's/Lakeside: 1 district (20 families). 1958, Amish migration from Maryland, Delaware and Pennsylvania.
19. Powassan: 1 district (27 families). 2001, Lakeside Amish.

## Other:

20. Mt. Elgin (south of Woodstock): 3 districts (43 families). 1962, Amish from Iowa, U.S.
21. Richmond Corner, New Brunswick: 1 district. 1994 (One of the "Christian Communities" founded by Elmo Stoll).

(Sources: 2015 Old Order Amish Directory Milverton Area and Branches Vol. 4; "Old Order Amish Address and Business Directory 2015" GA Printing, Norwich, Ont.; "Amish Settlements 2013" by Luthy and Donnermeyer in Family Life, Jan. 2014; "Amish Population by State/Province, 2016" Young Centre for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Elizabethtown College.)



# Amish Communities in Ontario

# John R. Ebersol – Amish Inventor, Businessman and Church Lay Leader

*Compiled by Fred Lichti*

Just as physical characteristics pass from one generation to the next, similarly aptitude and inclinations can be traced in blood lines. Succeeding generations of the Ebersol family seemed to have a gift for creativity and things mechanical. More than the average, Ebersols were occupied as threshers, sawyers, chair makers, shop fabricators and machine operators. The story and legacy of Amish fraktur artist, Barbara Ebersol (1846-1922), has been told and depicted in at least two books.<sup>i</sup> Lesser known is the legacy of her nephew, John R. Ebersol, inventor and entrepreneur.

Although John was born and raised in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where the majority of Ebersols are found today, the roots of this Amish family are French and Canadian. Christian Ebersol Sr. (1788-1862) and his wife, Susanna Neuhauser (1777-1849) were born and married in France. They were part of the mass migration of Alsatian Amish immigrants who settled in Wilmot Township from 1823-1850s as the family arrived in Upper Canada about 1832. They are buried in the “Christner Cemetery” located on the former Christian Ebersol farm, North Sniders Road, Wilmot Township, on a bluff overlooking the Nith River.

In 1837, their son, Christian Ebersol Jr., married Elizabeth Stoltzfus and moved to her home community in Leacock Township, Lancaster County. This couple had ten children, including the aforementioned Barbara. Their son David and his wife, Esther Riehl, were the parents of John R. Ebersol.

John was born Feb. 16, 1874. At the age of 21 he married Laura Miller and they had three children: Aaron, Daniel and Esther. Laura died in 1904. Whether on business or visiting his Ebersol relatives in Canada, John found his second wife, Magdalena (Mattie) Schmidt (born Feb. 11, 1873), in Millbank, Ontario. In a pre-nuptial agreement, Mattie agreed to marry John and move to Lancaster, Pa. with the understanding that if she didn’t like living in the U.S., they would move back to her home community. They were married March 18, 1906 in the Mornington Amish Mennonite Meetinghouse by Bishop Nicolaus Nafziger and moved to Lancaster, Pa. In March 1908 they moved back to Ontario with the three children from his first wife. John and Mattie had two children, a stillborn child and a daughter, Sarah (Aug. 16, 1912 - July 4, 1997). Sarah joined the Riverdale Mennonite Church in Millbank and is buried in the Riverdale Cemetery. John died Sept. 26, 1950 and Mattie (Schmidt) Ebersol died Aug. 1, 1952. Both are buried in the Edgcombe Amish Cemetery, Newton, Ontario.

As a young man John operated two threshing rigs in the Lancaster community and became concerned about the dangers and inefficiencies associated with hand feeding threshing machines. At the time sheaves were thrown onto a stand in front of the cylinder of the threshing machine and a man was

required to cut the bands and then, with both hands, feed the grain into the cylinder—a dangerous and unpleasant job. Around the time that his first wife died, a number of Amish men from John’s neighbourhood travelled to Waynesboro, Pa., to investigate the self feeder which the Geiser Manufacturing Company advertised for sale. Some in their party were impressed and bought the Geiser Company invention to attach to their threshers. John was unimpressed and called it a mere “sheaf carrier.” John dreamed of building a more sophisticated self-feeder which would prevent the threshing machine from choking and provide greater safety for the man feeding sheaves into the thresher. Consumed by this dream, John was often found staring at the man feeding the threshing machine when he was supposed to be tending his steam engine as it powered the thresher.<sup>ii</sup>

Finally, in 1908 just before he moved his family to Ontario, John finished building a prototype of his self-feeder. Because the grain harvest came earlier in Lancaster than Ontario, John’s prototype was attached to his brother David’s thresher and tested in the summer of 1908. Still in need of fine tuning, it was shipped to John in Ontario who made the necessary adaptations at his brother-in-law’s repair shop which was located at the site of the current Wellesley Apple Cider Mill.

