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On Learning To Read Gordon Christian Eby's Diary

by Paul Tiessen

*"I milked & seperated the milk,
then wrote this"* (Gordon Christian
Eby, Mon. Dec. 15, 1913)

Twenty-five years ago archivist Sam Steiner told me about a diary that had been deposited for safe-keeping in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College. Sam thought that the diary might help me in my attempts to place the "Berlin, Canada" project that I just then had underway in an historical context. He thought, too, that the diary might be a significant literary text, a joy to read. Sam was right on both counts. He was referring to the 1911-19 diary of Gordon Christian Eby (1890-1965). When the volume, *The Gordon C. Eby Diaries, 1911-13: Chronicle of a Mennonite Farmer*, was published in 1982, I dove into the diary again, at least its first three years. This time, instead of reading the diary in light of my interest in an apparently burgeoning Berlin, I drew on the reading strategies that editor James M. Nyce — with his interest in Pennsylvania German's agricultural practices — provided.

In recent years, on returning to it to prepare it for a new publication, I find that Eby's diary offers ever more possibilities and rewards. It invites further exploration in the formal terms that its status as "diary" suggests, and also in more complex historical terms than I had envisioned back in the late 1970s.

With reference to what we call "history," Eby's diary provides a lively series of revelations, echoes, and confirmations concerning the 1910s — whether of community or church, nation or world. For example, it draws attention to: (1) a distinctly "Pennsylvania-German" strand in economic and other activities in Berlin before World War One; (2) the culmination of the golden era of "continental German" culture in Canada; (3) the overwhelming



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imperatives of "British imperialist" rhetoric in Berlin, especially with the coming of war in 1914; (4) the meaning of being a "Waterloo County Canadian" in 1916, when street violence and the re-naming of the city from Berlin to Kitchener occurred.

At the same time, however, Eby's diary is a wonderful literary text, one that is at the same time baffling and enigmatic, as tantalizingly elusive as it is richly allusive. Despite its plenitude of delicious detail, it also has a way of "hiding" its own meanings and, inevitably, of making us search through our own views of the people and places we recall from the 1910s. It invites us to read both within and beyond the diary, to reach toward our own views of particular "histories" and re-think some of our preconceptions. For example, how does this diary fit into "Mennonite" history? In its subtitle, the 1982 volume of the diary calls Eby a "Mennonite farmer." But how does the term "Mennonite" inform our reading of the diary? To be sure, in the manner in which we now often use the term "Mennonite," with its reference to a broad ethnic sweep that includes the community in which a writer was nurtured and to which he continues to relate, it is a helpful description of Eby, even though he was not directly active in the Mennonite congregation in the 1910s. Indeed, it was partly Eby's own sense of himself as "Mennonite," and his

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quest to find ways to address that, that pushed him in particular directions, and that seems to have led him outside an institutionally “Mennonite” orbit. As great-grandson of Bishop Benjamin Eby, grandson of the Mennonite minister Isaac Eby, and son of the devout Mennonite mother Catherine (Clemens) Eby, a woman whom he loved dearly and whom he admired for her Christian commitment and piety, Eby was very aware of his religious past and, later in life, was able to convey warmly to his own children the details of their Mennonite/Anabaptist heritage, with its roots in Switzerland and Pennsylvania. At the same time, the distance of his father and older siblings from the Mennonite church had an effect on him. Eby is not very explicit about his specific religious status in his diary. While in some ways come to feel deeply Eby’s oneness with his world in the wondrous and rather idyllic 1911-13 phase of the diary, which bears the imprint of Pennsylvania-German Mennonite rituals and presuppositions, we run into problems when we read further and there encounter Eby during the war. Nyce’s 1982 volume, ending as it does in 1913, does not tell us that in September 1915 Eby, contrary to Mennonite practice, signed up for overseas duty during World War One, or that he left for Europe just over a year later. There is much to learn from Eby’s 1915 decision about the conflicts and contradictions of life in Berlin. However, that is beyond the scope of this short essay.

