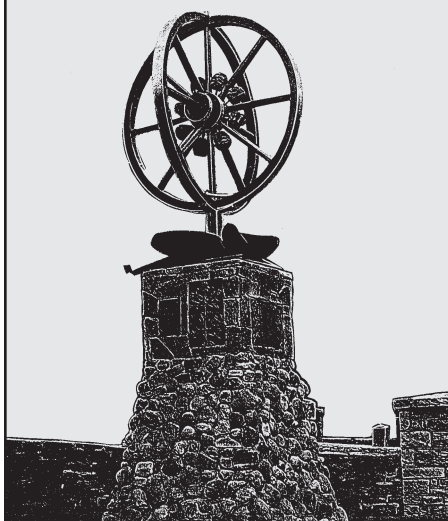


Ontario Mennonite History

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Peace Church Memorials Dedicated

Three Peace Churches in Ontario, the Brethren in Christ, Quakers, and Mennonites worked together to remember their ancestors who were witnesses for peace during the War of 1812. On June 10, 2012, three memorials were dedicated. People gathered at the Bertie Church cemetery near Fort Erie on a hot summer afternoon to dedicate the Brethren in Christ plaque. (See text below)

Many of the same people gathered at Rennie Park in Port Dalhousie (St. Catharines) for the Quaker dedication. Their plaque is part of a peace garden established many years ago. In the Quaker tradition, the dedication included a significant time of silence.

By late afternoon we gathered at First Mennonite Church, Vineland, where the Mennonite plaque is attached to one of the cemetery gateposts. Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, one of the organizations that supported this peace initiative, provided refreshments. Jonathan Seiling, the instigator of this Peace Church project, had his new children's book, *Feeding the Neighbouring Enemy* available.

Words on the Brethren in Christ marker:

To honour the memory of the pioneer Brethren in Christ (Tunker) Anabaptist believers, we establish this marker. Seeking land grants and exemption from military service, from 1788 onwards, they came to Upper Canada: Niagara, York and Waterloo. Because of loyalty to their faith, they courageously objected to military service in the War of 1812-14, based on conscience and scripture. In lieu of service, they paid a militia tax. This non-resistant stance demonstrated their desire to live as part of the Kingdom of God. Brethren in Christ now, as then, commit themselves to the non-violent resolution of conflict.



Leonard Chester of the Brethren in Christ Historical Society participates in the dedication of the marker at the Bertie cemetery near Fort Erie, Ont.



The Quaker stone is part of a peace garden in Rennie Park, Port Dalhousie.

Words on the Quaker stone:

Since 1660 Quakers have been guided by their Peace Testimony to reject war and practise nonviolence. In 1793 the government of Upper Canada recognized their right to conscientious objection. During the war of 1812 many Quakers refused to serve in the armed forces or provide material support. "A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it... Let us then try what Love will do." William Penn, 1693

Bus Tour explores Mennonites and the War of 1812

By Barb Draper

Three buses left Kitchener, Ont., on the morning of June 16, 2012. Two were chartered by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario while the third was arranged by a group from Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church. While the children and some adults from Stirling spent the morning at Ball's Falls, the Mennonite Historical Society and interested adults from Stirling gathered at Vineland United Mennonite Church to hear Jonathan Seiling's presentation on "The Mennonite Experience of the War of 1812."

Although the Mennonite presence in the Niagara Peninsula dwindled in the late 19th century, there was a significant concentration of Mennonites living there during the War of 1812. Although the Mennonites of the time did not seem to have great difficulty in claiming conscientious objector status, they were impacted by the many battles fought in the area

After the presentation, Jim Bearinger showed us a cannonball that his father found on their farm just west of Kitchener. Although no battles were fought in that locality, Jim has been informed that Mennonites young men sometimes drove supply wagons and liked to take home a souvenir. Cannonballs were the souvenir of choice.

Among the stories heard on the bus tour was that of George Ball, the miller at Ball's Falls. He was the son of a German Loyalist who fled from the U.S. in 1783 and was married to Catharine Overholt. As a grist-miller his role was deemed an essential service and he was not asked to serve in the army, but his wife was required to billet many soldiers.

The farms along the Niagara River south of Chippawa were predominantly Mennonite in those years. Among them was John Miller and his wife, Elizabeth Byer who suffered many losses during the war. After the war they claimed losses for a storehouse broken into in Sept. 1812, their property was plundered by the Americans in 1813 and several buildings were damaged and fences destroyed in 1814.

We also heard about Jacob Overholser who was charged as a traitor by his neighbours because they saw him providing assistance to the American army. Although he insisted he was forced to help the Americans, he was convicted as a traitor and died in prison.

Included in the tour were two museums, one in Jordan and the other in Port Colborne. At the Jordan museum one panel in the special War of 1812 display was dedicated to Pacifism while the museum in Port Colborne had John Graybiel's military exemption certificate on display.

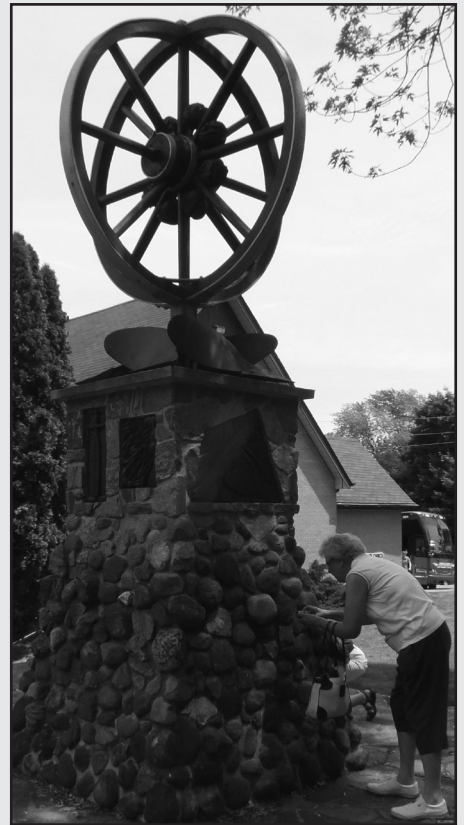
Thank you to Jonathan Seiling for organizing and leading the tour and to Sam Steiner who shared information on the second bus.



