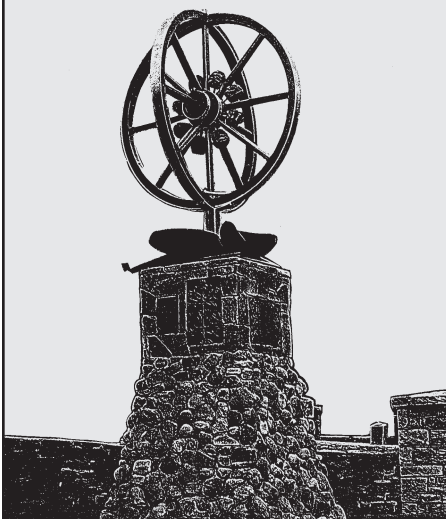


Ontario Mennonite History

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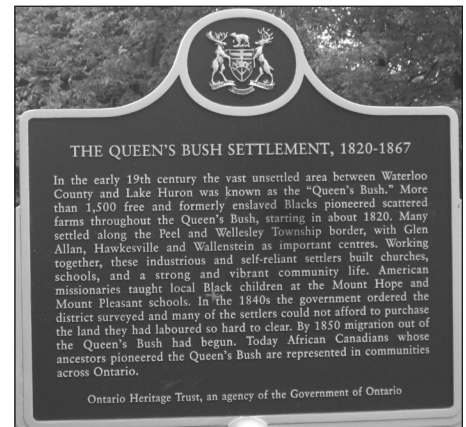
Black-Mennonite Histories: Roots and Routes

“To be brothers and sisters in the Lord we must understand the dynamics of black/white relations and its implications in Christian faith. An examination of the historical nature and development of black/white relations is necessary for understanding the status and reality of their relation today” (Hubert Brown, *Black and Mennonite*, 1976, 98).

I agree with Brown, in that we need to recognize and understand the ways in which our histories intersect, overlap and cross boundaries of ethnicity, race and religion. Black history is not a singular narrative of African-Americans seeking refuge from slavery or struggling against social oppression, but rather represents the intersection of multiple cultural and racial histories. In the wake of the successful Montgomery bus boycott, Martin Luther King, Jr. said “This is not just a victory for Black folk. This is a victory for “every freedom-loving individual” (from the film *Awakenings*). At the dedication of a cairn to the Underground Railroad on July 31, 2004 in Harrison Park, Owen Sound, a speaker referred to the monument as representing not only the story of Black people, but the story of humankind. More recently, I witnessed the unveiling of a historical plaque in Glen Allan, the site of the largest Black settlement in 19th-century Upper Canada, at which archaeologist Karolyn Smardz-Frost referred to Mennonites as having assisted the early Black settlers. My goal is to explore the nature of these interactions and to understand their significance to both Mennonites and Blacks.

Roots and Routes

I don’t usually give research presentations in cemeteries. My audiences most often are lively students, sometimes a bit too lively in their use of electronic media during my lectures. However, one evening in early September I stood in the Union Bethel



This plaque at the park in Glen Allan, recognizing the Black pioneers, was unveiled in 2008.

(Photo Courtesy of Timothy Epp)

Cemetery near Stayner, preparing my contribution to this year’s ceremony commemorating the racially integrated “Silver Shoe” community of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Beginning with an indigenous tradition in which the evening’s host turned and bowed to the four directions with eagle feather in hand, followed by a Highland dancer and then by my own presentation on Mennonite-Black interaction, the evening was a reminder of the interweaving of stories and histories of Canada’s peoples.

Mennonites and Tunkers (Brethren in Christ) played a role in the founding and populating of this settlement, and formed strong relationships with those of other nationalities, cultures and creeds. These are important lessons and memories in a world that so often seems filled with tension and conflict. My own path to this evening had already taken several geographic and scholarly turns, and the conversations I had with those in attendance that evening promised more discoveries to come.

I had first become aware of Ontario’s Black history when I was vacationing near Ayton, approximately ten years ago. I happened to pick up a county map at a local tourist information centre,

~ Continued on page 2 ~



*The Silver Shoe cemetery
 (Photo courtesy of Timothy Epp)*

and was surprised to see that the map included several sites identified with “Black history.” Judging by the names of communities in this area, I had assumed that the history of settlement was primarily one of English and Scottish pioneers. With the assistance of a research grant, I began to explore the social response to, and discourse surrounding, the reclamation of Black history in the areas and communities of Nenagh, Priceville, Negro Creek, and Owen Sound (the northern terminus of the underground railroad, as reflected in the name of a local historical publication). My research initially focused on public response to the promotion of Black history, but the further that I investigated this topic, the more I began to wonder about the intersections of Black history with the stories of other cultural and religious groups, including my own identity as a Mennonite.

The history of Black-Mennonite interaction has been documented to some extent within the American context. A community led by Pieter Corneliszoon Plockhoy near Delaware Bay between 1663 and 1664 included an anti-slavery stance as one of its founding principles. Although Plockhoy’s community was short-lived, five years later the Germantown Pennsylvania Declaration against slavery also bore Mennonite influence. While not all Anabaptists were vocal about their opposition to slavery during the Civil War, the late 19th century witnessed several outreach initiatives to Black communities in areas such as the Welsh Mountains in Pennsylvania. In the mid-20th century,

Mennonites volunteered to serve in Black communities during the Civil Rights era. Today the African-American Mennonite Association includes over fifty congregations. However, little attention has been given to interaction between Anabaptists and Blacks in Canada.

A map developed by my former research assistant, and based on the 1871 Ontario census, suggests that by the mid-19th century significant populations of Blacks and Anabaptists lived within close proximity of each other in Welland County (Bertie Township), the Wellington District (Peel Township), and Simcoe County (Nottawasaga Township). Census records from 1851 confirm that by the mid-19th century, Mennonites and Tunkers lived near the area known as “Little Africa” in Bertie Township, several Mennonite families lived near the largest Black settlement in Upper Canada/Ontario known as the Queen’s Bush (with estimates of up to 2,000 residents), and the Silver Shoe settlement of Nottawasaga Township included Tunkers and families of “Pennsylvania Dutch” background.

