



Wennogespraech

Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario

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Rockway Mennonite School: conception and birth

by Ferne Burkhardt

Mennonites of Swiss origin who made up the Mennonite Conference of Ontario had been, by and large, a rural people and quite conservative. Education beyond the very basic and functional level, which was necessary to read the Bible and to carry on the normal activities of life, was viewed with some suspicion. It opened doors to associations in an outside world from which Mennonites traditionally tried to be separate. It also introduced threatening ideas. Particularly in the areas of philosophy and science it was feared education would supplant faith, and spirituality would be rejected.

Because they were a rural people and very practical, these Mennonites viewed the skills acquired at home as more valuable than secular education learned in a high school classroom. During the winter months when farm work was slower, young people could attend Ontario Mennonite Bible School (OMBS), a three-month, week-day Bible school in Kitchener which dated back to 1907. What was learned at home, augmented by basic Bible training, had prepared young people well for life in the community and church, including leadership positions and missionary work.

But times were changing. Near the end of

the first half of this century the trend toward urbanization was beginning, a trend which grew rapidly in the fifties. No longer were the Swiss Mennonites of Ontario found only on farms and in rural villages. In urban settings there was less need and opportunity for children to help at home. There had to be alternatives. Attending high school was one, although school attendance beyond age 14 was not compulsory. With life situations becoming more complex, there was growing awareness of the need for higher education and increasingly Mennonite teenagers were going on to high school. A few parents sent their children to Christian schools as distant as Fort Erie, Ontario or Harrisonburg, Virginia. Others, unwilling to send their adolescents away from home or unable to pay the cost of travel and boarding school, but who had misgivings about the public school, looked for yet another alternative.

In a letter to the executive committee of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario, J. B. Martin, then secretary of the OMBS board, said that parents were keeping their children from school "because of the nature and influence of the modern high school." He cited the emphasis on militarism as a specific



Ferne Burkhardt

concern.

At this time Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KWCVS), one of three high schools in the immediate area, had a compulsory cadet training program complete with uniforms, drills and marches—all very offensive to the Mennonites. Special concessions were made, however, allowing Mennonite boys to train as a First Aid Unit, and they performed so well that they were given a special award one year. Significant also is the fact that they were not required to wear the cadet uniform. Instead they wore a white shirt with a Red Cross armband.

For young Roy Steckley, who later became one of Rockway's first graduates, there was no alternative to compulsory cadet training at the high school in Milverton where he was a grade nine student. When the bishop warned Steckley that he would be excommunicated from the Poole Amish Mennonite Church if he continued the training, he quit school and went to work in a shoe factory.

This was 1943 when Canada was embroiled in World War II and resistance to things military was a very live issue among Mennonites. The problem of compulsory cadet training was brought to the annual conference floor. While cadet training was a particular

Rockway Mennonite School 1946/47



pressure point, the felt need for a Christian school was much broader, including also the desire for better trained and dedicated church workers. Thus Mennonites in the Mennonite Conference of Ontario began to give serious thought to creating a high school of their own.

At a regular meeting of the OMBS board on September 16, 1943 the question of a high school was considered at length. A special meeting was called for November 1, at which the board passed a motion "that the question of the High School for the Conference of Ontario be referred to the Executive Committee of the Conference of Ontario for further disposition." As a basis for this action these reasons were given:

The growing number of students attending other church schools; the unsolicited comments favoring such a school; the opportunity for the church to help its youth spiritually with a balanced teaching.

The Mennonite Conference of Ontario met in special session November 9, 1943 at the

Elmira Mennonite Church where the executive committee recommended the appointment of a committee "to study the following points—

- 1) The need
- 2) The possibility of establishing such a school
- 3) The faculty
- 4) Accreditation [sic]
- 5) Location and equipment
- 6) Financial support
- 7) The standards, Biblical and educational
- 8) The opportune time to start such a school."

The recommendation was accepted with the amendment that the OMBS board be the committee to make the study. Work began immediately. Contact was made with the Ontario Department of Education regarding its requirements, a questionnaire was drafted and sent to each member congregation "to get the mind of the church," and a joint meeting of

the OMBS board, the conference executive committee, the OMBS faculty, and the education and young people's committee was planned as soon as the results of the questionnaire were tabulated.

The acting deputy minister of education, Major Cowells, and a Mr. Hooper, a former church school inspector, gave assurance that a school could indeed be established, but it would need to meet provincial academic standards if accreditation was to be given and it would need to operate for a number of years before an inspector could be satisfied that standards were being met. They also advised a careful consideration of costs since no government grants were available to privately operated schools.

Results of the questionnaire were these:
 Number in high schools (including church school) . . . 65 (from 18 different schools).
 Number in church schools . . . 14.
 Number that would possibly attend a church high school . . . 23.

