

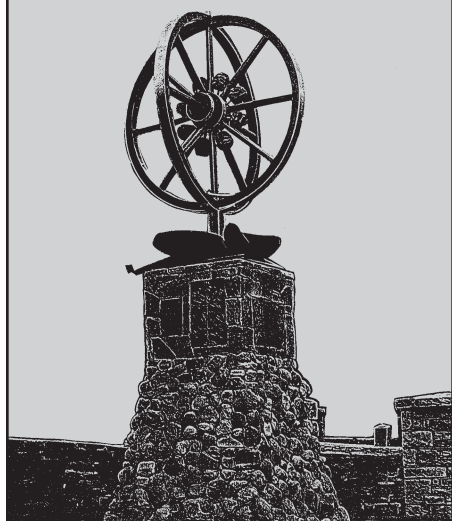
Ontario Mennonite History

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MCC beginnings, 100 years ago

By Harold Thiessen

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the Mennonite relief and development organization that we are all familiar with, turned 100 years old in 2020. MCC was established in 1920 to respond to a famine in the Mennonite colonies in South Russia/Ukraine.

Mennonites first came to South Russia in the 1780s (mainly from Prussia) seeking religious freedom and self-determination. Over a 140-year period they prospered with the major colonies of Chortitza (17 villages) and Molotschna (60 villages) and numerous other villages and smaller colonies throughout Russia. However, beginning in 1917, Mennonites living in South Russia/Ukraine were suffering due to civil war and political anarchy.

When the Czarist government fell in 1917, the rise of the Bolshevik party resulted in a civil war from 1918 to 1920. Those who supported the Bolsheviks were known as “Reds” while the forces of the former government were known as “Whites.” There was no effective government which led to several years of anarchy where robbery, murders and sexual assaults were rampant. The general lawlessness also resulted in a typhus epidemic and famine.

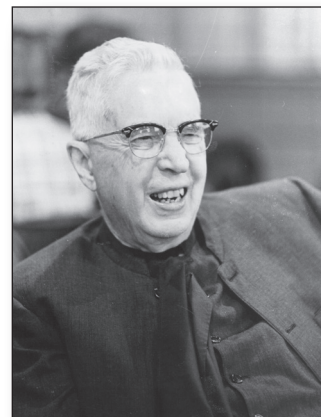
As the civil war raged in the Molotschna colony, some villages changing hands 10 or more times between the White and the Red armies. At the same time, anarchist groups and bandits roamed through the area. Often these groups would occupy Mennonite villages for months at a time. Historian Peter Letkemann has estimated that over 1,200 Mennonites were murdered in this period and over 1,400 died due to the typhus epidemic.¹ Raids by armies and anarchists took “virtually all moveable assets...including livestock, grain, hay, wagons, food, linens and wood.”²

The uncertainty of the time did not allow for proper crop planting or harvesting, and the situation was compounded by drought conditions, leading to serious food shortages and famine. It is estimated that over 800 Mennonites died of starvation.

These events prompted the Mennonites of the Molotschna settlement to establish a *Studienkommission*, a study commission, to seek help from North American and European Mennonites for both famine relief and to look at the possibilities of emigration. This group of four men left Ukraine on Jan. 1, 1920 and travelled through Europe, visiting with German and Dutch Mennonites, then arrived in New York on June 13, 1920. They shared stories of the dire struggles of the approximately 100,000 Mennonites in Ukraine and begged for help.

The Mennonite Church in the United States had already created the Mennonite Relief Commission for War Sufferers focusing on post-World War I relief work in France and the Middle East and a few individual Mennonite groups had provided some aid to their brothers and sisters in Russia (mainly in Siberia).