The following sources include passages indicating interaction between Mennonites, Tunkers and Blacks: Brown-Kubisch’s *The Queen’s Bush Black Settlement: Black Pioneers (1839-1865)*; Mapleton Historical Society, *Portraits of Peel: Attiwandaronk to Mapleton*; Uttley’s *A History of Kitchener, Ontario*; Drew’s *A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*, and Eby’s *From Pennsylvania to Waterloo: A Biographical History of Waterloo Township*. Interviews with descendents of Mennonites and Blacks from the Queen’s Bush have revealed family memories of inter-racial cooperation in the clearing and farming of lands to the west of Elmira. More recently, my presentations to several historical societies have been enriched by the stories told by members of the audience, about their own recollections and oral histories of Black-Mennonite relations. In the remainder of this article,

I will share some of my findings in hopes of generating further discussion.

Mennonites and African-Americans appear to have lived within relatively close proximity to each other in Pennsylvania during the later 18th and early-19th centuries, and their stories of migration to Canada have been intertwined in at least some instances. In at least one instance, the decision to migrate to Canada was influenced by slavery; Sherk and Betzner family histories record the journey of Samuel D. Betzner and Joseph Schörg to Rockingham County, Virginia, which they were considering as a potential new home, and their return to Pennsylvania after only one year due to their disapproval of the slavery which they had encountered in Virginia. Betzner and Schörg then migrated to Canada as two of the earliest Anabaptist pioneers in the Waterloo area.

In his history of Waterloo, Ezra Eby recorded the account of Abraham Erb, the founder of Waterloo, and Isaac Jones. Jones had traveled from Pennsylvania to Ontario with Erb, and tended cattle for him. One day Jones became lost with the cattle and a dog. After several days (Eby suggests a week), search parties found Jones and his herd, but then the searchers themselves became lost. In the end, all managed to make their way through the forests to the Grand River, approximately two miles south of Galt. Although I have found no other information about Jones, this story suggests that Blacks at times worked for Mennonites, and that Blacks and Mennonites may have migrated together in some cases.

The role of Blacks as hired hands to Mennonites is also found in the story of Levi Carroll, hired by another Mennonite pioneer, Abraham Weber.

Carroll suffered an injury while working in “the bush,” resulting in a broken arm or leg. Weber then arranged for the Carroll family to move into Waterloo’s first schoolhouse. The article “Ex-Slave Made a New Life in Kitchener” (*K-W Record*, Feb. 11, 2011), describes Levi Carroll as having



The Carroll family in front of the first schoolhouse in Waterloo, then their home. (Courtesy of http://logschoolhouse.blogspot.ca/2012_06_01_archive.html)

“raised corn on his lawn, tilling the soil with a long hoe, in the fashion he had learned on plantations... He died penniless in 1897, and spent the last few years of his life in the poorhouse... living in the county House of Industry on Frederick Street. The former slave was buried in a pauper’s grave somewhere in downtown Kitchener, with no money for a headstone.” Levi was the ancestor of Addie Aylestock, Canada’s first Black woman to become an ordained minister and who was inspired at a Mennonite revival meeting near Lebanon.

The document “Hannes Schneider and His Wife Catherine Haus Schneider: Their Descendants and Their Times 1534-1939” notes that the children of Joseph Schneider knew Levi Carroll’s children. Levi was also the ancestor of Diana Braithwaite, an internationally-renowned blues singer and advocate for Black history, who led those in attendance at the June 2013 meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario in an a capella round of “Down by the Riverside.”

In his history of Mennonites in Canada, Frank Epp notes that in these instances Mennonites may have hired

Blacks as “cheap labour” (Epp 1974, 79). Similarly, Abraham Hershey of Bertie Township in Welland County may have hired Blacks in his tannery and lumber mill:

A large number of black slaves who escaped from the south by way of the underground, settled on the land bordering the old Indian trail. There settlement stretched [sic] from the mouth of the Creek to St. John’s Church on Ridgemount. They were employed in the lumber industry. Abraham Hershey who lived by the river just south of Miller Creek had a large tannery and also a lumber business. Cheap labour would be his for the asking (“Little Africa: 1840-1875”).

In addition to working for Mennonites, Blacks also worked alongside Mennonites and Tunkers, exchanging agricultural labour in the fields of the Queen’s Bush area. Merchants such as Henry Stauffer Huber sold seed to Black families in the Yatton area, and Black pioneers such as John Little worked on their neighbours’ fields in exchange for assistance with their own crops (although Little does state that he worked two days for his neighbours in exchange for one day of assistance from them). Drew recorded John Little as saying

“I raised that year one hundred and ten bushels of spring wheat, and three hundred bushels of potatoes on land which we had cleared ourselves, and cultivated without plough or drag. All was done with the hoe and hand-rake. This I can prove by my nearest neighbors. I got the seed on credit of some Dutchmen in the towns, by promising to work for

them in harvest. They put their own price on the seed, and on my labor” (Drew, p. 153).

Little’s neighbours included those with surnames of Martin, Honsinger, Snider, Musselman, Eby, Weber and Bricker. Several accounts also exist of 19th century inter-racial threshing teams. Charlie Jones, who was Black and Mennonite by way of his adoption into the Jacob Z. Kolf family and his baptism into the First Mennonite Church, spoke Pennsylvania Dutch fluently and worked on such a threshing team.



An inter-racial threshing team.
(Photo courtesy
Waterloo Regional Museum)

Education

Blacks also may have played a role in the education of young Mennonites and Tunkers. One of the narratives collected by Drew was that of William “Judge” Thompson, who informed Drew that, “the colored children can all go to school here in Galt, and are generally sent to school.” Thompson, a barber and preacher in Galt and who “had his quiver full of children” (Kerr 186), had been an advocate for integrated education

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and said “the black horse and the white are both ignorant: there is prejudice on both sides. When I came here, colored children were not received into the schools. I fought, and fought, and fought, and at last it got to the governor, and the law was declared that all had equal rights.” (Drew, p. 96). In *The Public Schools of Galt*, Kerr describes Thompson as “‘Judge’ Thompson, the coloured barber and preacher of the village who had his quiver full of children, was a strong advocate of free schools. In the course of time, the villagers all came round to the liberal view” (Kerr, 186).