J. B. Martin, OMBS board secretary, reported these findings at the June 6-8, 1944 Mennonite Conference of Ontario sessions along with the recommendation "that Conference decide the further disposition of this question." Action was taken on the recommendation at a June 20 joint meeting of the Conference executive committee and the OMBS board. A high school study committee was struck and given responsibility "to study the advisability or rather to prepare a complete set up for the Ontario Mennonite Conference to establish its own High School in Ontario." Roy Koch was given responsibility to call a meeting. Other members appointed to the committee were Curtis C. Cressman, Norman High, Chester Buschert, and Harold D. Groh.

The committee began work in July and by August had determined that no municipal restrictions on building or operating a private school existed, but any building plans would need the approval of the city engineer. Several sites were investigated, including a 14-acre property on Doon Road, which was, in 1944, near the eastern limits of the city of Kitchener. The property included a barn and a large farmhouse. The asking price was \$8,500. Projections on property and operating costs were prepared for presentation to Conference delegates.

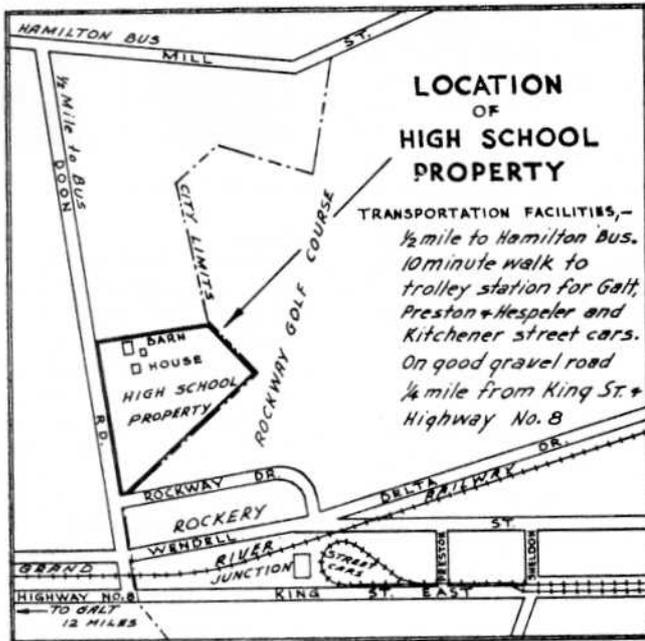
At another special session of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario held at the Wanner

From the brochure "The Advance of the Mennonite High School of Ontario," published in mid-1945.

In addition there is a bank barn and double garage.

The purchase price is \$9,250.00

Plans for a permanent building are continuing in consultation with an architect.



Bro. H. D. Groh has been appointed principal and negotiations are under way for another teacher. Details of the courses available for the first year, with other general information, are being prepared by the Administration Committee and will be announced later. It is expected that the school will open this fall offering ninth and tenth grade courses.

The finance committee has been asked to solicit an initial sum of \$50,000.00 for the purchase of property, erection of buildings, and carrying on school. Regional meetings will be announced for further discussion and solicitation. To successfully execute these duties the committee as your humble servants invoke the prayers and sympathetic consideration of the entire constituency.

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Mennonite Church, Hespeler (now Cambridge), on November 9, 1944, the high school committee recommended "that the church take steps to open a high school in the fall of 1945 giving the first two years of work and to add the higher grades as the classes advance."

The high school committee was also enlarged to nine members to facilitate personal contact with congregations. It was asked to continue its study of sites, costs, personnel, and operations.

Yet again a special session of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario was called, this time at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener on February 15, 1945. Significant at this session was the involvement of lay persons who were specifically invited to participate in discussion. The high school committee was retained and three-point recommendation was approved:

- to raise an initial \$50,000;
- to engage teachers and plan a school for 1945;
- to purchase property and plan for a permanent building.

Shortly thereafter three committees were struck. A five-member finance committee immediately set to work on a promotional pamphlet, "The advance of the Mennonite high school in Ontario," describing general plans for organization and development. The five-member property committee applied for a building permit for renovations and consulted with an architect to plan for a permanent building. Information on courses, program and costs was put together by a 7-member administrative committee. The combined committees met March 10, 1945 and elected an executive committee comprising Clayton C. Cressman, chairman; Harold D. Groh, secretary; Milton R. Good, treasurer; Angus S. Weber, chairman of the property committee, and J. C. Hallman, chairman of the finance committee. Cressman was also elected chairman of the administrative committee.

Raising \$50,000 was not an easy task. Selecting the best site and making alterations also meant careful work. At least there were choices in property matters. When it came to searching for faculty there were no choices. There were no fully qualified high school teachers in the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. Harold Groh wrote to Norman High, who later became a professor at the Ontario College of Agriculture in Guelph, inquiring if High had any interest in continuing studies to prepare for this work. It was Groh, however, who began to prepare for the job. He was already secretary for the Conference, and director of the Toronto Mission. He had received, in 1926, a B.A. degree from McMaster University (then in Toronto), a most unusual credential for a minister in the Ontario Conference. He had been ordained in 1923. Now he enrolled at the Ontario College of Education to study to be a teacher in addition to his manifold duties.

Salome Bauman was an elementary teacher in her twelfth year, teaching grade one at the Margaret Avenue Public School, Kitchener.