Here, I want to focus on a few of the elements of language and image that stand out in the diary during those earlier years, 1911-13, when Eby felt that a very busy and demanding life could be filled with a lot of fun. Although I want us to remember that Eby’s is a diary delightfully crammed with immediate experience and day-to-day data that inform our sense of history, here I will stress that it also engages its reader in aesthetic terms, in terms of linguistic expressiveness.¹

Eby’s first diary entry and his first readers

Gordon Christian Eby was a market gardener who lived with his parents on the edge of Berlin/Kitchener, near what is now the corner of Mill Street and Ottawa Street. Six days a week his work was governed by the garden, orchard, and greenhouse that his parents owned and operated, by the Saturday market, and by the wholesale and retail deliveries that he ran around town. Also, a couple times a year he joined in the family’s pig butchering activities organized by his father. But evenings and weekends he socialized, usually out and about in town — at movies, plays, restaurants, and performances of all kinds. Sunday afternoons he enjoyed spending with family, relatives, friends, and acquaintances at home, in the homes of friends, or in more public spaces such as Victoria Park. And ever he was taking photographs, developing them in his own darkroom; often, with family or friends, he played and recorded music on his gramophone. On Mondays and Thursdays he attended night school at Berlin Business College in the Fall/Winter of 1911-12 and again in 1913-14. Late at night, he wrote in his diary.

Eby kept a diary more or less continually from September 1911 to December 1919, a diary vibrant for its treatment of daily life in and around Berlin/Kitchener. He opened his diary with an entry that establishes something of the tone and the parameters of the entire manuscript, by talking not only about weather and work, but also about public activity and personal identity — and with this combination of statements he in effect guides our subsequent reading:

weather warm and cloudy -
showers afternoon. - worked at
apples, hilling celery, and in
greenhouse. Dominion
election day -

Billey King Liberal candidate
Billey Weichel Conservative "
- went up town in the evening to
hear the election results. King
was defeated - so was the

Liberal government which had a
majority of about 43 members,
the Liberal aim was to get
reciprocity in natural products -
it gave the conservatives a
majority of about 47 members.
This day Sept. 21st 1911 was
also my birthday I Gordon C.
Eby being 21 years old. (Thurs.
Sept. 21, 1911)

That Eby should so distinctly express and juxtapose the political and the personal might seem unlikely for a market gardener concerned about weather and chores. However, as we read on in the diary we find that the political and the personal simply and unselfconsciously co-exist. For him, the intimate and the public realms are interwoven; they bear on each other in complementary ways; they both truly matter. We can surmise that in Eby’s writing down of external material, he is mapping and gaining control over both inner and outer worlds. For him, inner identity implicitly finds definition in external experience.

During the 1911-13 years, Eby’s diary entries display exuberance and playfulness, a *joie de vivre* characterized by a breadth in range of observation, a suddenness in shifts of venue or locale. We feel that a lot was happening everyday in and around his world, that he had to be in several places at the same time (so to speak) to get it all recorded. As it happens, his attention to the simultaneity of events was in keeping with other contemporary media and art forms — from newspaper layout to modernist art, from stream-of-consciousness novels to film documentaries about city life — during an era self-conscious about rapid technological and social change. He used the medium of the diary in a way that reveals one of its strengths: to provide fragments — in his case, richly textured fragments — of observation.

The first readers who came along a half-century after his diary was created, members of Eby’s family, brought uniquely privileged entry points into the diary, because for them

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it was filled with still-familiar people, starting with Eby the author, and then extending out toward his neighbourhood, family, acquaintances, customers, and beyond. Eby's children grew up in the same house that he had grown up in, and their strong degree of knowledge of his earlier world provided them with a helpful scaffolding for understanding his text. At the same time, the first person to read Eby's diary closely — his oldest daughter Anne Eby Millar, who, along with members of his family, discovered the diary in the attic of his house only after his death in 1965² — must have been astonished by its boundless energy and buoyancy, its rhythmic stream of observation blending repetition with endless change.