Several people whom I interviewed for this study informed me that Mabel Hisson, who lived to the west of Glen Allan with her own family, at times took care of neighborhood children including those of Mennonites. Harriet Bailey, a Black woman who lived near Macton, taught young Susannah Martin how to crochet.

At least two Mennonites also received some instruction from Case Western Reserve University’s first African-American graduate, a Mr. John Frederick Augustus Sykes Fayette. Referred to as a “mulatto” by Leibbrandt in *Little Paradise: The Saga of the German Canadians of Waterloo County, Ontario, 1800-1975*, Fayette attended the college from 1832-1836, and graduated with an A.B. degree and was a student of theology for 1836/1837. A one-time associate of the abolitionist John Brown, Fayette moved to Upper Canada in 1840 to establish the Wellington Institute, the first school in Berlin to teach grammar and to use maps. According to one source, the school was located behind the Royal Exchange Hotel. In the second-last issue (No. 25) of the *Canada Museum* in 1840, an early German newspaper of the area, the Institute is advertised as having just opened (Dec. 2), and as “comfortable” and “well calculated for the object to which it is appropriated... to impart instruction to both sexes,” with the following encouragement from the paper’s editors: “we hope that all of them [Waterloo villagers] do readily accede to

the following trite & true saying—and acceding thereto, will avail themselves of its advantages- viz. ‘Tis Education forms the common mind—Just as the twig is bent the tree’s inclined.” Courses were advertised as including reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, English and grammar, with plans to include science and classical studies.

Fayette offered room and board to those living “at a distance”; Fayette himself took on responsibility not only for students’ education, but also for their “habits and morals.” Two of Fayette’s students were Jacob Y. Shantz, at age 18, and Israel Bowman, at age 11. It is also interesting to note the endorsement of the school in the *Canada Museum* (No. 25), as signed by, among others, Jacob S. Shoemaker, Esq. and Benjamin Eby, a prominent pastor/bishop in the Mennonite church who had migrated from Lancaster County to Ontario in 1807. The endorsement, dated December 7, 1840, reads as follows:

Mr. Fayette, the Principal of The Wellington Institute, is a regular Graduate of a distinguished Literary Institution, whom we consider fully competent, both from his respectable Testimonials of Character and Ability, as well as of our personal acquaintance with him, to discharge the important duties devolving upon an Instructor of youth.

Unfortunately, Steiner notes, “lack of students and increasing debts soon forced the school to close. At a cost of two dollars per person plus fuel, a student at the institute could get proper instruction in English grammar and use real maps to study geography. But this was expensive in those days and few could afford the fee.” (p. 25-26). Uttley records that while “Fayette’s rates for tuition were moderate, the institute did not attract enough young folk to make ends meet. He ran into debt and after a year or two left for parts unknown”; the Waterloo Historical Society’s version goes as follows: “being poorly patronized he ran into debt and left a year or two afterwards quite suddenly, greatly to the chagrin of his creditors” (Waterloo

Historical Society, 1914). Fayette then served as a Presbyterian minister and school superintendent before his death in London, Ontario, in 1876.

Marriage

Some evidence of Mennonite-Black marriages also exists. In her book *Rachael’s Legacy*, Mestern writes of a union between an “Old Order” Mennonite man and a woman described as “half-Negro.” Mestern has informed me that, based on her discussions with a now-deceased Old Order historian, this was not the only inter-racial relationship between a Mennonite man and a Black woman in this area. A recent article by Deborah Gilbert and Mary Kay Townsend also provides evidence of Mennonite/Black inter-marriage (Gilbert and Townsend, August 2009). John Adley, a Black man, married Hannah Stauffer, of Pennsylvania Dutch background. (1855-1856) (Gilbert and Townsend 2009).

One of the founding couples of the Silver Shoe community, named for the silver birch which grow in the area, was that of Margaret Jane Lang, from Lancaster, Pennsylvania and John Morgan, Jr., one of the Black pioneers of the Sunnidale area. Margaret was the daughter of James Lang and Margaret Jane Clance, and of Pennsylvania Dutch background. John Morgan had traveled from Sunnidale to Lancaster County to gain Margaret’s hand in marriage, and her parents’ consent. However, once John and Margaret had left her parents’ home to return to Canada, her parents changed their minds and pursued the couple only to find that John and Margaret had consummated their marriage, at which point Margaret’s parents gave up the chase (*Sunnidale Station—The Silver Shoe 1830-1973* documentary, September 20, 1997).

Land Transactions

If significant Black communities existed in areas such as the Queen’s Bush, what happened to their inhabitants? Several people have suggested to me that Blacks simply “weren’t good farmers,” or left “because

they couldn't cope with the climate." While some Black farmers were more successful than others, the available evidence contradicts both of these assumptions. John and Eliza Little arrived at their property between Wallenstein and Yatton in February of 1841, cleared the land and planted crops. They eventually purchased their property and sold it in 1862 to Jacob Martin, after which they moved to Haiti.

Today Jacob's descendants John and Lydia Martin live on the property. In one interview, I was informed that land was later purchased for one of Jacob Martin's grandsons from another Black man who, upon the sale of the property showed the new owners scars across his back left by the whip of his slave-master. Interviews with Mennonites from the Wallenstein area suggest that Blacks may have built or assisted in building houses which were later owned by Mennonites. The book *Portraits of Peel* includes the following account of William Lawson, who settled at "e. half lot, concession 5" to the northwest of Yatton:

"In 1873, William Lawson got this as Crown Land from Queen Victoria, whose seal is on the deed. The Lawson's paid \$486.00 for 100

acres at that time. Mr. and Mrs. Lawson, who were a black family, raised twenty children in a four room house with a lean-to kitchen on it. Hard to imagine! In 1918, Angus Bauman bought the land from Mary Anne Lawson, who was by then the widow of William." (*Portraits of Peel*, p. 215).