There were various relief groups forming in the U.S., and as more of them heard the reports of the *Studienkommission*, they became increasingly concerned about their fellow Mennonites in Russia. The *Studienkommission* asked that a coordinated effort be made by North American Mennonites so they would not need to deal with multiple groups. So, the Mennonite Relief Commission for War Sufferers (related to the “Old” Mennonite Church), the American Russian Mennonites (generally the General Conference Mennonite Church), the Mennonite Brethren (MB) churches, and others, came together at Elkhart, Indiana and reached this accord:



Orie O. Miller led MCC's first relief effort to Ukraine. (Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives photo)

“Resolved, that we, the representatives of the several branches of Mennonites assembled at Elkhart Indiana, this 27th day of July 1920, deem it well and desirable to create a Mennonite Central Committee, whose duty shall be to function with and for, the several relief committees of the Mennonites in taking charge of all gifts for South Russia, to make all purchase of suitable articles for relief work, and to provide for transportation and the equitable distribution of the same.”³

From this start, many other Mennonite groups who wanted to help in relief work were invited to a meeting on Sept. 27, 1920, in Chicago, Illinois, where Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) held its first official meeting. In his biography of Orie O. Miller, historian John E. Sharp echoes other historians in declaring that MCC may well be the most significant inter-Mennonite organization in Mennonite history.⁴

Efforts in Canada

In the spring and summer months of 1920, Canadians were also organizing to help their suffering brothers and sisters in Ukraine. Representatives of the *Studienkommission* came in August 1920 and as they did in the U.S., requested that Canadians organize themselves into one body. On Oct. 18, 1920, 14 men from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba gathered in Regina to form a Central Committee for Canada, which was authorized to “get into touch with the Central Committee of the United States for united action in this work.”⁵

The American committee welcomed cooperation with Canadian Mennonites. Thus, while not officially joining with the American MCC, Canadians began to work together with the organization in various ways. Money was gathered. In December 1920, there was an auction in Herbert, Saskatchewan that raised \$1,100 (this has been recognized as the very first MCC relief sale in Canada) and that same month the Canadian committee sent \$7,000 to the American organization. By 1927, MCC in the U.S. had received donations of \$57,000 from Canadian Mennonites.

Meanwhile, Mennonite churches in Ontario were already organized and in early 1918 had established the Non-Resistant Relief Organization (NNRO), headed by L.J. Burkholder of Markham. It included the Ontario Conference of the “Old” Mennonite Church, the Old Order Mennonites, the Brethren in Christ and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. The NNRO raised money for war sufferers and also began to contribute to the relief effort in Russia. Sewing circles also began to provide clothing and bandages to war refugees. Clothes were collected and along with western Mennonites shipped 75 tons of clothes valued at \$110,000.⁶

The First MCC Workers sent

On Sept. 20, 1920, the first three MCC workers left for Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey) with Orie O. Miller as the unit director, to establish working policies for the new organization. Orie Miller was a young Goshen College graduate from Indiana who had already volunteered with the Mennonite Relief Commission in 1919 to serve in Beirut under the Near East Relief organization (NER). He was joined by Arthur Slagel, another Goshen graduate and Clayton Kratz, a Goshen student.

In Constantinople, Miller used his previous experience in Beirut to organize, secure warehouses and make connections with other agencies. Various permissions, visa and travel permits were obtained. While Slagel remained in Constantinople, helping to assemble relief shipments bound for Russia, Miller and Kratz travelled via Crimea (on an American warship) to the Mennonite colonies, reaching Halbstadt, Molotschna, on Oct. 13, 1920.⁷ They learned of the horrific conditions and talked with the local relief committees establishing needs and forming plans.

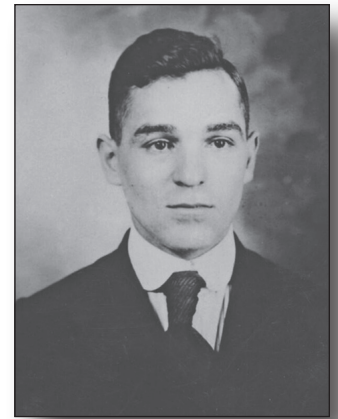
However, the civil war was still raging in the Mennonite areas, with a remnant of the White Army under General Wrangel still holding the Molotschna. The Wrangel government welcomed the relief efforts of the American Mennonites, but it was feared that a victory for the Reds would close the door. Despite appearances that a White defeat was imminent, the MCC workers pressed on, but were unable to reach the other major Mennonite area of Chortitza due to the fighting. They only got as far as Schoenweise on the east side of the Dnieper River.