The next summer John asked his brother to re-test his invention but not wanting to be bothered, David declined. Undeterred, John then asked his former Lancaster County neighbour, Reuben Z. Stoltzfus, if he’d be willing to try out his invention. Stoltzfus agreed with the understanding that if the Ebersol self-feeder worked and became marketable, he would become the American supplier of self feeders.<sup>iii</sup> John’s intention to secure a U.S. patent for his invention was strongly opposed by the Amish ministers in Lancaster.<sup>iv</sup> Thus, on Aug. 15, 1908 he applied for a Canadian patent for his invention and a year later was issued Patent No. 120262.

In 1909 John bought three acres of land at 98 Mill Street East in Milverton, Ont., near the Grand Truck Railway tracks. Here he built a two-storey shop and began producing self feeders. Ebersol self-feeders could be attached to many brands of threshers and grew in popularity. They were soon shipped all over Canada, the U.S.A., Central and South America and Russia. A report from John H. Kauffman in the Jan 31, 1917 issue of the Amish newspaper, *The Budget*, reads: “Bird-in-Hand, Jan, 26, 1917. John Ebersol of Canada is also spending some time here looking after his interests in the sale of self feeders of threshing machines which he makes. There are a number of them in use here and giving good service.” For 25 years the Ebersol Manufacturing Company prospered and John expanded production to include other farm equipment like straw choppers, manure spreaders, feed mixers and snow blowers.

*~ Continued on page 6 ~*





*Ebersol manufacturing plant in Milverton, 1936  
(Photos courtesy of Fred Lichti)*

Through his experience in business, John acquired some skills which set him apart from his peers in the Amish community. He was fluent in English, an able letter writer and comfortable dealing with broader society. When Canada entered WW I and passed a conscription law, the Old Order Amish ministers appointed him to assist young men called up for military service. John accompanied young Amishmen to the tribunals which ruled on their applications for exemption from military service and on behalf of the Old Order Amish congregations reached out to Mennonite Bishop S. F. Coffman of Vineland for advice and help.

Although the vast majority of his Amish contemporaries were farmers, John was an inventor and businessman. As a successful businessman he remained committed to the Amish church all his life. Like a typical Amishman, Ebersol wore a straw hat most of the time in his manufacturing plant and office. An inquisitive travelling salesman who frequently visited the Ebersol plant once asked John, "Why do you wear a straw hat all the time?" Demonstrating his wit and sense of humour John quickly replied, "To keep my brains cool so that I can mind my own business."<sup>v</sup>



About 1930 John passed his business to his son, Aaron. By 1933 the company employed 12 workers. Like his father, Aaron had a creative, mechanical mind. He improved the grain harvesting process by designing a straw shredder which attached to the rear of the threshing machine and received a patent for his invention in 1941. Under Aaron's management, the Ebersol Manufacturing Company greatly expanded its product lines so that by 1954 they were manufacturing 12 large items. The Ebersols even did their own smelting and melted down scrap metal and poured their own molds.<sup>vi</sup>

Advertisements for the Ebersol self-feeder claimed that it "is more sensitive than human hands" and "Does everything but talk." The Ebersol self-feeder was known to thresher men as "the feeder with the governor" or "the feeder with brains." One advertisement claimed that the Ebersol Farm Equipment Co. Manufacturers sold "Ebersol special feeders, straw shredders, feed mixers, hay and straw shredding unites, grain throwers, hay and straw throwers, grapple hay forks and general repairing."<sup>vii</sup>

As the Ebersol Manufacturing Company grew, Aaron saw the need to accept public electricity and the telephone. To avoid the censure of his church, he took on two non-Amish partners whom, it was said, owned the hydro and the telephone.<sup>viii</sup> Nonetheless, tensions between those who resisted newer technology and those, like the Ebersol family, who accepted newer technology finally resulted in a division in the Mornington Old Order Amish congregation. Along with the Ebersols, a number of families formed the Steckley Old Order Amish District in 1945. Over the next 30 years the Steckley District accepted tractors, hydro, telephones and cars. Discontented with this latter innovation, Aaron's son took his family back into the Mornington Old Order Amish Church about 1976.<sup>ix</sup>

With the invention of the self-propelled combine, harvesting grain changed dramatically. Except in Old Order communities, combines displaced shocks, grain binders and threshing machines. The Ebersol Manufacturing Company was sold to non-Amish parties and fell on hard times. Various product lines and equipment were sold off and the company finally closed in 1967.