Sam Steiner and I came along a little later as readers. When Sam introduced me to the diary, I had just completed editorial work on three highly visual books concerning Old Order Mennonites from Waterloo County, and I was in the midst of editing an altogether different kind of book with the "Berlin" project.³ I found in Eby's warm small-town intimacies an illuminating foil to the bravado of the dominant discourse in Berlin around 1912. The booming and unified voice of official Berlin, with its German reference points, celebrated the spectacle of Berlin's successes as a small but muscular industrial and commercial city with such stridency that Eby's text, although nimbly at one with the everyday flow of new technological and industrial marvels, seemed a relief in its understated, muted, and (in effect) resistant or subversive tone.

Secondly, I was astonished because my earlier work on the three Old Order / Waterloo County volumes —

all of them dealing with Pennsylvania-German, or Swiss Mennonites — left me overwhelmed by strong visual images. *People Apart* (1977) in particular was filled with brilliant images but without any voice attached to them. Indeed, by 1979 people in Kitchener-Waterloo and beyond had long been accustomed to seeing Waterloo County (particularly Old Order) Mennonites — either directly or in forms mediated by artists and photographers — but (unless they were familiar with work by Mabel Dunham or Edna Staebler) rarely *hearing* them. Eby's diary, although not related in any direct way to the Old Order world, provided a voice that was structured by intonations and pronunciations affected by his own Pennsylvania-German background, a world where his many Pennsylvania-German acquaintances, friends, and relatives not only throughout Waterloo County in general but also in the Mennonite church in particular, unendingly crossed paths with him.

But the difficulty in making Eby's particular voice audible in a sustained way was made apparent in the 1982 published volume of his diary. There James M. Nyce, an American anthropologist, was interested in agrarian practices rooted in Pennsylvania-German culture. Hence, he paid special attention to Gordon Christian Eby's and his father Christian Eby's agricultural activities, from production to marketing. Nyce, interested also in Christian Eby's career as "charmer" or healer,⁴ provided a lively commentary on that career in notes that run throughout his edition of the diary and that contribute to a sense of the unity of one strand of the diary's concerns. Thus Nyce provided readers with bracing entry points into the diary. But Nyce tried

not to intervene in Eby's punctuation practices. Hence, Nyce produced a transcript of the diary that does not quite translate what a reader of Eby's hand-written original might take as Eby's system of punctuation — for example, Eby's unmarked use of the end of a line as a natural breaking or breathing point. Of course, as Nyce himself observed, it is impossible to convey in printed text what Eby created by hand in his diary (Nyce, in Eby, *Chronicle* 6). In my own attempt to establish a text (as in the diary excerpts that I have included in this essay), I have introduced short dashes to mark certain shifts in attention or momentum or rhythm. In this way, I have sought to make more audible the sound of Eby's "voice."

In recent years scholars have shed new light on how we might consider diaries by little-known private writers. For example, in *Inscribing the Daily*, Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff draw on Elizabeth Hampsten's *Read This Only to Yourself* in recommending that we as readers learn to use a "special inventive patience" when coming across what seems absent or suppressed or excessively repetitive in a woman's diary. Discussions of women's diaries seem especially applicable to diaries by men from minority groups experiencing extreme cultural and linguistic uncertainties and transformations, like Eby's.

During my recent re-reading of Eby, and my attempts at practising the difficult discipline of "inventive patience," I have found new pleasures in Eby's achievement. I will allude briefly to a quality in the diary — the use of exuberant language and poetic image — that offers a particular sense of delight and reward, even as it

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Editorial Committee: Linda Huebert Hecht, Lorraine Roth, Sam Steiner, Barb Draper, Maurice Martin

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enriches our sense of the history of the time and place that Eby knew.