She was "getting bored" with first graders and was open to a change. She was hardly prepared for an offer to teach at a high school which she had never heard of and, in fact, which did not yet exist! She was not academically qualified for such a position although she had begun work toward a B.A. degree in 1940 through summer courses—a goal she achieved in 1951. Since the proposed school was private and credit would not be granted immediately, there was freedom to hire faculty who would not have qualified academically for the public system.

Miss Bauman believed in the concept of Christian education, seeing this as an opportunity to impart to young people values that were good and right. She decided, "If the Lord asks me, I must do it." To accept made no practical sense whatsoever. She would give up her security to enter a nebulous situation for which she was ill prepared in the best of circumstances, and that at considerable financial sacrifice.¹ However her enthusiastic spirit and

smaller one . . . My heart was in my boots! How by any stretch of imagination could this be a school within two weeks!"

On the appointed day—September 5, 1945—the school did open. The classrooms, scrubbed by volunteers from nearby Mennonite churches, were furnished with old double desks built for ten-year-olds which scarcely suited the long legs of adolescents. From a restaurant there were cast-off wire-backed chairs and small tables which became the teachers' desks. Miss Bauman quipped, "With all those second hand and outmoded furnishings, the lack of indoor plumbing did not seem too incongruous." Since the upper floor was to be a dormitory for girls, the rest of the house needed to be equipped as a residence with bedrooms, kitchen, and diningroom. All the shopping for the household was done by Harold and Cora Groh and Salome Bauman.

Nettie Sherk, together with her two children, lived in the residence and for her services as matron and cook received a salary of



The Rockway grade 11 class in 1946/47. From left: David Groh, Ella Cressman, Delford Zehr, Paul Fretz, Lois Martin, Roy Steckley, Richard Harder, Samuel Rittenhouse, Rita Nickel, Robert Witmer, Jeanne Gingrich, Mary Gingrich.

dedication to the Lord's service which inspired hundreds of students until her retirement in 1970, left no room for hesitation.

The appointment of Harold D. Groh as principal of the emerging school, and of Salome Bauman as an additional teacher, was approved at the annual Mennonite Conference of Ontario sessions at Elmira on June 7, 1945. The same day, a recommendation that the name of the new school be "Rockway Mennonite School" was tabled. Delegates were given a month to register any suggestions with a decision then to be made by the high school committee and the executive committee of conference. They approved the initial recommendation on August 11, 1944.

Two weeks before the school was to open, Groh and Miss Bauman visited the site where a large stack of fresh straw stood beside the barn. The farm family, still living there, was eating supper after a hard day's threshing. The two teachers requested permission to see the rooms which would become classrooms. Miss Bauman reflects:

"We entered the bedroom, still furnished. Folding doors separated this room from a smaller room on the outer side. Twenty-four grade 9's would have to be crowded into the bedroom and the ten grade 10's into the

\$10.00 a week minus \$2.00 for each child (presumably for their food and lodging). She was also allowed to have a garden and some chickens!

Behind the house/school was a large garden which would furnish produce for the dormitory larder and for sale to generate some income for the treasury. Across the spacious lawn and driveway was the barn whose stables, lofts, and granaries would be remodelled a year later to accommodate the growing number of students. All of this would eventually disappear to make way for professionally designed classrooms, auditorium, gymnasium, and sports field with little resemblance to the primitive beginnings of Rockway Mennonite School.

Other things that would change as the school would develop were the discrimination experienced by females, the harsh legalism and ultra-conservatism imposed on the institution in its infancy, which may have been in a measure a reflection of the Conference at that time, but also portrayed the strong will of a powerful bishop who was chairman of the board. The development of the school on many fronts, however, goes beyond the topic of this paper.

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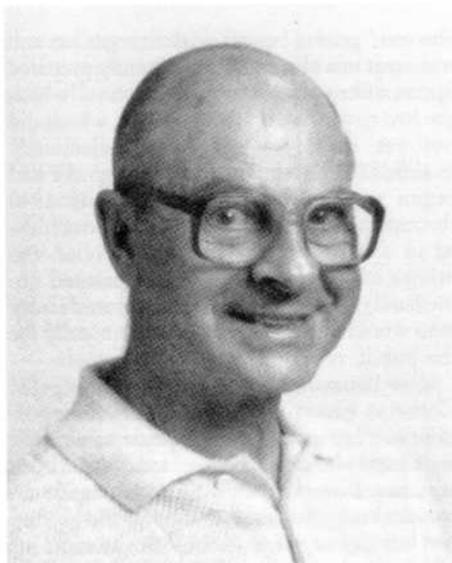
In the beginning: at Hageys and Wanners

by Eben C. Cressman

One warm summer's day in 1799 Squatter Daniel Dodge sat on a hilltop overlooking the Tinaatua (Grand) River where it is joined by a rushing tributary (the Speed River). As he was musing about his life of leisure in the unoccupied former Indian lands he noticed a movement in the trees as two horsemen approached him.