Kratz and Miller then parted ways. Kratz was to stay and begin preparations for the relief effort while Miller would return to organizing in Constantinople. It was the last time Miller saw his co-worker. Kratz thought that his American citizenship would protect him from harm, but this was not to be. The story is that after the Red victory, he was arrested and then released but then disappeared again. G.A. Peters of Halbstadt attempted to find Kratz, risking his own life to question the Red Army leaders. He was assured that Kratz would be released but it was never done. Despite many efforts by local and American Mennonites, as well as the Quakers, he was never seen again.

Miller was just able to slip back out to Sevastopol, Crimea, before the Red Army’s ultimate victory.

In general, some good preparation work was done but MCC’s first efforts at relief for Russian Mennonites had failed due to the Red Army victory and no aid was permitted to reach the Mennonite villages. However, Miller had met Mennonite leaders in many communities and had arranged for the distribution of relief supplies. But at this point, MCC could only help Mennonite and other refugees who had made it out to Constantinople. Miller left to return to the U.S. on Feb. 9, 1921, knowing that Clayton Kratz was still unaccounted for.

Meanwhile, the situation in Ukraine worsened. Bolshevik taxes, which included large payments of grain and food, started to take a toll. By the fall of 1920, the sporadic drought became widespread over south Ukraine. All fall and winter there was practically no rain. By March 1921, it had become so dry that the grain planted in the fall was being blown out by the roots. Continued dry weather made it impossible to grow any spring crops.



*Clayton Kratz
(MCC photo)*



*In the early 1920s, these men helped bring aid to Ukraine:
(back left) C. E. Krehbiel, Arthur Slagel (front) Alvin J. Miller,
P. C. Hiebert. (Mennonite Heritage Archives photo)*

There was no pasture for livestock and little other feed. The stock went into winter quarters in a bad condition. Many a horse, the last his owner had, became too weak to leave the stall, dropping where he stood. The cows that were kept alive produced little milk. Famine was all around and people in southern Russia were crying out for help.

C.F. Klassen, an MCC worker, witnessed the following:

“Villages entirely deserted, the thatched straw roofs of stables and houses taken down to feed the cow or the horse, flight from the village with the refugees dying in large numbers along the roadside. The starving people clinging desperately to life, prolonging their miserable existence by eating the seeds of weeds, the bark of trees, chaff or straw, gophers, rats, crows, cats, dogs, the carcasses of animals starved to death—anything to sustain life. Multitudes of refugees straggling along the roadways begging at each house for a morsel of bread.”⁸

On his way back to the U.S. through Europe in 1921, Orrie Miller met with some Quaker officials who informed him that both British and American aid was getting into Russia through the port of Riga in Latvia. The new MCC now pivoted in that direction. Early in 1921 Alvin J. Miller, a Goshen graduate from Grantsville, Maryland, who had been with the war reconstruction service in France and had served for a time with MCC in Constantinople, was appointed the MCC director of relief work in Soviet Russia.

Working through American relief organizations and Quaker contacts, Miller arrived in Moscow on Aug. 27, 1921, and began difficult negotiations with the new Soviet government and with the American Relief Administration (ARA), an organization administering relief to post-war Europe. On Oct. 1, 1921, MCC signed a contract that permitted MCC to operate under the ARA, as American Mennonite Relief (AMR), setting out the terms of the work MCC would do.

Miller also had to negotiate a separate contract with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic at Kharkov, Ukraine. That agreement was signed on Oct. 20, 1921. Dutch Mennonites were now also involved. During this time, Miller connected with B.B. Janz of the Molotschna who provided valuable on-the-ground advice and who planned to survey the villages in the Mennonite areas about specific needs in each.