Language and Image

From the beginning of his diary, the weather was central for Eby, and he started almost every entry with that — and then proceeded to talk about his chores (or “jores” as he almost always called them, unable or unwilling to avoid his “Pennsylvania-German” phonetic inheritance). He seemed to use work-and-weather as a launching pad for a lyrical voice that sometimes would break out beyond the rhythms of town and country life, beyond the rhythms of the seasons that he tracked in his diary.

Eby may have avoided expressing himself at length emotionally in his diary. However, he did not in the same way restrain himself from hints of a poetic sensibility. For example, his parents’ farming operation, for which he bore central responsibility, was for him a thing not only of duty and obligation, but also pride and beauty, and he converted his feeling about it into words. Responding to what he was able to imagine as a wondrous world, a gentle garden world, he mirrored in his diary that delicately-tended part of himself that he kept on display for all who came along:

I explained to Ada my way of keeping track of orchard trees - she was quite interested in trees etc. - she took a walk through young orchard with me. (Sun. May 11, 1913)

Took a walk in our orchard, listened to Edward Baetz & his sisters sing - it is a fine summer evening - (Thurs. Jul. 17, 1913)

After supper till dark I picked a 6 qt basket of Montmorency cherries from the little 3 year old cherry trees below spruce row - they are fine. Mrs. A. Lang got the first basket of Montmorency cherries from the young cherry orchard. (Fri. Jul. 25, 1913)

Mr. and Mrs. Moody, Dora, and one of her sisters were also here - I took a picture of them and Mother but it was a failure for I didn’t have the proper focus, I also took a picture of George and his chums in front of the little apple tree in front of the hot house, it is just white with bloom. (Sun. May 26, 1912)

Ed Dunke wheeled down here for some strawberries I had picked for him in the morning. He also seen the garden and was interested in the cherries, which were like a picture - trees well loaded and just beginning to ripen. (Sun. Jul. 14, 1912)

His garden and orchard defined a realm in which Eby seemed to find his bearing, perhaps something of his being, as we see in a particularly poignant moment he records when, during the war years, he returned to that world from a military training camp elsewhere in Ontario: “Strolled around home. The old folks are well, garden looks well” (Sun. Jul. 23, 1916).



Pages from the Gordon Christian Eby Diary. Photo credit: Sam Steiner, Mennonite Archives of Ontario

But Eby’s poetic sensibility was at work elsewhere, too. For example, Eby would take an ordinary event — what for him was ordinary, like a pig butchering — and use turns of phrase to transform it into something acutely, even comically, perceived, his few words in one case including a brusque translation from Pennsylvania

German to phonetic English: “just as dad was sticking the pig, Benney came out being only a few feet away from us, he stood tight against the wall, looked at us, made kind of a sour face and said ‘auch nit,’ meaning au don’t” (April 3, 1912).

What we feel is a diary that teems and bristles with vivid energy even in its longer passages, and I have many favourites. Here are two consecutive entries from 1913 that take us from “Scott” at the south pole to “One Armed George” at the dinner table, from baskets picked up at the local orphanage to a dead horse being dragged up a snowy hill:

Got up at 7 oclock - don jores after breakfast. Mild this morning - looks like a storm - tem 31 above - I & Jake hauled corn stalks from Erdman’s out of swamp - took ties along back to use as fence posts next spring. Turns colder - snow flurries sunshine now & then. Dad picked over beans in hot-house - after dinner I & Jake hauled one load of corn stalks - I then took a few orders up town - fetched empty baskets at the orphanage. Don jores after supper - then read the newspapers, read about the death of the British south pole explorer “Scott,” with 4 of his men - afterwards was down at Eds - helped them to put the brick fire pot in their kitchen stove - Laura, Kate & Erna went out skating, so did Clarence & Sam. Herb & Ed shelled corn - Gord also helped. Louisa is sick with rhumatism - went to bed before I came. Got home around 10 oclock, looked after fires, wrote this - ready for bed at 11 oclock. Tem. 14 above howling wind. (Tues. Feb. 11, 1913)