With the invention of the Ebersol Self-Feeder, John R. Ebersol significantly improved the safety and efficiency of the threshing process. His business acumen and ability to communicate served his community well during WWI when his church appointed him as the advocate for young men seeking exemption from military service. In this role he also served as the Old Order Amish correspondent and liaison with military officials and other Amish and Mennonite leaders who advocated for conscientious objectors in Canada. John's descendants in the Ontario Amish community are very active in repair shops, chair-making, construction and the horse industry, proof that the Ebersol gene for inventiveness and entrepreneurship is still being passed on.

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- <sup>ii</sup> Beiler, Elias. Newsletter of Pequea Bruderschaft Library. Vol. 7, No. 1. April 1999, pg. 3.
- <sup>iii</sup> Elias Beiler writes that his grandfather, Reuben Z. Stoltzfus, had the rights to sell the Ebersol Self Feeder in the USA from 1913-1923. His sales were brisk in Lancaster, Chester, Birks, Mifflin and Somerset Counties in Pa. and Norfolk County, Va.
- <sup>iv</sup> Stoltzfus, Sam. From Mainstream Pequea "The Ebersol Self Feeder". *Plain Communities Business Exchange*. Nov. 1993, pg. 5.
- <sup>v</sup> *The Amish of Canada*. Gingerich, Orland pg. 171.
- <sup>vi</sup> Interview with James Ebersol by Fred Lichti, Dec. 8, 2016.
- <sup>vii</sup> See the Ebersol File, Heritage Historical Library, Aylmer, Ontario.
- <sup>viii</sup> David Luthy interview with John K. Ebersol. March 26, 1986.
- <sup>ix</sup> Interview with James Ebersol by Fred Lichti, Dec. 8, 2016.

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## Yoder Reunion to feature Swiss cousins

Former Steffisburg, Switzerland official, Hans Jakob Joder, and his son Andreas, a prominent engineer, will be featured at the 2017 National Yoder Reunion to be held Sept. 20-23 in Shipshewana, Indiana. Steffisburg, where Joders have lived for more than half a millennium, is the point of origin for all Yoders of North America. Hans Jakob and Andreas will talk about the "Joder-Steffisburg Connection" using photographs and illustrations from the town.

"Hans Yoder of Great Swamp" is thought to be the first of the Anabaptist Yoders to come to America in August of 1717 and this reunion will celebrate the 300th anniversary.

Another confirmed speaker is Joe Springer, curator of the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College since 1986. He will give an outline of Anabaptist history with emphasis on the Swiss Anabaptist and the formation of the Amish. He recently published a two-volume, *Montbéliard Mennonite Church Register, 1750-1958: A Sourcebook for Amish Mennonite History and Genealogy*. He will detail his findings on the different Yoder family branches who lived in Alsace from the late 1600s, many of whom emigrated in the 19th century.

Chris Yoder, editor of the Yoder Newsletter ([www.yodernewsletter.org](http://www.yodernewsletter.org)) since 1983, will provide an overview of the various Yoder branches in America and will also discuss the results of the Yoder DNA study.

For more program and registration details contact Chris Yoder, [cyoder@tds.net](mailto:cyoder@tds.net) or call him at 616-212-3443.



*Andreas and Hans Jakob Joder of Steffisburg, Switzerland, will speak at the Yoder reunion in Shipshewana, Indiana, in September.*

# Our People of the Land: Their architecture and their cultures – a few thoughts

by Karl Dick, Waterloo, ON

Maurice Martin, in the *Canadian Mennonite*, May 9, 2016, wrote that Swiss Mennonites and Dutch/Russian Mennonites settling in North America, had different landscape preferences based on what they experienced in their place of origin. Similar observations can be made regarding the farmstead architecture employed by these two rural groups. Sociologists have pointed out that isolated groups with distinctive cultural practices often constructed their buildings in a way that reflected their particular traditions.