A key part of the MCC contract stipulated that the AMR would feed and clothe all people, not just Mennonites. MCC also included a clause indicating that help would be given “to the needy civilian population” thus including parents and other adults, while the ARA contract stated that supplies were intended only for children and the sick. The contracts with the Soviet Russian and Ukrainian governments had the following clauses:

- AMR staff had freedom to organize local committees and freedom of movement, as well as free transportation to be provided by government for food and other aid.
- Relief was to be provided to the entire population regardless of race, religion or social status.
- AMR was not to engage in political activities.
- AMR was not to exceed 15 foreign workers in its efforts but expansion to 20 permitted if relief in northern areas was also undertaken.
- No duties were to be charged on supplies imported and no supplies would be confiscated or requisitioned by the government for other uses.

The AMR organization proposed to assist starving Mennonites and Russians by opening centres for supplementary feeding in villages and by providing supplies for children’s homes, civilian hospitals, and the needy civilian population.

By November 1921, the famine had intensified. When the people had no more bread, their only recourse was to exchange some of their clothing, furniture or farming implements for food. Desperately, leaves, bark, cornstalks, or *kurai* (a thistle) were ground into flour. Cats, dogs, crows, gophers, even dead horses and cattle were eaten. Miller wrote about his travels into those areas: “Here we were introduced to starvation conditions, but I shall not take time to describe the harrowing scenes.”⁹

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About 34,000 people lived in the 60 Mennonite villages in the Molotschna, the largest colony, with another 30,000 in 97 villages in the other settlements. Of these 64,000, about three quarters were Mennonites. The central MCC headquarters for all of Ukraine was in Aleksandrovsk (Zaporizhia).

Continuing government delays, transportation challenges, freezing temperatures and massive snowfalls, crime and other problems were getting in the way of the relief effort. Often supplies were transported from railway sidings to village warehouses through drifting snow by horse-drawn sleighs. The shortage of horses was a problem, and it took about three horses—half-starved as they were—to pull the load one well-fed horse could have handled. During the first spring months of 1922 the roads were almost impassable.

It was not until Christmas 1921 that the first food was delivered to Mennonite settlements on the Volga River and not until March 1922 that food reached South Russia, more than two years after the Constantinople failure. The first relief kitchen opened in the village of Rosenthal, Chortitza colony on March 16, 1922. Aid reached the main towns of the Molotschna colony later that month: Halbstadt on March 20 and Gnadenfeld on March 25. By May 1922, the AMR was feeding between 24,000 and 25,000 persons daily in 140 kitchens and by August the number of daily feedings reached 40,000. The feeding kitchens continued in operation through the summer of 1924.

Arthur Slagel wrote: “On March 16 the first meal was given in the Chortitza village kitchen. The children came, with their plates and spoons, received their portions and sat down to eat. And how they did eat! It was a sight worth all the effort it had cost—the many months of waiting and planning to do actual relief work in Russia.”¹⁰

Local villagers helped run the kitchens. Each village had a three-person committee who organized the kitchens that were set up, usually in the village school building. The kitchen was supplied with one or more large iron kettles and large brick ovens were built for bread or biscuit baking. Benches, tables and chairs were usually borrowed or cheaply constructed.

Once per day at 11:00 a.m., villagers would receive one piece of bread and two servings of cocoa. Once or twice weekly they received beans or rice or corn grits with sugar and milk. Committees had to decide who was needy enough to receive the aid. For instance, if a family had two horses or two cows no aid was given, as it was determined that the extra animal could have been sold or slaughtered and food obtained. Lists of eligible people were made and carefully checked for attendance to avoid “repeaters.”

The feeding priorities were:

1. Children under fifteen, adults over sixty, and the sick.
2. Nursing and expectant mothers.
3. Women between fifteen and sixty, not in group two.
4. Men between fifteen and sixty.

The first three groups were fed most of the time, but by June 1922, there was enough in the AMR warehouses to feed the neediest men as well. Workers and committee members received two rations per day.

Slagel recalled, “On one occasion, a group of boys who were just enjoying their noon-day meal were asked which kind of American food they liked the best. For a moment they looked at each other and at the questioner with bewilderment, then replied in a chorus, ‘Everything!’”¹¹



The American Mennonite Relief kitchen in Halbstadt, Molotschna. (Mennonite Heritage Archives photo)

One meal a day was not much, but the food was of good quality and so well prepared that it brought the colour back into the faces of the children and they began to gain weight.