Got up around 7 oclock. Tem. 5 above zero - looked like storm but turned out sunny most of day but cold, occasional light snow flurries N.W. winds. Jake was at home this forenoon - helped

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washing & set up his stove. After jores I worked at books - got out how much we sold during 1912 - it comes to \$2219.36 the best we ever done. One Armed George was here for dinner - after dinner Mrs. Weber was here to visit Mother a bit - also fetched some onions. After 2 oclock Jake came down - we hauled 3 small loads of sewer manure, it is frozen very hard. I think we will stop hauling for awhile - it is too hard to get loose. The old horse "Tom" on the sewer farm property, which Ed used down there died last night - Ervin Velzing dragged him up on the hill with their team this afternoon - Ed & Charley Moyer also helped - Charley had to vomit about it - little Benny went along also to see the doings. I started the incubator lamp in the washhouse cellar to keep the frost out - it helps a little - Herb was here a bit after supper, brought our dog home. I read slept awhile etc. - ready for bed at 11 oclock. Tem. 8 above zero, N.W. wind is howling (Wed. Feb. 12, 1913)

Of course, Eby bracketed all of his incredibly conceived material inside obligatory references to the February temperatures and the howling wind.

In a way, Eby occupied not only a geographical place but also a psychic space between country and town, as also between Pennsylvania-German dialect (for which he had no viable lexicon) and official English expression (which he tended to write out phonetically), and even between church and state. His place at so many cross roads seemed to sharpen and intensify his poetic imagination. Although he had been nurtured in the First Mennonite (or: "Chris Eby's") Church when he was young, he found his own place in more fluid and flexible zones somewhere alongside that church, during the 1910s returning to it from time to time only for special events. In the 1890s and early 1900s it had been for him a church too caught up in its search for

absolutes, too unable to offer a user-friendly culture to someone like the sociable Eby, who was interested also in the offerings of the town, with its clubs, skating rinks, theatres, and cafes, with its wide range of churches beyond just the one church, and with the people he accompanied to, or serendipitously came across, in those places. These were mostly unstable social spaces, filled with their own uncertainties and excitements, but they provided enough of both fixity and latitude for him to muster a sense of his own personality and potential. When World War One came along, Eby, like many young men of the town, signed up.⁵ But when he was in Europe during the war, it seems that he was unable to find words to keep his diary occupied, as though the absolutizing gestures of war limited his imagination, as though the space in which he was still hoping to write had become too tightly controlled a space. On brief visits to London right after the war, he hoped again to find a user-friendly culture. He stuffed his diary with long lists of words taken from places that were for him central to the imperial metropolis (its museums, its galleries, its castles), as though he were trying to kick-start his poetic imagination by copying the historically-loaded texts of the imperial centre. But when he came home to Kitchener in 1919, he set his diary aside altogether, and never told anyone about it. It seems as though the pre-war world that he had once exulted in, a homey and home-spun world where he had room to map his own poetic territory, had died.

On reading to learn

Eby's diary leads us to many historical questions about Pennsylvania-German Mennonites' attempts to construct a usable culture in Canada in the 1910s, a decade when Mennonites were on the verge of shaking some of their separateness from the world and gaining a new secularism and worldliness in the period between the wars (Steiner 26-27). In the absence of a chorus of similarly colourful voices from the 1910s, Eby's diary rejuvenates aspects of that decade and our sense of

Berlin/Kitchener culture's multiple locations during that period.