Let me digress with a fascinating example. In the summer of 2016, a research study of the causes of childhood asthma was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The Hutterite children in this study experienced asthma at a rate similar to the general population, while the Amish children had almost no asthma cases. The article stated that both groups originated in Europe, emigrated to the United States in the 1700s and 1800s and have remained reproductively isolated. Their lifestyles are similar except that the Amish live on traditional family farms while the Hutterites live on large, communal farms that are largely industrialized. What was striking in the study is that the rate of asthma among the Amish children is 5.2 percent compared to a rate of 21.3 percent among Hutterite schoolchildren.

The explanation given by the researchers is that Amish children are exposed to farm animals from a very young age, while Hutterite children live in a more sanitized environment. Both groups are renowned for being fastidious about cleanliness, but under the microscope, the kitchen floor sweepings were quite distinctive! What the allergist stumbled onto in the medical realm could also be an interesting topic in the sociological realm.

Anabaptists escaping persecution in the north and the south of Europe moved east in the 17th century, and across the Atlantic in the 18th century, respectively. In Poland and Ukraine the new immigrants' buildings, including the barns, were usually of brick, with as many ornate embellishments as the owner could afford. The churches were invariably built in the classical Prussian style with no steeples and a decidedly neo-Romanesque look, complete with red clay tiles on the roof.

By contrast, the Swiss and South-German Anabaptists initially met in covert ways, although by the 18th century many enjoyed greater tolerance. In Pennsylvania, the buildings were quite simple, often a frame building with white clapboard. By the 20th century the Amish and Old Order groups had maintained an austere, plain style, with unfinished wood on the interior. More progressive urban congregations, on the other hand, later employed brick in whatever mode the local customs dictated.

For the Dutch/Prussian/Ukrainian Mennonite farmers in eastern Europe the 18th and 19th century, barns were

commonly built on level ground, with granaries and hay storage on the second floor (and houses and barns usually integrated into one building). The South Germans, on the other hand, almost always looked for a sloping location where a bank barn could be constructed. A beautiful example of this is found in the Black Forest Open Air Museum (Vogtsbauernhof) near Gutach, Germany, with a farmhouse dating from 1612 where the occupants lived on the masonry-walled ground floor. The animals were kept in the immediately-adjacent stable, and the crops stored on the spacious second floor. Not surprisingly, the rolling topography of Pennsylvania and Virginia happily reminded the Anabaptist immigrants of the south German landscape they had left behind.

For the Mennonites living in Russia (Ukraine), the traditional farmstead had a huge brick oven separating the living quarters from the stable with straw often used for fuel due to the scarcity of firewood. As the brick retained the heat of the fire, bread-baking was possible. Wealthier homeowners were able to employ cast-iron stoves that burned coal.



*This farmhouse museum near Gutach, Germany, shows architecture built into a slope. Perhaps Swiss Mennonites had this in mind when they built their barns and houses into hillsides with outdoor access on two levels.*

*(Photos courtesy of Karl Dick)*



Upon immigrating to Canada and the U.S. in the 1870s and later, these folks from Russia's steppes were happy to find large tracts of level land in North America. Their impoverished immigrant circumstances didn't permit the building of ornate, large brick homesteads until the second or third generation.

In fascinating contrast to the flat Russian topography, my grandfather, Peter Jacob Dick, purchased a hilly farmstead in 1925 where Marsland Drive is now located in Waterloo. The house, built around 1830 by Caspar Schneider, a German immigrant, consisted of barn-like mortised and tenoned post-and-beam construction. The intermediate studs were 3 inches by 6 inches, on top of a fieldstone foundation. This house was situated like a bank barn, with the kitchen in the basement and the seldom-used formal entrance on the next level. This was the traditional Swiss Mennonite house style, similar to the layout of the Brubacher House at the University of Waterloo.

How do landscapes influence construction methods and how do a settler's customs determine the nature of the buildings constructed? Perhaps you have heard the laments of prairie Mennonites who have moved to Waterloo Region, saying they no longer have the vast landscapes of the west to give them a sense of freedom. Do the "Russian" Mennonites consequently have an innately different view of how to experience (and crave) liberty in both a philosophical and religious sense? Perhaps the steppe/prairie landscape breeds a more independent spirit! There is plenty of evidence for this, some will say, in view of the significant diversity in matters of faith for Mennonites in our western provinces, and the daunting task it was, to meld the polity of the three streams in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada.