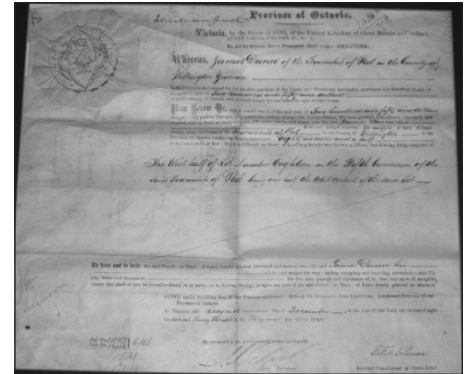
However, in spite of their general acceptance into the surrounding communities, Blacks in the Queen's Bush area were informed that they were squatting on "clergy reserve" and would have to either purchase the land or vacate it. Few Black families had the resources to purchase these properties and many returned to the United States, especially after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.

Conclusion

Following the writing of Hubert Brown, it is important to remember that while cultures and races often are made to appear as distinct and divided, our roots (and routes) are inextricably intertwined, often in ways that may surprise us. While our perspective of the world is influenced by the images of ethnic, racial and religious conflict provided through our media, we need

to reclaim these stories of our interconnectedness and recognize our stories as interwoven in the fabric of our culture and heritage.

Timothy D. Epp is Associate Professor of Sociology at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He did a presentation at the spring Historical Society meeting in Glen Allan and led a tour of local places of interest related to Black history in the area.



This is the original land deed of 1873 to James Dunn, a Black pioneer, for the west half of Lot 18, Concession 5 of Peel Township. The property is presently owned by Ron and Merri-Lee Metzger.

Memories of Black and Mennonite Connections

By Diana Braithwaite

This is an excerpt of Diana Braithwaite's comments to the Mennonite Historical of Ontario on June 15, 2013 at the Mennonite Church in Glen Allan. She is a blues singer interested in Black history. She brought greetings from her 90-year-old mother, Rella Braithwaite, who was born in the Wallenstein area.

It all started many years ago. My great-great-great-grandfather was a slave who escaped from the southern United States. The first time he was caught. Determined to be free, he tried again and that time made it all the way to Canada through following routes, paths, and rivers of a system that became known as the Underground Railroad. His last name was Lawson.

When he made it to Canada, he started a large farm not too far from here (Glen Allan). His sons also went on to have large farms of 100 - 200 acres near Wallenstein. My

great-great-grandparents lived here, my great-grandparents, my grandparents and my mother were born near here. They were one of the first African-Canadian pioneer families to live settle in this area. Today, the Hisson family, also descendants of Lawsons, live in Listowel.

Jemima Lawson and her husband, my grandfather, William James Aylestock who lived in the little town of Lebanon, became friends with the Mennonite families that lived in the same area. My mother and her eight brothers and sisters who were born in Lebanon, grew up attending the one-room school house and church across the road from their home.

My grandparents often spoke about the very good friendship they shared with Mennonite families living in the same area where they had made their homestead. Here are words from my mother Rella: "When I was growing up, we [Black and Mennonite families] lived side by side. We would

~ Continued on page 6 ~

often help each other with the threshings on each other's farms and at the end of the day, we would join the food together."

My mother also told me that quite often Black and Mennonite families also shared farming equipment. She said "If you didn't have the necessary equipment for your farm, Black and Mennonite families would borrow from each other. We were good neighbours. That's sharing."

I was also told by my mother, that my great-grandmother and her Mennonite friends were apparently very good cooks, but when it came to baking pies, my great-grandmother's sister, Mary Lawson's homemade apple, cherry and pumpkin pies were well-known and praised quite highly in the Mennonite community.

My mother also said that her mother's elderly cousins, my grandmother's cousins, would often tell my mother that as children they had wonderful memories of playing with a group of Mennonite children that lived near to the Guelph BME (British Methodist Episcopalian) church. They would have a wonderful time playing games and running up and down in the Guelph BME church yard. Her cousins mentioned many times that there was no distinction made between or amongst the children as they played together. The fact that some of the children were Black and some were Mennonites, made no difference. It was about who could jump the best skipping rope, throw the ball without dropping it, run without being caught, and skip the longest without tripping. They were friends and looked forward to meeting again at the BME church yard the following week,



The Hisson homestead.

(Photo courtesy of <http://freepages.genealogy.roots-web.ancestry.com/~methodists/queens.htm>)

to play some more games and have some more fun. My grandfather was very close with a Mennonite friend who taught him how to speak Pennsylvania Dutch.

In recent years, when I started working on a short film about the first African-Canadian settlers in this area, I was gathering and collecting history to piece together the puzzle with an archaeologist, Dr. Karolyn Smardz. When we were travelling around this area going to cemeteries and various landmarks, she told me it was the Mennonites who helped to preserve what was left of the cemeteries that might have been on their land when they first started farming.

This was very important and I personally appreciated and am thankful for those who put boundaries around the cemeteries of early Black settlers, not removing the headstones and markers, thus allowing us to find and acknowledge the graves and burial grounds of our ancestors.

Five years ago, after the plaque unveiling of the Queen's Bush pioneers at Glen Allan park, I started a festival called the Underground Railroad music festival. When we were setting up, we realized our one source of power for the musical equipment and PA system was not working.

We put together two or three long extension cords and the Mennonite family living across the way allowed us to stretch it across the road, and plug it into their power source on the side of their house until the problem could be rectified. When the festival was over and we were cleaning up, children attending the event shared the balloons that decorated the park with their children. In fact, they left the balloons with them. When we left, I remember seeing the Mennonite children running and playing with the balloons so perhaps they will have good memories of us as well.