George Bechtel and John Bean from Pennsylvania had heard about good farming land in the heart of Upper Canada for sale at a reasonable price. These men chatted with the amiable Dodge who was impressed with their simplicity and their prosperous appearance. They were looking for new homelands to rear their families in the Mennonite tradition.

Dodge informed them that a large tract of this wooded, well-watered land was available for sale from its owners Richard Beasley, James Wilson, and Jean Baptiste Rousseau who had purchased it from the Six Nations Indians. (These Indian lands had been granted by Governor Haldimand to the Indians who had remained loyal to the British crown during the Revolutionary War—six miles on each side of the Grand River from its source to its mouth.) Bechtel and Bean that very July (1799) purchased large tracts—Bechtel 3,150 acres and Bean (Biehn) 3,600 acres—and had the deeds legalized at the Registry Office in York (Toronto). They returned to Pennsylvania with enthusiasm and soon had others interested in founding a new colony in the hinterlands of



Eben Cressman

Upper Canada. (Dodge himself was so impressed by these land-hungry pioneers that eventually he purchased some land for himself and married Elizabeth Wismer, a Mennonite maiden.)

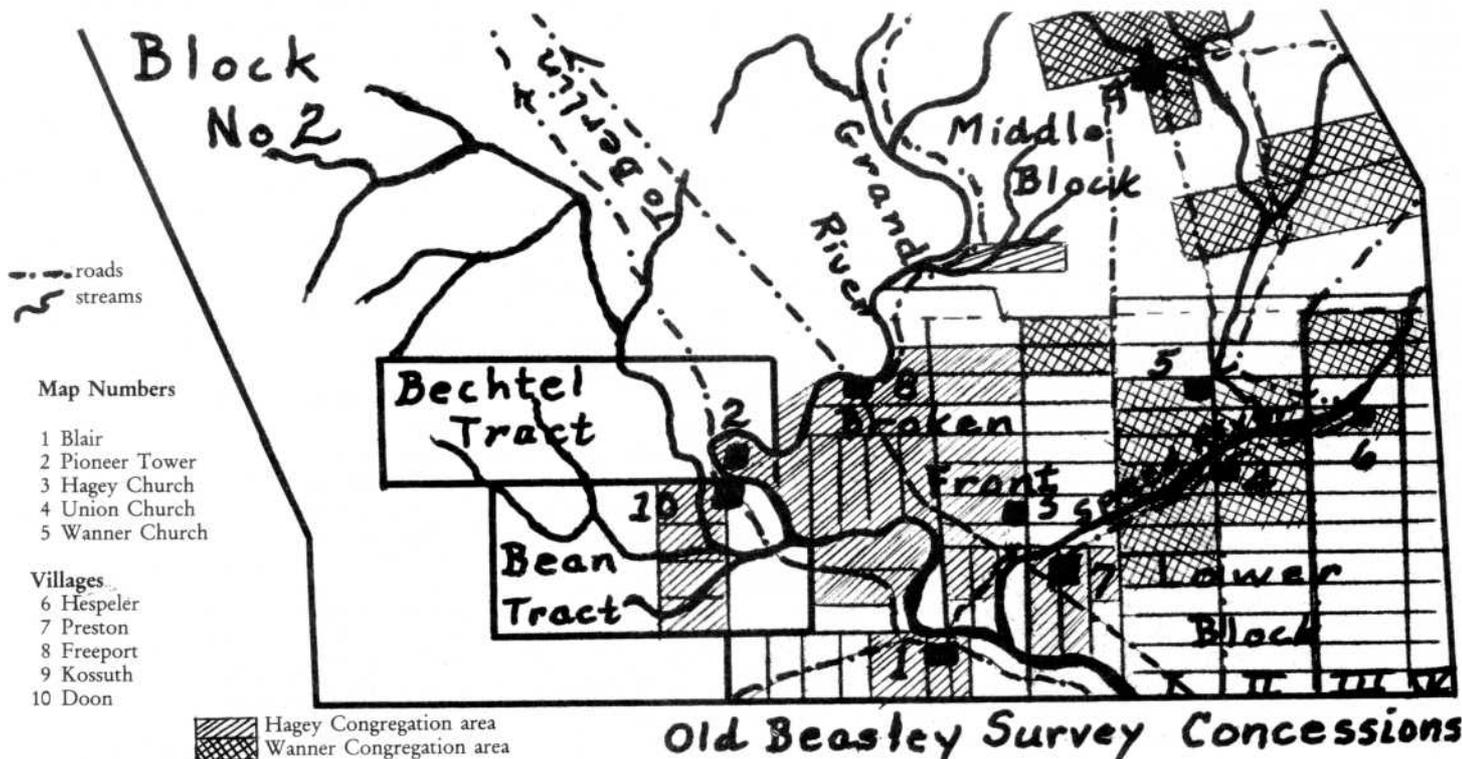
By 1802 twelve families, ten on the west side of the Grand, had immigrated and set up log homes on their paid, registered lands. But then a startling bit of news dashed all their hopes of peaceful community. Sam Bricker, a venturesome pioneer of their number, walked to York and overheard a conversation in a tavern. Investigating the rumor he had overheard he confronted Richard Beasley who had to admit that the Mennonite lands were indeed encumbered with a mortgage. The outcome is history. In 1804 Beasley sold the 94,000 acres of land to the German Company of Penn-

sylvania for \$20,000 and the settlement was saved. New settlers entered the southern portion of the tract, Waterloo Township, in large numbers during the next few years.