A more murky religious matter concerns the folk art symbols on Pennsylvania barns and there is some indication that this was purely a tourist promotion device. Interestingly, the German-heritage barn on my grand-

father's farm in Waterloo, had a simple cut-out design in the gable as did most of our neighbours' barns. Legend has it that among German Lutherans the Maltese cross protected the barn from fire.

One could ask how the ethnic homogeneity within Swiss and Russian Mennonites has been affected by their propensity for living in close proximity to their kinfolk. In the case of the Russian migrants, the Canadian immigration policies of the 1920s and the late 1940s often required that applicants be sponsored. This led to urban and rural settlement patterns being concentrated in certain areas, and preserved many aspects of their cultural lives, including marriage. The Prussian system of an Ältester (bishop) monitoring everyday life matters, civic as well as spiritual, certainly brought conformity with it.

There is also a shadow looming over how the New World settlements, for both Swiss and Russian immigrants, were made possible by the colonial-era governments opening up "vacant" lands that were occupied by aboriginal peoples. There was little awareness among the immigrants of how land was acquired; they generally saw the availability of vast tracts of land as being a blessing granted by God.

Another distinction between the two European branches of Anabaptist culture is that in Ukraine many rural households included local people as maids, nannies, and stable help. Swiss-German farms were much smaller, without the need for hiring extra help beyond the extended family. So the typical Russian Mennonite farmstead of the 1800s often included accommodations for extra workers, but always somewhere in the back part of the structure, with far more



*Mennonite barns in Ukraine were built on flat terrain.*

spartan arrangements. The workers are often referred to as "Russians" in memoirs. Some inter-marriage between the groups occurred occasionally.

These folk who originated in the Netherlands and Prussia identified with the culture of Germany. Thus farmsteads, although somewhat adapted to the climate of the steppes, were patterned after the modes one can still see today in the Vistula area of Poland. The elaborate harness designs portrayed in early photographs from Ukraine were also no doubt based on what they envied in Germany's upper classes. Post-secondary education in Ukraine invariably involved travelling to Germany or Moscow. Many a home had a piano in the front room and there were even a few pipe organs in the region's churches.



*Peter Jacob Dick's German-heritage barn in Waterloo had cut-out designs in the gable.*

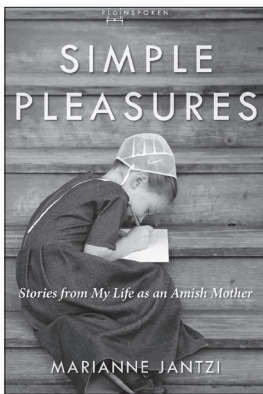
The disparate cultures presented some intriguing challenges when the 1920s immigrants arrived in Waterloo County. My father-in-law, then a teenager, came from a prosperous physician's home in the city of Berdyansk, to live on a Mennonite farm on the outskirts of Waterloo. On the first day he was sent out to a field with a horse and a walking plough, perhaps as a test! A few days later, while learning how to deal with a team, he had a serious accident, but was ordered to go back to work the next day.

The story is told that when the first contingent of 1924 refugees arrived at Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo, they were asked to wait in the horse-and-buggy shed until their hosts arrived because of their shabby, supposedly flea-infested clothing! It's also common knowledge that while the Swiss Mennonites warmly invited the new German-speaking arrivals to join the existing congregations, the newcomers resisted; they were accustomed to singing in four-part harmony rather than in unison and many

had enjoyed having a pipe organ, even in village churches back in Ukraine. By contrast, the congregations who welcomed them were in the midst of debating women's use of bonnets and had already switched to the English language for worship.

These two strands of Anabaptism are almost totally integrated in our communities today, but the interrelationship between our culture and the physical environment we choose for ourselves deserves further research.

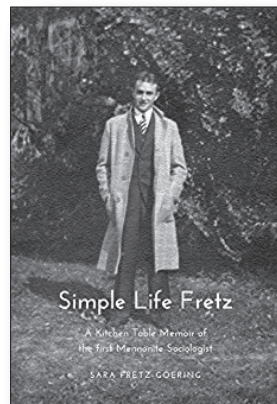
## NEW BOOKS



### ***Simple Pleasures: Stories From my Life as an Amish Mother.***

Marianne Jantzi.  
Herald Press, 2016.