J. Winfield Fretz Publication Fund in Ontario Mennonite Studies

The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario welcomes applications from any individual or charitable, church or community-based organization that requires financial support to assist in the publication of research—as a book, film, or other form of media. Projects should illuminate the experience of Mennonites in Ontario.

Normally, up to \$2,000 is available per project.

For more information, see

<http://www.mhso.org/events/fretzaward.shtml>
or contact:

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Conrad Grebel Celebrates 50 Years



Conrad Grebel University College release

On the weekend of August 23-25, Conrad Grebel University College celebrated 50 years since a group of “radical” visionaries dared to boldly dream of a Mennonite college in Ontario. These visionaries included a group of progressive young ministers, two university professors and a handful of forward-looking businessmen—individuals that included: Harvey Taves, Norman High, Milt Good, John Snyder, and Roy Snyder. Current President, Susan Schultz Huxman observed that, “We forget that these early visionaries were young people—in their 30s and early 40s—who diplomatically rejected the naysayers in Canada and the U.S. who said we should not accept the invitation to join the University of Waterloo as a “church college” and be responsible for creating a vibrant residence community and a values added rigorous liberal arts education.”

Over 600 people signed up for a portion of the weekend, coming from as far as Britain, California and Winnipeg. The festivities began with the laying of a datestone near the entrance of the new \$8.7 million academic facility expansion. This was followed by a Book Launch for *Bridging Mind and Spirit: Conrad Grebel University College 1963-2013* which was authored by Grebel professor of History and Peace & Conflict Studies, Marlene Epp, with the assistance of archivist Laureen Harder-Gissing and graphic designer Jen Konkle. This colourful 96-page publication elicited many memories during the weekend celebration.

The legacy of the college’s founding President, J. Winfield Fretz, was honoured at a sold out “Bow-Tie Gala” which was co-hosted by the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union (MSCU), an institution where Fretz played a key role in its conception.

The gala was emceed by John Rempel ‘67, one of the college’s early

chaplains, who had interviewed Fretz during the college’s 25th anniversary and video clips of this were interspersed during the evening. Sara Goering-Fretz, Winfield’s daughter, who was visibly touched after seeing this footage, shared greetings from the family. Liz Heinmiller, an alumae from the first year the residence opened collected memories from fellow alumni who described Dr. Fretz as “supportive, encouraging, positive, and warm. “Many alumni recalled his get-to-know-you evenings at the beginning of term at his home. He took a genuine interest in each of us, making it a point to truly get to know us, not on a superficial level, but in a way which explored our goals in life and helped us set our sights on worthy things,” shared Heinmiller ‘69. The gala ended with the announcements of the winning bidders on the silent auction by development director Fred Martin ‘87, who encouraged other ‘vocal’ bidders above the silent bidders in an effort to reach the \$50,000 goal for the Winfield Fretz Seminar room in the new MSCU Centre for Peace Advancement.

Saturday’s activities included a brunch for the 60’s era alumni hosted by Ed Bergey ‘67. Alumni shared about the impact that Conrad Grebel had on their lives. Other decades gathered in the afternoon sun for reminiscing and for playing Ultimate Frisbee or for children’s activities. Wendy Chappell Dick ‘90, from Bluffton, organized Grebel HAD Talent, which replicated talent shows from across the eras. The outdoor show ended with some 8 mm footage provided by Karl Dick ‘65 of a talent show and a skating party in 1965.

The weekend ended with a Celebration Service on Sunday morning that featured a reunion of Chapel Choir members, directed by freshly retired director Leonard Enns. An alumnus from each of the 5 decades reflected on the spirit of the times and the impact of Grebel. Stories of pranks, weekly sheet changes and attempts at composting

elicited much laughter. However, the Theatre of the Arts held a quiet hush when these alumni reflected on the impact Grebel had on their growth, friendships, values and faith.

The anniversary weekend also had a multimedia component provided by Facebook, Twitter and a variety of video clips on the college’s YouTube channel. This includes a 10 minute retrospective video called “Challenging Mind and Spirit: Grebel’s first 5 decades” with a script by Tim Miller Dyck ‘96 and narrated by Eric Friesen ‘67

For more information visit grebel.ca/50th

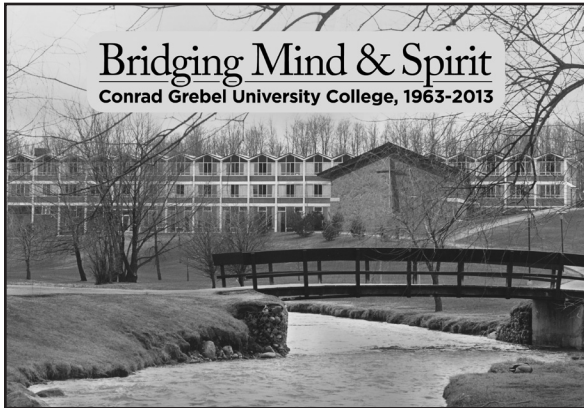


Four of the remaining living presidents of Conrad Grebel University College attended the date stone ceremony for the new addition on Aug. 23, 2013. From left: past presidents Ralph Lebold, John Toews, Henry Paetkau and current president, Susan Schultz Huxman. Their bow ties are in honour of the gala honouring J. Winfield Fretz.



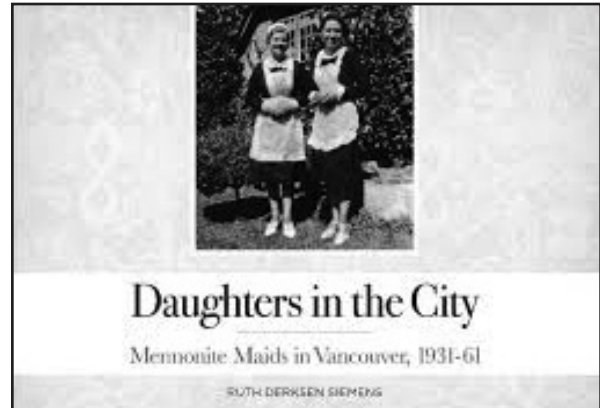
A book launch was part of the 50th anniversary celebrations on Aug. 23-25 honouring author Marlene Epp (left) archivist Laureen Harder-Gissing and designer Jen Konkle. Fred W. Martin, Grebel’s director of development, also played a key role in bringing this book together.