Religious services were held in the various homes where small groups met for worship. Jacob Bechtel, ordained a deacon in Pennsylvania, and Joseph Bechtel, ordained a minister in Canada, led the early, widely scattered congregation. John Erb, a prosperous Mennonite landowner and miller was exempt from military duty in the War of 1812-1815 because his milling business was considered essential to winning the war. With all the money he accrued he built a brick meetinghouse at his own expense and dedicated it as a "free to all denominations" place to worship. It seems to have been used mostly by Mennonites who later became known as the Hagey congregation.

The Hagey cemetery, at its present location, was used as a burying ground as early as 1810. But the first deeded Mennonite Meetinghouse was not built until 1842 on the adjoining property. Early in Upper Canada the "Family Compact" had forbidden any denomination from securing deeds to church property except the Anglicans, thus forcing the free churches to build for the use of all denominations for purposes of preaching services, schools, and burying grounds. This earliest Mennonite congregation, known as the Bechtel congregation when the headquarters had been in the Blair area, had become known as the Hagey congregation when the location north of Preston was secured from the Hagey family.

The Daniel Hageys were not early immigrants, coming only in 1822, but because of their character became respected leaders. The eldest son Jacob was ordained deacon as a young man. The second son Joseph, married



to Sam Bricker's daughter Sophia, was ordained minister in 1851 and bishop in 1852. As a bishop he had duties beyond the Hagey congregation and was well received, drawing full houses when he preached with an "exhortation to be more like our Lord and Master."

The red brick meetinghouse was built in 1842 in the arrangement still used in the Old Order buildings. In 1896 renovations costing \$30 modernized the building which was lighted by two coal oil lamp chandeliers. In 1928 a furnace with forced air heating was installed, and in 1953 an addition with basement rooms modernized made this a beautiful and convenient building in its setting of trees.

But all was lost in disastrous fires. In 1954 the church was relocated to Concession Street, Preston and rebuilt on land donated by Eugene Langs. The name was changed to Preston Mennonite Church. Present membership is 175.

Tunkards were the earliest pioneers in the Wanner congregation arriving east of Preston as early as 1801—the Gingrichs, Grohs, and Bears. The Mennonite families arrived about 1809 and later—families of Wanner, Panabaker, Bechtel, Bretz, Clemens, Strome, Detwiler, Stauffer, and Snyder. The Tunkards seem to have met with the Mennonites as one congregation from an early date. These families met in the houses of members for worship. Then, in 1829, Samuel Bechtel donated a plot of land on the corner of his farm for a meetinghouse, school, and burying ground for all denominations. It was a frame structure and was used mostly by the Mennonites and Tunkards. The site since 1929 has been marked by a cairn and a plaque just off Highway 24, Hespeler.

The present site of Wanner Church on the hilltop above Beavertdale was donated by the Wanner family first as a cemetery as early as

1817, and deeded as a Mennonite Church in 1837 when a white brick building was erected with John Bear as its first minister. His father Martin Bear had served as minister from 1808 until the new church was built. The congregation remained small since most of the pioneer families left the church or moved away. Then in 1874 the Mennonite Brethren in Christ division marked a further decline. Even the minister John Bear left with the new group.

By 1892, when Absalom B. Snyder was ordained minister, only five families claimed membership.

But there was a bright spot too, for Wanners claims the first Mennonite Sunday school in America organized in 1842. A plaque on the building commemorates this event. There was criticism and the services were not continuous. The use of the English language vs. the German language controversy seems to have been centered in the Sunday school movement.

Brighter days followed the arrival of Bishop Simon Kanagy and his wife in 1932. They organized the second vacation Bible school in the Ontario Conference in 1933.

The present brown brick structure built in 1938 has had an educational wing built in 1969. The modern parsonage was built in 1955 on additional land donated by A. J. Shantz. There are now 140 members.

Monuments, cairns and plaques are reminders of the earliest pioneer settlers who cleared the land and built the foundations for agriculture, industry, and commerce. But the most important contribution of all is the bringing and propagating of the simple faith of their Anabaptist forefathers.

This is a summary of a talk presented by the author to the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario on June 11, 1983.

Book Note

One quilt, many pieces: a concise reference guide to Mennonite groups in Canada by Margaret Loewen Reimer (Waterloo: Mennonite Publishing Service, 1983), 60 pp., \$3.50.

This helpful little volume is derived from a series published in the *Mennonite Reporter* from November 1981 to May 1982. Twenty-seven groups are included under five general headings. For each conference or grouping of congregations, Reimer provides a brief history (as brief as one sentence), something on unique emphases, membership figures, number of congregations, geographical location of the group, and schools, institutions and periodicals sponsored or recognized by the group.