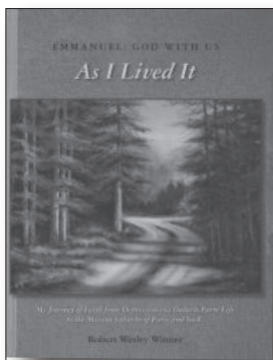
Marianne Jantzi, from the Amish community near Milverton, Ont., writes about her life with four young children. She is a former teacher in an Amish parochial school. As part of the Herald Press Plainspoken series, this book provides a glimpse into the everyday life of an Amish mother.



### ***Simple Life Fretz: A Kitchen Table Memoir of the First Mennonite Sociologist.***

Sara Fretz-Goering.  
Privately published,  
2016, 192 pages.

Writing from her father's perspective, the daughter of J. Winfield Fretz has put together a comprehensive story of his life. She began collecting photos, letters and transcripts after his death in 2005. Fretz was the first president of Conrad Grebel College. The book is available from Friesen Press.



### ***Emmanuel, God With Us: As I Lived It.***

Robert Witmer.  
Privately published,  
2016, 188 pages.

Witmer's memoir tells of his growing-up years on a farm near Kitchener, his struggle to afford college while supporting a family, and his years serving as a missionary in France and later in Quebec. To order, contact [robwit@golden.net](mailto:robwit@golden.net).

# Brubacher House to consider Indigenous relations

*By Laura Enns*

The Brubacher House Museum, an 1850s Pennsylvania German Mennonite farmhouse in Waterloo, opened its doors for the 2017 season on May 3. I arrived back just in time, after a very long walk. Most of the time, I don't commute 300 kilometres to work. In fact, as the new live-in curators of the museum, my husband and I normally only have to commute downstairs to give public tours of our home and host community events. On May 3, however, I was travelling home from a great journey—the Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights.

The Pilgrimage for Indigenous Rights, which took place from April 23 to May 14, 2017, was a 600-kilometre walk from Kitchener to Ottawa in support of the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The walk was organized by Mennonite Church Canada and Christian Peacemaker Teams in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action. Mennonites from across Canada participated in this profound spiritual and political action.

As the curator of a Mennonite historical site on the Haldimand Tract, I wanted to join the pilgrimage in order to learn more about Indigenous histories and cultures, so that I could learn to tell the stories of this land more honestly and completely. In a year of Canada 150 celebrations, I also wanted to better understand the impacts of Canadian settler-colonialism and Mennonite settlement on Indigenous peoples. What I heard again and again was that July 1 would be more of a *commemoration* than a *celebration* for Indigenous peoples. Finally, I wanted to explore the potential for the Brubacher House, a symbol of Mennonite settlement, to become a site for reconciliation. As UNDRIP has been named the "blueprint for reconciliation," I knew that participating in the pilgrimage would be an important step in the right direction.

I returned home with many more questions than answers. How can we share the story of the Brubacher House in a way that honours both Indigenous and Mennonite histories? Where are the Indigenous historical sites, or places of cultural significance on the Haldimand Tract? How can we build relationships with local Indigenous groups, and partner in the curation of Brubacher House tours, exhibits, and events? How can we, as historians, public educators, and leaders of cultural institutions, advocate for the full adoption and implementation of UNDRIP into Canadian law, so that



*Laura and Joshua Enns began as the new hosts for the Brubacher House Museum on Feb. 1, 2017, replacing Jacquie and Karl Reimer. (Conrad Grebel University College photo by Aurrey Drake)*

Indigenous peoples might be guaranteed basic rights to land, livelihood, freedom of belief, cultural heritage, language, and education?

This year, my husband, Joshua, and I hope to continue our journey of learning and building relationships with Indigenous peoples as we take on the responsibility of hosting the Brubacher House Museum. This is a year to reconcile our past with our present and future, and to begin writing a new chapter of history, where everyone's voices are heard.

We invite you learn more about the Brubacher House by visiting us for a tour. We are open 2:00-5:00 PM, Wednesday to Saturday, from May to October. We look forward to your visit!