New Books



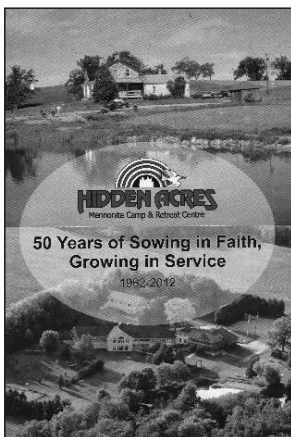
Bridging Mind & Spirit:
Conrad Grebel University College, 1963-2013.
 Marlene Epp, Jennifer Konkle (Designer),
 Laureen Harder-Gissing (Contributor).
 Conrad Grebel University College, 2013, 96 pages.

This illustrated history of Conrad Grebel University College celebrates its 50 years of existence. The bridge symbolizes the connections between Grebel and the secular University and Grebel's role in connecting the church with the wider world. The book launch was part of Grebel's celebrations on August 23, 2013.



Daughters in the City:
Mennonite Maids in Vancouver, 1931-61.
 Ruth Derksen Siemens.
 Fernwood Press, 2013, 104 pages. Available at
www.daughtersinthecity.com.

This illustrated book tells the story of young refugee women who worked as domestics to help pay their families' travel debts. It preserves the history of the Bethel Home established in 1931 in Vancouver and the later Mary Martha Home. It describes the social changes that led to the closure of both homes in the early 1960s.



Hidden Acres Camp and Retreat Centre: 50 Years of Sowing in Faith, Growing in Service 1962-2012.
 Tina Wheaton and Christine Nisbet.
 Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, 2012, 275 pages.

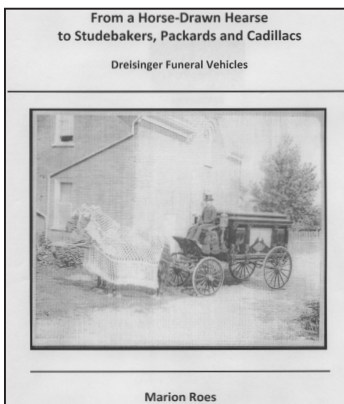
Part 1 of this history has a chapter for each of the decades and includes a variety of colour photos, including aerial photos. Part 2 describes camp traditions such as the chicken barbecue, single Moms camp, family camping

and retreats. Names of the directors, committee members and summer staff over the years are also included.



Mennonites in Ontario.
 Marlene Epp.
 Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 2012, 60 pages.

This new edition of Mennonites in Ontario is an update from the 2002 edition. The cover features the striking fibre art by Judy Gascho-Jutzi, "Encounters along the Grand." With its analysis and updated statistics, this little book remains the best introduction to the numerous Amish and Mennonite groups in Ontario.



From a Horse-Drawn Hearse to Studebakers, Packards and Cadillacs.
 Marion Roes.
 Self-published, 2013, 84 pages.

Marion Roes is the keeper of the Dreisinger family history and old records from the furniture and funeral business in Elmira, started by her great-grandfather, Christian Dreisinger. She has compiled a book of 49 photos and photo postcards of vehicles, buildings, signs along with financial information and some anecdotes and memories. There are many photos of vehicles starting c 1915 and earlier this year she was contacted by a professional car historian requesting copies of the photos. In return, he offered to identify the make, model and year of each vehicle. "What a bonus that was!" she said. The book is \$20 and can be purchased from the author at 519 883-1448 or mlroes@sympatico.ca; and at the Waterloo Region Museum Gift Shop, 10 Huron Road, Kitchener. Copies will also be in local archives and libraries.

Book Review

Elsie Cressman an extraordinary woman

Review by Barb Draper

Elsie Cressman: A Trailblazing Life.
Nancy Silcox. Pandora Press, 2012.

Nancy Silcox presents an interesting biography of Elsie Cressman who passed away in Sept., 2012 at the age of 89. Her life was unusual for a Mennonite girl born in the 1920s.

Elsie grew up on a farm near New Hamburg, the daughter of Curtis Cressman, a bishop in the local Mennonite Church. Perhaps some of Elsie's pioneering spirit came from her mother who was a graduate of Hesston College in Kansas, something that was very unusual for a woman in those days. Although Elsie was an outdoors girl and not a model student, she went beyond the expected eight grades attending the Plattsville Continuation School and a Brethren in Christ high school in Fort Erie where she worked as a housemaid to pay for her tuition.

Nurse's training at St. Mary's Catholic Hospital in Kitchener came next. After graduating Elsie spent some time at a Mennonite Hospital in Colorado, and the Mennonite Children's Home in Kansas City before going back to school. She graduated from Goshen College with a BA in Nursing Science in 1953.

Soon after her graduation, Elsie was tapped on the shoulder by Orrie O. Miller of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to work at a leprosarium in Tanganyika, Africa. In 1954, Elsie sailed on the Queen Mary, and arrived in Kenya during the Mau Mau rebellion. When Elsie arrived at Sirati, a medical mission begun in the 1930s, there was a fledgling hospital and 10 medical staff. During her 17 years there the Leprosarium became a self-contained village with several medical buildings, a school and a church.