As we continue to cultivate and advance beyond those reading approaches that I have suggested here, we will continue to find more meanings — both fixed and fluid — in Eby's work. We will find in it a historically detailed and a poetically sensitive record of strands of both custom and change in one key phase in the culture of Ontario's Pennsylvania-German Mennonites — the ethno-religious group which Eby in some way echoed. Eby's diary offers a sensitive and complex record of social, political, technological, and personal dynamics of the worlds Mennonites experienced in and around Berlin/Kitchener and beyond. The diary will continue to enlarge our sense of the "Mennonite" past in Canada, seen here not in terms presented by a prominent representative of the church (as in the case of some excellent diaries recently published),⁶ but by someone who lived and who wrote about life at the edge of our usual focus. Eby absorbed a kind of street-level body of perceptions that in the evening he brought home and set down in the white space he had ready and waiting for him.

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Notes

1. The Edna Staebler Research Fellowship for 2002, sponsored by the Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum, enabled me to bring my long-standing interest in Eby's work into focus with my project, "Gordon Christian Eby's poetics of life and language: Mapping the modern world, from pre-war Berlin to post-war

Kitchener (1911-1919)," and I wish to acknowledge their generous support. In my correspondence with the Fellowship committee, I identified Eby's diary as one of Waterloo Region's "outstanding cultural documents" of the early twentieth century. This present paper is a glimpse at one strand of my work involving Eby's diary.

2. Anne Eby Millar produced the first typed transcript of the diary, the draft from which I originally worked in establishing a text, before I made stylistic and other alterations based on my reading of the original itself during 2002. I am grateful to Anne for her help all along the way. For copyright information about the diary, contact Sam Steiner, Archivist, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.

3. The Mennonite books were: *People Apart: portrait of a Mennonite world in Waterloo County, Ontario* (1977), *Mennonite Country: Waterloo County Drawings by Peter Etril Snyder* (1978), *Rebecca's Nancy: a story of a little Mennonite girl* (1978). The Berlin volume was *Berlin, Canada: A Self-portrait of Kitchener, Ontario before World War One* (1979).

4. The procedures and the social environment of "charming" were certainly at odds with the rhetoric of industrial/technological/ commercial progress charted by the image makers of Berlin, Canada before World War One, and it is important to note that Gordon Christian Eby's enthusiasm lay on the side of modern progress. Eby's father's world was out of sync also with the primary views on charming held by the Mennonite church. Indeed, Nyce indicates that Gordon Christian Eby was affected socially by his father's reputation and renown as charmer: "Although [Gordon Christian Eby] was very much a member of his community, ... because of his father's status and reputation, [he] remained at some level detached from it. Gordon's

father, especially in his career as a charmer, created his own synthesis of faith, traditional lore and modernity. From him young Gordon seems to have learned to pick and choose among various alternatives more readily than those more steeped in Mennonite ways" (Nyce, in Eby, *Chronicle* 5-6). Gordon Christian Eby's mother, Catherine (Clemens) Eby, always very committed to the Mennonite church, lamented deeply when her son joined the military in 1915.

5. In his recent history of the Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo, Ontario, Karl Kessler provides a sense of the mood of the time, whether in the country, in the community, or in the Mennonite church. See especially pages 111-12 of his *Path of a People: Erb Street Mennonite Church 1851-2001* (2001). For a study of Eby's church, see Reginald Good's 1988 volume, *Frontier Community to Urban Congregation: First Mennonite Church, Kitchener 1813-1988*.

6. Royden Loewen, in praising Eby's diary, refers also to Harvey L. Dyck's 1991 translation, *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880*, as an outstanding "Mennonite" diary. Another we might add is John B. Toews's 2000 translation, *The Diaries of David Epp, 1837-1843*. Both of these diaries — and in this sense they were altogether unlike Eby's, and more in spirit and tone like that of Eby's great uncle Elias Eby (anthologized in Loewen, *From the Inside Out*) — were by ministers in the Mennonite church, leaders in their community who by virtue of their appointed task were concerned first and foremost with the spiritual and general well-being of the community and congregation as a whole.

Paul Tiessen is a professor with the Department of English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. This essay won the 2003 J. Winfield Fretz Award in the graduate category.