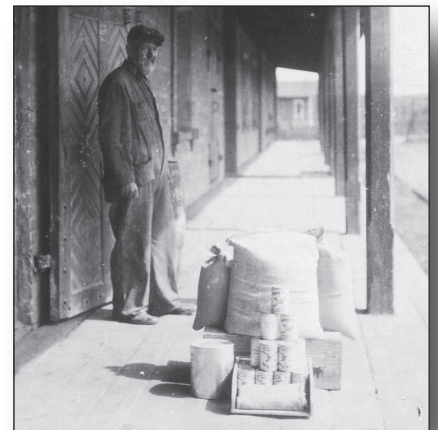
Food drafts and clothing

In addition to the feeding service, MCC also distributed food packets sent by Americans directly to their relatives and friends in Russia. Many Russian Mennonites appealed to any and all North American Mennonites so as to receive a package.

The content of the \$10 food-remittance package was: 49 lbs of white flour; 25 lbs of rice; 15 lbs of sugar; 10 lbs of lard or an equal amount of bacon; 3 lbs of tea; and twenty tins of condensed milk. The packages were delivered from early 1922 until the spring of 1923 and totalled well over \$200,000 in value.

Kitchen feeding in Russia reached its crest in June 1922, but the need for clothing became more urgent from that time. The clothing the people had from better days was wearing out, and new supplies were not available—and many had been exchanging clothing for food, the greater immediate need. The poorest had practically nothing left to wear. In some areas, 20 to 25 percent of the Mennonite children were going about stark naked, while adults had only tatters and rags that hung from their bodies.

A report of these conditions was sent to America and as a result, packages of clothing were gathered from all parts of the U.S. and Canada, and in the fall of 1922 a large shipment of clothing was on its way. This included over 7,000 pairs of footwear; 5,372 overcoats; 8,824 adult and 17,297 pieces of children’s underwear; 4,886 waist shirts; 3,936 skirts; 1,169



The contents of a food package (flour, rice, sugar, lard, tea and tinned milk) sit on the shipping platform of the American Mennonite Relief warehouse in Schoenwiese. (Mennonite Heritage Archives photo)



*The official beginning of the MCC tractor program in Ukraine in the fall of 1922.
(Mennonite Heritage Archives photo)*

shawls; 6,896 men's shirts; 35 fur coats; 36 straw hats; 20,310 girls' and children's dresses; 27,924 pieces for children under five; 1,111 double and 1,596 single blankets and comforters, etc.; 14,614 spools of thread.¹² These goods were sorted for use and distributed according to need. In addition, Mennonites in North America could also send \$20 clothing remittances with material to sew new garments.

Tractors and Farm Animals

The food kitchens relieved the most pressing need but the prospects for the future were gloomy, with starvation conditions likely worsening. In some areas the rain had been sufficient for growing a crop, while in many others it had been very dry. MCC realized that relief operations would need to be continued for at least another year.

MCC workers soon recognized that feeding and clothing was not enough; they also wanted to help people feed themselves. Farmers needed horses, cattle, seed wheat and working capital. The soil had been poorly worked for several years because of a lack of horses, so MCC determined that tractors should be sent from America in time for summer plowing.

On June 26, 1922, MCC purchased 25 Fordson tractors and gang plows, together with spare parts. This shipment left New York on July 24, 1922, bound for Odessa. It was then shipped to the Mennonite colonies by the Soviet authorities. G. G. Hiebert of Reedley, California, an experienced farmer, was appointed by MCC to take charge of the tractor work. The first plowing began

on September 15 and was extremely successful to the degree that 25 additional tractors were sent in December.

MCC also purchased horses and sold them at cost plus the expense of transportation. According to records 203 horses were procured at a total cost of \$10,554. Sheep were also provided, sold to the villagers on credit, so wool could be spun for clothing. In 1924, 139 sheep valued at \$350 were provided.