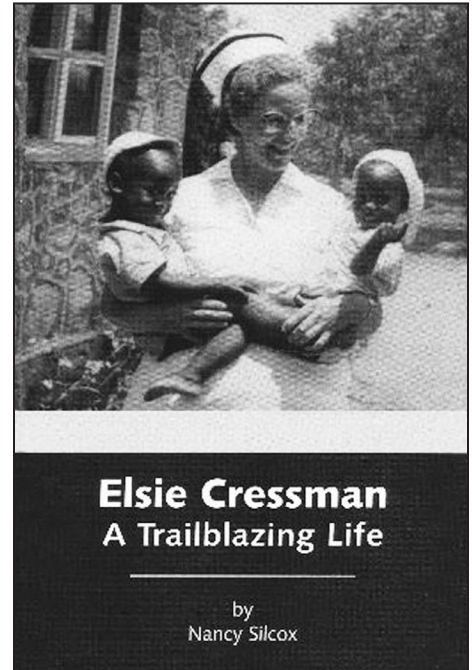
Elsie seemed fearless as she faced the challenges of her assignment. She

believed that God was in control and she didn't need to worry. She bought a rifle and learned to go hunting. She used a motor scooter to get around and enjoyed travelling in Africa. She also learned a lot about African birthing rituals and gained experience in delivering babies.

At age 50 Elsie decided to become a midwife. She trained in London, England and then worked in Africa for a while. When she returned to Ontario in 1976 she began nursing at KW Hospital, but soon local people were asking her to deliver their babies, even though midwifery was not recognized here. The word spread and by 1983 she had so many clients she had to reduce her work at the hospital.

The medical profession was initially very disapproving, but slowly midwifery was growing in acceptance and finally in 1991 it was legally recognized. Elsie was highly respected as a midwife and her work played a substantial role in bringing this recognition. She was the first midwife to practice at KW Hospital. Throughout her life, Elsie maintained a spirit of adventure, but one experience she could have done without was a law suit brought by one of her clients. Elsie retired as she was approaching 80 years of age.

The author must have spent hours interviewing Elsie, as the book is written from her personal point of view. But I noticed that there are no references to the 1959 church split in which Elsie's father played a key role. Perhaps Elsie was too involved in her work in Africa, or perhaps Silcox found that story too confusing to deal with. When Elsie returned to Ontario she attended Grace Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, a more traditionalist Mennonite group with a dress code. It's too bad the



book doesn't mention that Elsie's trailblazing is even more remarkable given that she is part of a Mennonite group where most women are homemakers.

This is an interesting and easy-to-read book about an extraordinary Mennonite woman.



Elsie Cressman and Patricia Legault with Elsie's Order of Ontario in 1994.

GAMEO Update

Our GAMEO (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online) writers have been very busy, making it possible to add 26 new biographies of Mennonite church people and leaders from Ontario during 2012 and in 2013 thus far. They are listed below in alphabetical order with brief comments about them.

Bauman, Ilda (1898-1974), key role in launching and managing the Kitchener House of Friendship

Bearinger, Jessie (1924-2007), home maker, thrift shop pioneer for Rockway Mennonite School

Cressman, Curtis Clement (1894-1971), bishop, pastor, leader in Conservative movement

Cressman, Elsie (1923-2012), trailblazing missionary, midwife, awarded Order of Ontario

Epp, Henry H. (1925-2010), minister, visionary and conference administrator

Fretz, Joseph Winfield (1910-2005), sociologist, college president, institutional innovator

Gingerich, Orland (1920-2002), Ontario minister and bishop, active in Mennonite and Amish history

Good, Cyrus Nathaniel "C.N." (1869-1967), Mennonite Brethren in Christ pastor, church leader

Goudie, Samuel (1866-1951), Mennonite Brethren in Christ leader (edited, expanded)

Goudie, Henry (1851-1942), Mennonite Brethren in Christ leader (edited, expanded)

Hagey, Joseph B. (1810-1876), bishop of the 19th century Waterloo Mennonite settlement

Hess, John H. (1922-2007), pastor, urban ministry innovator at Warden Woods in Toronto

Kanagy, Margaret Elizabeth Brown (1883-1952), urban missionary, congregational leader

Kanagy, Simon Menno (1869-1941), urban missionary, pastor and musician

Koch, Alice Nahrgang (1913-2011), served in WMSC, MHSO, supervised MCC Cutting Room

Koch, Roy Swartz (1913-2010), Mennonite Church minister, bishop and denominational leader

Martin, John M. (1910-2011), farmer, itinerant preacher and evangelist

Martin, David Weber (1873-1959), farmer, church founder of the David Martin Mennonites

Nigh, Ross Edward (1917-2001), Brethren in Christ churchman, promoter of missions and peace

Regehr, Abraham Peter (1895-1995), pioneer, businessman, part of the credit union in Niagara

Reimer, A. James (1942-2010), Mennonite theologian and professor at CGUC

Roth, Moses H. (1898-1978), farmer, bishop, leader in conservative movement

Schmitt, Leona R. (1910-1991), Mennonite Central Committee Ontario Cutting Room manager

Schwartzentruber, Grace Magdalene (1930-2005), missionary to Brazil

Sherk, J. Harold (1903-1974), Mennonite Brethren in Christ pastor, educator, peace worker

Snyder, Edward Groff (1905-1991), farmer, businessman, Mennonite lay leader.

The authors of these biographies are: Howard Bean, Ferne Burkhardt, Del Gingrich, Virginia Hostetler, Maria Klassen, Earl Koch, Lucille Marr and Sam Steiner.

Several of the authors wrote multiple biographies.

As always, the Gameo Committee appreciates your suggestions for biographies of important, deceased Mennonite men and women leaders in Ontario.

The above articles are available on the net at: www.gameo.org

*Linda Huebert Hecht,
Chair GAMEO Committee
Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario*

Mennonite Archives of Ontario Update

By Laureen Harder-Gissing

The Government of Canada has provided funding of \$150,000 through the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage. This new investment will support upgrades to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario through the acquisition of specialized equipment to preserve and exhibit archival materials.

Archives are a vital part of any community, and archival equipment contributes to that vitality in visible and hidden ways. What you will not see when you visit the new archives is the specially-tuned heating and ventilation system humming away quietly in the background, keeping the paper and digital files, photographs, films and sound recordings at a temperature and humidity designed for their preservation. You will not see the fire suppression system, the sensors, sprinklers and reservoir of chemical clean agent designed to extinguish fires without damaging archival materials. And unless we have a special public event, you will not see the inside of our storage room with its compact shelving designed to triple our storage capacity.