The intended audience for the book would appear to be Mennonites, since minimal introductory material is included. Much of its information on the smaller groups is not available elsewhere.

— Sam Steiner

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Rockway Mennonite School

Continued from page 11

The birth of Rockway Mennonite School came after a relatively short but intensive period of labor. Once the desire had been identified and interpreted as a need, undoubtedly brought into sharp focus by the immediate tensions of war, no time was lost in creating a mechanism which moved steadily and logically forward. There seemed to be little hesitation or resistance from the constituency, a situation that turned around completely two decades later. During the sixties, Rockway suffered decline and turmoil and narrowly escaped being closed. In the next decade, with an Association rather than the Conference being directly responsible to operate the school, a slow climb to new heights began.

At its outset, the preamble of the first constitution expressed the need for trained and dedicated workers to carry on the work of the church, and it was for this purpose as well as simply to provide a Christian alternative to the public system, that Rockway came to be. That goal has been and continues to be achieved. Beginning with the first graduating class of six young people in 1948,² through periods of both stability and of stress, future church

and community leaders, outstanding in many fields, have emerged from the halls of Rockway Mennonite School. There they encountered values and challenges which, for many, shaped their lives. Today Rockway graduates girdle the globe, touching many lives, building on foundations which were strengthened at Rockway Mennonite School.

Notes

¹Salome Bauman was unable to recall precise figures; only that the Rockway salary was "quite a bit lower." According to minutes of the Kitchener Public School Board, December 14, 1944, base salary for women was \$1000 with \$100 increments to \$2000 and \$50 increments thereafter to \$2200. Since Miss Bauman had taught for 12 years, it would seem her salary could have been in the neighborhood of \$2000. According to High School Committee minutes for April 7, 1945, a motion was made to pay \$1200 for teachers and \$1500 plus rent for the principal at Rockway. A full salary schedule for 1952 at Rockway stated a base salary for a female with a B.A. degree of \$1300 with annual increments of \$25 to a maximum of four.

An additional \$150 was allowed for an Honours B.A. and a similar amount for a teaching certificate.

A male teacher, equally qualified, began at \$1500 or \$1750 if he was married, with \$100 additional for each child to a maximum of \$300. No policy existed for married females, with or without children.

This was still far below the 1945 public school pay schedule of eight years earlier in terms of increments and maximums.

²The six graduates were Robert and Lois (Martin) Witmer, missionaries under the Mennonite Board of Missions in France; David Groh, pastor of a Mennonite church in Millersburg, Ohio, editor of the *Ohio Evangel* and a member of the Mennonite Publication Board; Delford Zehr, general manager of Provident Bookstores in Ontario and church council chairman at Valleyview Mennonite Church, London; Roy Steckley, a senior public school principal in Kitchener, active member of Preston Mennonite Church and a member of the Board of Directors of Rockway Mennonite School Association; Paul Fretz, an elementary school principal with the Waterloo County Board of Education, member of Bloomingdale Mennonite Church and active in Gideons. Another member of the class who did not graduate was Mario Snyder, who returned to Argentina where he grew up in a missionary family and where he became a church leader.

Note: Full documentation for this article is with the original paper at Conrad Grebel College Archives.

Passing the time of day — with tombstones

by Helen Freeman

It has not been an infrequent sight during this past summer of clement weather, for a passer-by to notice a local historian or genealogist diligently studying the headstones in a cemetery. He or she may have been sitting on a lawnchair in front of the stone, with notebook in hand, recording each notation made on the stone.

Sometimes, the weathered condition of the stone made it necessary for the recorder to take a closer look, or even to attempt to follow the letters with a finger to discern the message written on the stones. The genealogy committee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario has undertaken a large task—probably larger than it had at first seemed—to record all of the Mennonite cemeteries in Ontario.

The physical appearance of each cemetery was different, making each one of special interest to the recorder. Sometimes weeds and long grass made it difficult to find the headstones. A snake would occasionally slither by and insects had to be contended with. Other cemeteries were well trimmed, surrounded by well-kept fences. Several broken headstones needed to be pieced together like a puzzle in order for their messages to be read.

One pleasant cemetery to record was located on the shores of Lake Erie. Warm breezes from over the lake made recording this cemetery an enjoyable task.

Mennonite cemeteries scattered across southern Ontario have their own stories to tell. Many children and young mothers have been buried, telling of hardships of the years gone by. Verses on the headstones expressed the feelings of loss by the survivors, but more importantly pointed to the hope of a reunion in heaven. Some verses seen frequently this summer were:

“Weep not for me my (wife) so dear,
I am not dead but sleeping here.
I was not yours but God’s alone
He loved me best and called me home.”

or

“This lovely flower to us awhile was
given,
Transplanted now it brightly blooms in
heaven.”

or

“In death’s cold arms lies sleeping here,
A tender parent, a companion dear;
In love he lived in peace he died,
His life was asked but was denied.”

It was interesting, while recording the information on the stones, to ponder on the lives that our deceased ancestors had lived. It was also beneficial to have an elderly person of the area accompany you to the cemetery to reminisce about the people that they



Passing the time at Rainham Church’s Lakeshore cemetery. Catharine Daley is in the foreground.

remembered so well.