By fall of 1923, Ukraine experienced a good harvest which enabled MCC to slowly begin pulling out of the region. Incredibly, it was a surprisingly small number of about 15 Americans (and two Dutch Mennonites) who were involved in organizing, delivering and distributing all of this aid in Russia.

American totals for relief provided was \$1.2 million with a contribution by Canadian Mennonites of over \$57,000. In the overall totals, over 10 separate church organizations contributed to the "Central Committee." There does not appear to be a comprehensive total of the number of people fed or an estimate of how many were saved.

Epilogue

In 1929 MCC published *Feeding the Hungry, Russia Famine 1919-1925* with various authors, edited by P.C. Hiebert and Orie O. Miller. This 465-page report is available online at <https://chort.square7.ch/Buch/AMRO.pdf>. It was my primary source.

My grandmother was a young mother in the Molotschna village of Klippenfeld in the early 1920s. She told me in an interview, "We were saved by the *Amerikanische Küche* [American kitchen]."

To acknowledge the 100th anniversary of Mennonite Central Committee, I want to repeat this statement from the 1929 report:

The American Mennonite Relief in Russia and Constantinople is the first successful undertaking of the several branches of the Mennonites as a body. This common work has pleased many and has proved so efficient and satisfactory in its general results that it is but natural that there is a desire, expressed from many sources, to continue cooperative work along these lines where experience has proved its practicability.

The Central Committee has therefore taken preliminary steps to continue the organization for relief work on a cooperative basis. The following article is the product of their prayerful reflections upon ways and means to utilize past experiences in providing for future emergencies. May the Lord lead us aright in all matters, and teach us to think less of self, more of others, and most of Him.¹³

¹ Peter Letkemann, "Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno," *Preservings*: December 1998, No. 13, p. 10

² John E. Sharp, *My Calling to Fulfill, The Orie O. Miller Story*, p. 104

³ As reported in *My Calling to Fulfill, Gospel Herald*, August 5, 1920

⁴ *My Calling to Fulfill*, p. 110.

⁵ Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada, A History*, p. 23

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 25

⁷ *The Orie O. Miller Diary, 1920-21*, p. 58

⁸ P.C. Hiebert and Orie O. Miller, *Feeding the Hungry: Russia Famine, 1919-1925*, p. 188

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 207

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 215

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 216

¹² *Ibid*, p. 266

¹³ P.C. Hiebert and Orie O. Miller, *Feeding the Hungry: Russia Famine, 1919-1925*, p. 415

‘A Moment from Yesterday’ features archival photos

By Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Archives of Ontario

Since 2015, the Mennonite Archives of Ontario has provided photographs from our collections for the *Canadian Mennonite* regular feature “A Moment from Yesterday.” All photographs in the feature, such as the one below, are also viewable online through the Mennonite Archival Information Database (<https://archives.mhsc.ca>), and past issues of “A Moment from Yesterday” can

be found on the Canadian Mennonite website (<https://canadianmennonite.org>). Photographs from the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg are also featured.

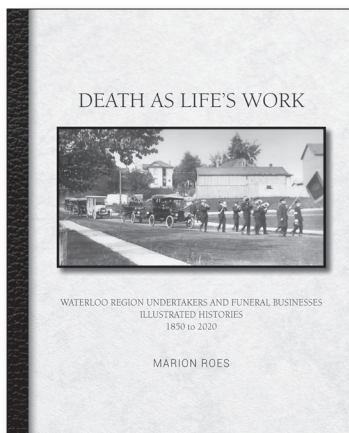
This is a chance for our archives to share our collections and demonstrate the great variety of stories within the Mennonite historical experience. Feedback from readers has been quite positive.



Women of Grace Lao Mennonite Church sing at a “ladies’ revival” in 1999. This was an important year for the congregation of about 90 people, as they also dedicated their own independent church building in Kitchener, Ontario.

Previously, they worshipped at St. Jacobs Mennonite Church. The church grew from the efforts of refugee families sponsored by St. Jacobs in 1980 and was nurtured by other Lao and Hmong Mennonite congregations in southern Ontario.