You will see glass cases housing exhibits drawn from our collections in the archives gallery. These exhibits will tell the stories of Mennonite history and culture on a local, national, and international scale. In the Archives reading room you will see a new digital microfilm reader to focus, magnify, scan and print microfilm documents quickly and easily. A new document scanner will allow you to scan maps, diaries and other delicate materials without causing damage.



Kitchener-Waterloo MP Peter Braid speaks with Laureen Harder-Gissing and Marlene Epp about the history of Mennonites in Ontario.

Braid made the official announcement of government funding for the enlarged archives on June 7, 2013.

(Conrad Grebel University College photo)

In ways hidden and visible, this equipment will help keep our historical treasures both safe and available for future generations. We are pleased that Canadian Heritage, and by extension the people of Canada, have become partners in this project. We are confident that this project will enrich the awareness and understanding of our history for Canadians both locally and across the country.

MCC in Canada: A 50th Anniversary History Conference

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada is sponsoring an academic and community outreach conference, hosted by the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg on Dec. 13-14, 2013. The conference will celebrate MCC Canada's 50th anniversary and will begin with a book launch of Esther Epp-Tiessen's history of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada.

MCC Canada officially began on Dec. 13, 1963, but the story goes back much farther, at least to 1920. The purpose of the conference is to ponder,

critique and celebrate the story of caring for one another and for each other.

On Friday evening, Esther Epp-Tiessen will talk about "Writing the story of MCC Canada," followed by a book signing and reception. Saturday morning will include: "Gender and Generation in the MCC Story" by Lucille Marr; "Canadian Mennonite Identity and MCC" by T.D. Regehr; "MCC Canada and the Global Community" by Alain Epp Weaver; and "Religion and the 'Common Good' in Canada" by Paul Bramadat.

Saturday afternoon will feature stories about Indigenous people by Rick

Cober Bauman, Women by Eileen Klasen, Refugees by Marijke Olson, and Low German Mennonites by Mary Friesen. Another session in the afternoon will feature Restorative Justice by Wayne Northey, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank by John Wieler, Voluntary Service by Hardy Groening, and the MCC Ottawa Office by William Janzen. The final discussion will centre on "Envisioning MCC in Canada in 2038" by Stefan Epp-Koop.

More information is available at <http://mennonitestudies.uwinnipeg.ca/events>.

Three Bridges School

By Barb Draper

In the spring of 1825, John W. Brubacher walked from Pennsylvania to his new property on the shores of the Conestoga River, not far from what became known as Three Bridges. In those days Woolwich Township had almost no settlers and he was virtually alone, chopping down trees to make the land suitable for farming. On weekends he walked to Waterloo to spend time with friends. That fall he walked back to Pennsylvania and the next spring he returned with a wagonload of equipment to start farming in earnest.

He married Catharine Martin and soon they were raising a family on the shores of the Conestoga River. Within a few years, many other Mennonite families from Pennsylvania joined them and a solid Mennonite community took root. John W. Brubacher became the local deacon. In 1844 the community got together and built a log building to serve as a schoolhouse and meeting-house next door to where the Three Bridges School stands today.

Three Bridges School became School Section #3; it was in existence before there was a school in St. Jacobs and probably before Elmira. It served the local community well and in 1872 they built a new building that is still being used today.

Three Bridges, like other local schools, had its own board of three trustees. That changed in 1965 when Woolwich Township created a Township board of five trustees to oversee all the schools except for those in Elmira. The mid-1960s were a time of change. Small one-room schools were closed and new centralized schools were built. Villages such as St. Jacobs, and Floradale kept their schools while the country schools were closed. The one exception was Three Bridges.

You see, the Old Order Mennonite community with its deep roots in Woolwich was not ready for centralized schools. They saw that bussing their children to larger schools with new facilities complete with gymnasiums would have a detrimental effect on their community values. The Mennonites supported public schools in Woolwich Township for over 100 years, but the traditional groups saw that was happening in the 1960s would disrupt family control of education.

It's not that Old Order Mennonites are opposed to education. They value basic education very highly—after all they began many of the local schools. But their allegiance is to God and they want the school to re-enforce the values of their community—faithfulness, simplicity, humility, self-discipline, and community. They are not interested in higher levels of education where people are taught to be confrontational and to question everything. When the Old Order Mennonites of the 1960s saw their local schools prepared to close, many of them withdrew their children from public schools and began their own parochial schools.

The Woolwich Township School Board saw what was happening and tried to avoid a complete exodus. They negotiated with Old Order families and the result was that Three Bridges School remained as a small country school in Woolwich Township. Parents were allowed to choose between Three Bridges and St. Jacobs. As a result, the more traditional Mennonites sent their children to Three Bridges and other families sent their children to St. Jacobs.

A few years later, in 1969, the Woolwich Township Board of Trustees was subsumed into the Waterloo County Board of Education. One of the last actions of the Woolwich Township Board was an appeal to the Waterloo County Board to keep Three Bridges open. For the last 44 years, Three Bridges School has held a unique spot within the Waterloo Region District School Board. It has been a “Mennonite” school without a separate catchment area. It has attracted a variety of traditional Mennonites; many Old Colony families began sending their children as they began moving to the area in the 1990s. The school has not offered French as a second language, assuming that the children are already bilingual, with their first language a dialect of German.

This arrangement has worked well for the traditional Mennonite population. Many families have chosen to send their children to Three Bridges even though the parochial schools are nearby and provide a good quality education. These families have found the teachers at Three Bridges to be supportive of their values.

Today the Three Bridges School is under serious review by the Waterloo Region District School Board and there is a strong possibility that it could close in the near future.

The writer is a local historian with special interest in the Mennonites of Woolwich Township. Her father, Martin Frey, was one of the trustees of the Woolwich Township School Board in the 1960s.



The Three Bridges School today still uses the old 1872 building. (2008 photo by Barb Draper)