Book Review

Risk and Endurance: A History of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church

By Lauren Harder

Published by Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, 2003

Printing: Courtesy Waterloo Printing Company Ltd.

236 pages

Paperback \$18.69

Reviewed by Maurice Martin

This congregational history by Lauren Harder is really in many respects the history of the Ontario Mennonite Conference. It certainly provides a clear window into many of the issues which faced the Mennonite Church in Ontario after 1890. Harder rightly points out that a chief Mennonite characteristic is the call to “nonconformity” or “simplicity” including the call to shun materialism, avoid extravagance, in forms and places of worship as well as dress style. She perhaps should have paid a bit more attention to the Old Order split of 1889 which focused precisely on such issues. She simply states: “With the departure of the more conservative Old Order, the Conference felt some freedom to innovate.” She might have noted that there emerged a rather distinct “northern” and “southern” or rural-urban split which for a long time shaped the life of the Ontario Conference. She does well to describe the urban influences which underlay the issues causing the split of Stirling Avenue Mennonite from First Mennonite.

Harder does good work in continually placing the history of the Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church and the Ontario Mennonite Conference into the context of the broader Canadian history, e.g. the Great Depression and World War II.

This history is particularly engaging because of how the author

weaves family names and correspondence into the narrative, beginning with her captivating description of the Betzner reunion. She reminds the reader that the Stirling Avenue split involved real people, not only theological or lifestyle issues. Sometimes families found themselves on two sides of the issues, or at variance with the official stance of the church. Harder comments: “Clearly, in some Mennonite families, teachings around the dinner table did not always match those around the communion table.”(page 28)

The author carried a thread throughout the history of the extent to which women bore the burden of the division, beginning with the issue of wearing hats rather than bonnets in the workplace, which was resolved in the “bonnets to church, hats to work” decision. She also notes that there were several “female-headed families” in First Mennonite Church at the time. Is the author suggesting that the independence of the Stirling Church was inextricably linked to the beginnings of female emancipation from church structures and strictures? Certainly the role of women in the emerging mission of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church is well-documented throughout this history.

The themes of separation from the world and the independence of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church from the Ontario Conference are also linked. Harder points out that for a time the independence of the Stirling Avenue church nudged the Women’s Missionary Society to expand their role beyond Mennonite circles into the wider community. This was seen to go against the Mennonite doctrine of separation from the world. Without Mennonite missionaries to support, or conference programs to contribute to, the Stirling Avenue Mennonite

Church increasingly related to other denominational or non-denominational programs.

Harder shows this to be a kind of elliptical loop away from the Mennonite centre, to a later return, as Stirling eventually became a member of the General Conference Mennonite Church, and finally also the Mennonite Church. Why did Stirling wait so long to join the Central District of the General Conference Mennonite Church? She writes: “Stirling delayed any new affiliation indefinitely because it was still hoping for an eventual reconciliation with the Ontario Mennonite Conference - a hope that remained faint right up to the 1960’s.”(page 69)

The pain of separation from First Mennonite Church lingers throughout the history of the Stirling Avenue church. Harder comments in this regard: “After all they had been through, it is not surprising that Stirling members approached potentially divisive issues with trepidation” (page 87) This was with respect to introducing a piano into the worship services.

The author sensitively portrays the several leaders at First Mennonite Church who in their attempts to be faithful ended up at variance with each other. Though the two congregations were separate, time and circumstances often brought their leaders together in common cause. For example, Weber and Derstine were on the House of Friendship board together. Naturally U.K. Weber figures prominently in the early history of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church.