NEW BOOK



Death as Life's Work: Waterloo Region Undertakers and Funeral businesses Illustrated Histories, 1850-2020

By Marion Roes

Death as Life's Work is a new book by Marion Roes, telling the history of the people who care for us when we experience the death of a loved one. It includes interviews with funeral directors, providing insight into their life's work. For many it is a calling. Stories about life and death in the mid-1900s will resonate with those who remember attending visitations and funerals of their parents and grandparents. Earlier undertakers are profiled through newspaper items, advertisements and photos. There were men who conducted funerals in the villages of Linwood, St. Clements and Hawkesville. Their other trades were carriage-making, selling implements and building altars for churches.

This oversize book includes more than 28 interviews and hundreds of photos of people, buildings, vintage vehicles and old advertisements. The author has included her comments and reflections on her research process.

Marion Roes has also written *Mennonite Funeral and Burial Traditions* (2019) and *From a Horse-Drawn Hearse to Studebakers, Packards and Cadillacs: Dreisinger Funeral Vehicles* (2013). For more information, contact Roes at 519-883-1448 or mlroes@sympatico.ca.

MHSO Spring Meeting

The 2021 spring annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario was online on June 16, 2021. Rather than having a guest speaker, we took stock and to celebrate our society's ongoing work and accomplishments in this pandemic year. Some of the highlights were:

- A reminder that we are still hoping to place a plaque commemorating conscientious objectors at the site of the Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, north of Sault Ste. Marie. However, momentum on this project with Ontario Heritage Trust's provincial plaque program has stalled due to the pandemic.
- An announcement that the MHSO board has pledged \$5,000 to "Indigenous-Mennonite Encounters in Time and Place," an academic conference and community event to be held at Conrad Grebel from May 13-15 2022. (Living History, 2018)
- A report of the continuing work by the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online committee to add biographies of Ontario Mennonites to GAMEO. About 225 biographies have been added over the years, with about 30 being worked on now.
- A report that Detweiler Meetinghouse Inc., to which MHSO appoints board members, is in a holding pattern with no programming being planned at present
- An announcement that Brubacher House is taking advantage of its pandemic closure to develop a digital oral history called "Life Upstairs." Through our J. Winfield Fretz Publication Fund, MHSO is contributing to this project which will produce an oral history of the House from the perspective of its live-in hosts over the years. Bethany Leis has been engaged by the Brubacher House committee as "digital historian in residence" to research the House's history as a museum.
- A report that MHSO's Russlaender Centenary Ontario committee is making plans to host the Ontario portion of a cross-country train trip organized by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and TourMagination commemorating the 100th anniversary of the arrival of Russlaender immigrants from the Soviet Union in July 2023. More information can be found at <https://mhsc.ca/russlaender-100>.

From a report by Laureen Harder-Gissing, President



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

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

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

Projects should illuminate the experience of Mennonites in Ontario.

Normally up to \$2,000 is available per project. Applications are accepted twice yearly, May 1 and December 1.

More information: mhso.org/content/fretz-publication-fund

Early squatters in Wellesley Township

By Barb Draper

A few years ago, I picked up a history of Wellesley Township, Waterloo Region, and was intrigued to discover that my relatives were among the early squatters. It is not clear how many of them were practicing Mennonites at the time.

Wellesley Township was settled much later than other local townships because it was part of a large clergy reserve in the early part of the 19th century. Waterloo and Woolwich Townships were part of the Haldimand Tract and large parts of those townships were purchased by Mennonites from Pennsylvania in 1803-04 and 1807. These townships were surveyed without road allowances with the main roads generally following the old Indian trails; other roads were added later to give access to all farms.

Wellesley Township has a different history. When the government of Upper Canada encouraged settlement into the hinterlands, some land was set aside as crown reserves and clergy reserves. When the land was surveyed and divided into lots, one out of every seven was designated a crown reserve and one of seven a clergy reserve. The intention was to lease the land to bring in money to support the government and the church. But there was so much inexpensive land in southern Ontario that no one was interested in leasing. Other settlers hated these reserves because they sat undeveloped with no one to help build and maintain the roads.