Many people or groups of people have done a large amount of work in several Mennonite or community cemeteries in the area. Cemeteries that have been completed or are in the process of being recorded are: Steinmann’s, Breslau, Bloomingdale, Maryborough, Hagey’s, Wellesley, Conestogo Old Order, South Cayuga, Rainham (Lakeshore), Reformed Mennonite near Fisherville, Wannors, Hostetlers Reformed, St. Jacobs, First Mennonite in Kitchener, Erb St., Mannheim, and Gardiner near Cashmere.

The goal of the genealogy committee is to record the information from each gravestone in every Mennonite cemetery in Ontario. Each cemetery will be compiled into booklet form, and also a filing system will be organized to include the grave of every Mennonite person

in Ontario. This system will then be available for any interested researcher to consult at the Conrad Grebel library.

There is still a great deal of work to be done. Volunteers who could accurately read German inscriptions would be gratefully appreciated. Other interested persons could help with recording cemeteries not yet finished, or typing filecards for the filing system. If interested in helping with any of these tasks, please contact Allan Dettweiler at (519) 664-2351.

More volunteers are needed

The genealogy committee is attempting to set up a file system of obituaries of Mennonites or persons with Mennonite ancestry. Volunteers from any Mennonite areas such as Kitchener-Waterloo, Elmira, New Hamburg, Milverton, St. Catharines, Leamington, Markham, or Niagara are being sought to be responsible for clipping out current obituaries from their area’s newspapers to be compiled into a central filing system. Such a system would be of great benefit to future genealogy researchers. If interested in helping with this work, please contact Allan Dettweiler at (519) 664-2351.

Research in Progress

Allan Dettweiler has prepared a card file of all Ontario Mennonites whose obituaries were printed in the *Gospel Herald* from 1908 through the present. Are there persons willing to do the same for *Der Bote*, *Mennonitische Rundschau*, etc.?

These indexes will ultimately integrate with the research currently being done in cemeteries by the Society’s genealogy committee, and the project described above, if volunteers can be found.

Persons wishing to make use of Dettweiler’s index should contact Sam Steiner at Conrad Grebel College (519) 885-0220.

Genealogy—How to collect and record information from family and friends

by Lorraine Roth

There are two types of information that one seeks from family members. The first type I would like to discuss is the historical part. Here one delves into the past. Who were our great-grandparents? Who were their parents and ancestors? Where are the families of all of these people? Where did all of our ancestors live? When did they migrate to Canada, and where did they settle? What did they do to make a living? What were the unique events in their lives? For information of this type, one generally goes to the oldest and/or most interested family members.

Information may be solicited from people in three different ways—by telephone, personal visit, or letter. Of these, the personal visit is likely to be the most productive. Use the telephone to arrange a visit or to check on one simple question, but do not expect people to give you all the information you want on the spur of the moment. People's memories sometimes need prodding, and more than one visit may be required to get much information.

If the people you are wanting to contact live at a distance, you may wish to try interviewing by correspondence. Some people find it difficult to write letters, but it is worth trying. Back in 1968 I was given the name and address of my grandmother's cousin who was born in 1888. Since she was living in Nebraska, I had to use the mail but very fearfully sent off my first letter. Fortunately, she was able and willing to write, and in less than a year we were able to collect the story and data on her father's entire family.

In interviewing people, the following may be some helpful things to remember. Be sensitive to the schedules or interests of those you are interviewing. I once called a man over 90 to arrange for an interview. He told me not to come before two, because he might not be finished with lunch before that time. After I arrived, he received a telephone call asking him to repair a pump. At first he tried to put them off for that day but finally agreed to do it for them at four o'clock. Then I knew how much time was allotted to me.

I do not use a tape recorder in my interviewing, because I am not comfortable in using it. If you can use it without destroying spontaneity, it certainly would be helpful in recalling details. It is important, however, to write down the information and the stories received. Do not trust your memory. Notes can be made during or immediately after the interview. Sometimes I have found when writing up the story after the interview that I then have further questions and need to go back to fill in the details.

If your knowledge or stories spark interest or lead to eliciting further information, tell them, but if they confuse, leave your stories untold. Say enough to capture the interest of the person you are interviewing, but do not overwhelm him/her.

Make your questions as specific as possible. "What do you know about . . .?" will probably

receive the answer, "Nothing," or at best, "Not much." Begin with the questions which the person is likely to be able to answer and then go on to the more difficult or more remote ones. Ask first about the parents, then the grandparents, and then the great-grandparents. Do not begin with the great-grandparents.

Frequently a number of older people brought together for conversation is very productive. They stimulate each other and know the right questions. I often took my parents along on these interviews. Occasionally, the conversation would go off on a tangent and the interview was lost, but the risk is worth taking. I have also discovered on occasion, that the "tangent" was more fruitful than my questions although it may have been on another topic or family.