## **Brubacher House news and events:**

<https://www.facebook.com/brubacherhouse/>

**Website:** <https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/about-conrad-grebel/affiliates-and-related-organizations/brubacher-house>

**Telephone:** 519-886-3855

**E-mail:** [bhouse@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:bhouse@uwaterloo.ca)



# Sites of Nonresistance

## Exhibiting the Experiences of Ontario Mennonites during the First World War

by Laureen Harder Gissing, *Mennonite Archives of Ontario*

As a young Mennonite man during the First World War, Aaron Weber was wary of walking through downtown Kitchener. “One time,” his son Norm recalls, “he walked right close to the barracks, and the soldiers around there were watching him and he just hot-footed it...and got out of there in time because they used to grab them...and take them in there and make them sign up, force them to do it.” The site of the barracks is now a non-descript parking lot on Courtland Avenue; the evidence of Weber’s experience is long gone.

War monuments, cenotaphs and honour rolls remind us of dramatic and familiar stories of war. A new exhibit at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario tells war stories of a different kind, and lays out an alternative memorial landscape—the landscape of *nonresistance*.

These 12 stories are gleaned from letters, diaries, newspapers, photographs, government documents and family histories found in the archives. Together, they paint a picture of the Great War from a “peace church” perspective. Since 1793, Mennonites and other “peace churches” in Canada had been assured by law of exception from military service due to their religious beliefs. In May 1917, after three years of terrible casualties in the Great War, the Canadian government announced compulsory service and conscription became the law of the land.

While Mennonites had generally hoped not to engage with the war, this became increasingly impossible. On city streets and along rural roads, at railways and border crossings, in homes, churches and government offices, Ontario Mennonites had to navigate the passage between their 400-year-old peace tradition (“nonresistance”) and their society engaged in Canada’s first modern war.

Finding Mennonite voices to populate the exhibit was a challenge. The most well-known story is the creation of the Non-Resistant Relief Organization

in response to the conscription crisis of 1917. (This organization eventually merges with others to become Mennonite Central Committee Ontario.) Another enduring story is that of E.J. “Ernie” Swalm, a Brethren in Christ youth who faces a court martial, later described in his book *Nonresistance Under Test*.

Other experiences are less well known. Mary Wismer, studying at Macdonald Institute in Guelph, wonders if she, as a Mennonite, should consider practicing her dietary profession in a military hospital. A Mennonite congregation wonders if it should take the name of a “warlord” when their city’s name is changed from Berlin to Kitchener. A group of Mennonites in Markham become involved in the pre-war arbitration movement, an unusual alliance with non-Mennonite peace groups. Daniel Brenneman is “apprehended” by the military from a neighbour’s farm in East Zorra Township and held in a military camp in London, Ontario for six weeks where he resists coercion to “put on the uniform.”

Border issues encountered by Mennonites have a particular resonance a century later. American preacher E.L. Frey is stopped from entering Canada when he declares that he will be preaching against the war. Between 1919 and 1922, Mennonites, Hutterites and Dukhobors are banned from immigration to Canada as the Canadian government

responds to pressure from veterans groups.

The exhibit also explores the history of the poppy as a commemorative symbol as it relates to the creation in the 1980s of the “peace button” by Ontario Mennonites. The red button with the words “to remember is to work for peace” has been an object of debate ever since.

An unusual story in the exhibit involves Gordon Eby who was a long way from his home and Mennonite roots in Kitchener when his battalion was quartered in Siegburg, Germany, after the 1918 Armistice. His knowledge of German helped open doors of German hospitality for him and his army buddies. Eby treasured postcards he was given by the families of Siegburg, perhaps as a reminder of a more humane end to both the horror and tedium of soldierly life.

Underlying this exhibit are these challenging questions: Why are these stories not more familiar? How does our society choose which events and places of the past to commemorate? What does it mean to remember war?

*Sites of Nonresistance runs at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, until May 2019. Tours are self-guided, but archivist-guided tours and additional programming can be arranged in advance. See the exhibit website for details: [uwaterloo.ca/grebel/nonresistance](http://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/nonresistance).*



## SITES OF NONRESISTANCE

### ONTARIO MENNONITES AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

*This banner from the exhibit features a photo of the Courtland Avenue barracks in 1916 blended with the streetscape as it looks today.*