Because some early land grants, including the Haldimand Tract, had no crown or clergy reserves, all of Wellesley Township and the former Peel Township (now Mapleton) to the north were set aside as clergy reserves. This meant Wellesley and Peel Townships were officially settled much later than other townships.

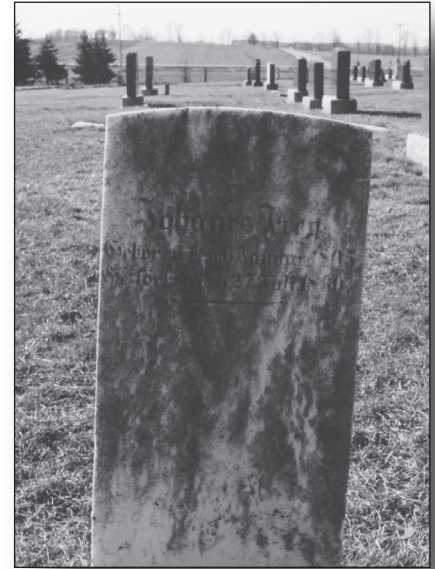
Clergy reserves were very controversial. In the end, all clergy reserves were taken over by the government in 1830, but Wellesley Township was not surveyed until 1842. By that time many squatters were living

there. In fact, the surveyor found so many people illegally farming in the areas bordering Woolwich and Wilmot that the surveyor divided the township into east and west. In the east half, the roads, lots and concessions are a continuation of Woolwich and Wilmot townships, while the west half is in the pattern of townships to the west.

The original survey map of Wellesley Township of 1842 shows Martin and Jacob Frey living on the farm where Johannes Frey, my great-great-grandfather, later lived. Martin and Jacob were his younger brothers who came to Canada from Germany in the 1830s. Meanwhile their sister Magdalena and her husband Philip Schweitzer were living in what is now downtown Hawkesville.

A historian described Johann Philip Schweitzer: "He arrived in the year 1837—this being the date on his exemption and identification papers from the German army. He was 5'5" tall, black hair and black beard, grey eyes, a pointed nose and a round face. His wife was Magdalena Frey, also from Germany. In 1845, he had 40 acres cleared. Then John Hawk came along and bought the holding for \$700."

In September 1842, the settlers of the Queen's bush (Wellesley Township) wrote a letter to the local Member of Parliament, apologizing for their boldness in squatting there, saying they were immigrants who had no means of buying land or making a living except as day labourers. They wrote: "We thought it would be best for ourselves and our families, if we could go into the woods and cultivate that soil, which we saw was, at any rate as long as it was unsettled, of no more use than being a rendezvous of the wolf and the bear—contemplating at the same time, once to buy the land we have taken in possession, should it be sold upon such conditions that we could buy it." While they expressed appreciation for plans to have the township properly surveyed, they heard a report that purchasing the



*Johannes Frey (1805-1860)
is buried at the St. Jacobs Mennonite
cemetery at Three Bridges.*

land would require cash and were fearful that would make it impossible for them to buy the land they had been farming.

Johannes Frey emigrated from Germany in 1848. He farmed beside his brother Martin so presumably his brothers were able to purchase the farm they had been squatting on. Jacob is buried at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, so perhaps he moved to town. Philip and Magdalena Schweitzer moved to Woolwich Township and raised a large family on a farm east of Elmira.

There is some indication that the family had Mennonite connections in Germany. Three of the five brothers who moved to Canada are buried in Mennonite cemeteries; the other two brothers and one sister seem to have been Lutheran or Evangelical Association. Johannes Frey died of cholera only 12 years after immigrating to Canada, but his descendants are numerous in Waterloo Region and make up a significant part of the Mennonite church.

Research and quotations are from The Maple Leaf Journal: A Settlement History of Wellesley Township. Debbie Dietrich, Phyllis Lelau Kitchen and Barbara Stewart. 1983.