Chapter 6 is appropriately entitled *Communion*, as it deals with the common life of the congregation and the many small and sometimes larger changes which occurred in the church

~ Continued from page 7 ~

from 1960-1975. Here Harder lists all the pastoral leaders of that time, their personal styles and emphases, as well as the revised leadership patterns of team ministry and a board of deacons to replace the individual deacon(s). Harder comments: "Over the generations, the church had worked itself into a paradoxical position in regards to leadership." (page 153) She explains that in the early years each member needed to pitch in to make the congregation work, but that later the congregation became more pastor-driven. Thus the strong lay leaders played their roles outside the worship services. These leaders tended to dominate discussions at congregational meetings. Jim Reusser and Winfield Fretz worked hard at bringing about "an important shift in the power balance in the congregation." (page 153, from an interview with Jim and Helen Reusser) This again illustrates the trend in the Mennonite Church in Ontario at the time.

The title *Communion* also reflects the increasing reconciliation between First Mennonite Church and Stirling Avenue, which began to hold joint communion services in that period. The 1960's also saw unprecedented inter-Mennonite cooperation in Ontario, in which Stirling church participated. This included the formation of Conrad Grebel College, as well as Silver Lake camp. Finally Stirling Avenue joined two conferences in 1969. Harder might have done well to name them - United Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Conference of Ontario. The sub-title of that part of chapter 6 is *Communion Restored: Serving Together*. Harder might have pointed out that it was indeed joint mission and service ventures, as well as joint interests in Conrad Grebel College which finally precipitated the integration of three conferences into Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada.

Harder sensitively describes the "homecoming" of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church to its roots in the Ontario conference. This is portrayed

not as "the return of the prodigal" but as two formerly estranged friends now putting the past behind them to forge out a common future together.

In the final pages the author brings us back full circle (perhaps a little late) to the book's theme expressed in the title *Risk and Endurance*. She describes the initial split as a "risk of faith" for those who feared that "the bonnet issue" would cause people to leave the church. Clearly the risk "paid off." She ends the history in the same way she began, by telling the story of the "Fireside Reunion" of 1991. It became a sharp reminder to the congregation that their earlier links to non-Mennonite groups had an elements of risk. She concludes with the challenging question: when to risk, how to endure.

Maurice Martin lives in New Hamburg. Maurice is a long time pastor with Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. He is currently ministering at Shantz Mennonite Church near Baden, Ontario.

Book Notes

Joseph Reuchly and Anna Schweitzer *Family History and Genealogy, Second Edition* Compiled and Published by Elizabeth (Betty Bast) and Irwin Steckly (Stratford, Ontario, Canada, 2003). It is based on the First Edition (1983) by Mrs. James (Helen Wilcox) Reschly.

This genealogy contains some European background of the Reschly and Schweitzer families, family stories, copies of documents, photographs, heritage tour and reunion program (July, 2003), and an index, in a loose-leaf binder cover. The five Reschly daughter married and remained in Canada while the only son, Joseph Jr., immigrated to Iowa, taking the name with him!
Submitted by Lorraine Roth

Waterloo Historical Society, Volume 91. The Waterloo Historical Society Volume 91 includes two articles of interest to members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. The first one is *Mennonite Fundamentalism and the Hawkesville Brethren, An Examination of the Origins of the Wallenstein Bible Chapel and it's Impact on the Local Mennonite Community* by David A. Martin. Martin is the University of Waterloo winner of the WHS 2003 Local History Award and his paper has been printed in an edited-for-space version. The other article in this volume is *No Ghosts, History of the Wachmuth Block/Dreisinger Building* by Marion Roes. Volumes will be available at Kitchener Public Library, Grace Schmidt room in mid May. *Submitted by Marion Roes*

Ted E. Friesen, author of *Memoirs: A Personal Autobiography of Ted Friesen* (Altona, MB: Ted E. Friesen, 2003) in 180 pages, with text and photos, tells the story of his life and travels. He helped establish a successful family business, worked in the church and helped to found Mennonite Central Committees for Manitoba and Canada as well as two Mennonite Historical Societies, Manitoba and Canada. The discussion of Ted's public roles is balanced by the story of his family life in which his wife Linie was central. Ted's memoirs provide insight into the many changes of the past 80 years and are a significant contribution to Mennonite History. *Submitted by Linda Huebert Hecht*