Keep confidential things confidential. Sometimes when printing certain things they can be reworded to say the things that should be said but in a more acceptable way. For example, "I remember my grandfather as a cranky old man," in print may appear something like this, "John had a stroke, which left him partly paralyzed and somewhat demanding." Build up confidence by using in-

formation you receive in a kindly way. Occasionally someone has wept as they shared about an unsatisfactory relationship in the family. This became a sacred moment, which required trust.

Although the memories of older people are invaluable in piecing together the story of our ancestors, one must remember that they are not infallible. If you receive information which is contradictory, discuss the contradictions with the persons who have the varying versions. Sometimes, when confronted with the facts, people can amend their recollections. It may be a case of having the right facts but in the wrong order, or a certain story may be applied to the wrong set of ancestors. In some cases, we simply have to live with the contradictions, hoping for some evidence to tell us which is the correct version.

You are wanting to gather both the stories about your ancestors and their families and also the data of birth, marriage, and death. People's memories are fine for the stories but do not serve well on the other data. Check with the people you are interviewing whether they have written records such as those frequently

Continued on page 16

FAMILY NAME _____

DESCENDANT's NAME _____ SPOUSE's NAME _____
(maiden name in case of wife)

Date of birth: _____ Date of birth: _____

Place of birth: _____ Place of birth: _____

Date of death: _____ Date of death: _____

Where buried: _____ Where buried: _____

Father's name: _____ Father's name: _____

Mother's name: _____ Mother's name: _____
(maiden) (maiden)

Date of marriage: _____ Place of marriage: _____

(List second and third marriages on separate forms.)

Occupation: _____

Residence(s) _____
(give dates for change of residence)

Religious affiliation: _____

CHILDREN

Name	Date of birth	Date of death	to whom married
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

List adopted children but indicate that they are adopted.

In the case of children who died in infancy or who did not marry, give place of birth and where buried and any other particulars on this form.

Remarks: _____

Mennonite Historical Society Fall Meeting November 12, 1983

at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church
King St. S., St. Jacobs, Ontario

Guest speaker: Robert Ulle, Blooming Glen, Pennsylvania
Co-Author of *Conscience in crisis: Mennonites and other peace churches in America, 1739-1789.*

9:00 a.m. Church historians workshop (\$3 registration fee)*
Registration and coffee.

9:30 a.m. Welcome
Congregational reports.

Robert Ulle in conversation with Sam Steiner
"The importance of 19th century letters, diaries and church records in writing history."

Come with your questions for the discussion period.
12:00 noon Sack lunch, we will provide coffee.

1:45 p.m. Fall meeting (offering towards expenses)
Address by Robert Ulle

"The early settlers in Germantown: pioneers of our faith."

*Mennonite Conference of Ontario & Quebec and Western Ontario Mennonite Conference will pay the fee for their church historians.

GENEALOGY COMMITTEE

is sponsoring a

Fall Public Meeting

at the
BRUBACHER HOUSE
(off Columbia St. on University of Waterloo campus)
on

November 15, 1983

7:00 p.m. Tour of the Brubacher House
Cost \$1.00 per person

8:00 p.m. Public Meeting at the Brubacher House

Speakers: Winston Martin will speak on this recent research and experiences in Pennsylvania, and will trace his genealogy back to the Tyson ancestry.

Lorraine Roth will discuss Western Ontario Conference connections with Pennsylvania through the Swartzentruber ancestors.

For Christmas— Available from the Society

Epp, Frank H. *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: a people's struggle for survival* (Toronto : Macmillan, 1982) \$25.95

This book is a must for anyone with an interest in Canadian Mennonite history. Nowhere else can one read about Mennonites East and West, Swiss and Dutch, as they have interacted in Canada during this century.

Direct your orders to the Society, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6.

Genealogy

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found in family Bibles. Ask to see them and copy them. If they are in German and difficult to read, try to make a satisfactory arrangement to have them photocopied so you can get help in interpreting them.

I have developed a form which has been helpful in recording the data for ancestors. This is reproduced on page 15.

Along with genealogical data and stories, you may also wish to collect photographs. Most every city has a place where negatives are made of old photos. If you borrow photographs, whether snapshots or studio pictures, take them to a place where they are reproduced on the premises, and return them immediately to their owners. Photocopies of the record in the family Bible and other documents may also be collected.

Devise a system for organizing the materials you gather. You may begin with one filing folder or one three-ring binder. As your material multiplies, you can break it down into segments and add filing folders or notebooks. Loose-leaf notebooks are almost a must in genealogical work, because pages frequently need to be inserted and rearranged. Some people use a card file. This is alright for the genealogical data and stories, but photos and documents do not fit very well into file boxes.

Next issue: Gathering information on present-day families.

I would like to become a member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. I will be informed of all Society events, will be eligible to serve on the various committees of the Society, and will receive *Mennogespräch* as part of my membership.

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ POSTAL CODE _____

ACTIVITIES _____

Memberships: Student - \$3.00
Regular - \$10.00
Additional memberships at same address (one mailing) - \$5.00
Sustaining - \$15.00

Mail to: Secretary, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
c/o Conrad Grebel College
Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6