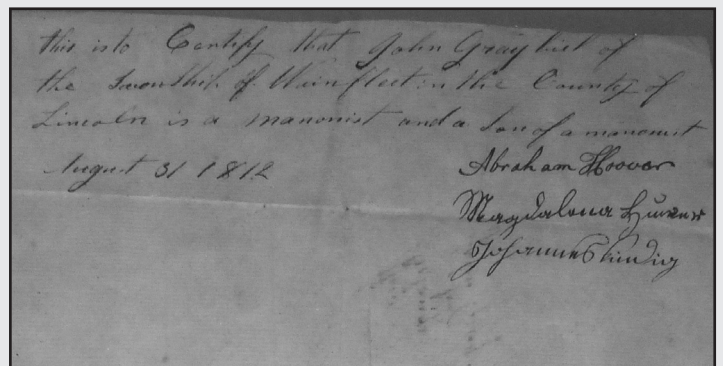
Jonathan Seiling



Jim Bearinger displays the cannonball found on his farm many years ago.



On the bus tour, Gwen Albrecht examines the stones that make up the pioneer memorial at The First Mennonite Church, Vineland.



The military exemption certificate for John Graybiel says, "This is to certify that John Graybiel of the Township of Wainfleet and the County of Lincoln is a Mennonist and a son of a Mennonist." It is dated August 31, 1812 and includes the signature of Abraham Hoover.

Peace Church...continued



The Mennonite plaque is on a cemetery gatepost at The First Mennonite Church, Vineland.

Words on the Mennonite plaque:

During the War of 1812 the Mennonite congregation meeting on this site included members who followed their conscience and refused to serve in the military. Other Mennonite settlements in Niagara, Rainham, Markham and Waterloo faced the same issue at that time. As members of a historic peace church, Mennonites believe that Jesus taught and lived love of enemies, and that following his example does not allow taking up arms. In 1793 the government of Upper Canada had recognized the right of Mennonites, Quakers and Brethren in Christ to be Conscientious Objectors to war; the War of 1812 was the first testing ground of this right.

The Prince of Peace is Jesus Christ...

True Christians do not know vengeance.

They are the children of peace.

Their hearts overflow with peace.

Their mouths speak peace,

and they walk in the way of peace.

- Menno Simons, Reply to False Accusations, 1552

The Changing Culture of Old Colony Mennonites

By Kerry Fast

Kerry Fast recently completed a PhD at the Centre for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. She has done significant research among Low German-speaking Mennonites.

In the 1959 edition of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Cornelius Krahn wrote the following under the heading of "Old Colony Mennonites":

In the total pattern of Mennonite history [Old Colony Mennonites] could be compared in some respects with the Kleine Gemeinde of the Molotschna, the Hutterites, or the Amish, although more conservative and culturally retarded than any of these. ... Not only was the contact with the outside world reduced to bare necessities, but also the

challenge that comes through contact with the other religious groups and the outside culture was neutralized. Contact with the German culture from which the Old Colony Mennonites stemmed was completely lost, and contacts with the new environment were not permitted. Thus in the attempt to retain the Mennonite heritage the group deprived itself of the challenges and influences which come through contact with other groups. Even the best concept of the Christian church cannot be realized in a vacuum. New stimulations and a challenge of thoughts and practices by opposing forces and a revitalization through contact with like-minded groups is as important as a sound basic concept.

The entry, "Sommerfeld Mennonites," (a group similar to Old Colony Mennonites) was written by Harold S. Bender: "The complete cut-off from outside cultural influences ... had its inevitable consequence in intellectual and cultural stagnation." Bender goes on to claim that the Sommerfeld Mennonites are "in a complete bondage to dead tradition, [which has] resulted in serious spiritual stagnation. The focus of all concern on preservation of the Plattdeutsch and the old outward customs produced regrettable results in many places."

What is Culture?

These quotations are dated. We raise our eyebrows and squirm a little when we hear the words "cultural retardation,"

~ Continued on page 4 ~

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but we are left with little doubt as to the editorial position of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Harold S. Bender was the Editor of the Mennonite Encyclopedia and Cornelius Krahn the Assistant Editor). According to these entries, there is a right culture and a wrong culture. Or to give it more nuance, there is a constructive way in which to shape culture and a destructive way to do it. In the opinion of Bender and Krahn, Old Colony and Sommerfelder Mennonites have definitely chosen a self-destructive path. But these quotations also have a surprisingly refreshing view of culture and its dynamic properties.

In the entry on Old Colony Mennonites, Krahn lays out the two articulating components in culture. First is a vigorous engagement with external forces. As Krahn writes, “new stimulations and a challenge of thoughts and practices by opposing forces.” Second is embracing internal forces, i.e. a grounding or support in what is familiar. He describes this as, “contact with like-minded groups” and “a sound basic concept” of what it means to be Mennonite. Old Colony and Sommerfeld Mennonites, according to Krahn and Bender, have focused only on the latter and have failed to engage external forces, to their detriment.

That Krahn and Bender would describe traditional Mennonite groups in this fashion should not surprise us. They were at the forefront of engaging modernism in a way Mennonites had not done prior to mid-twentieth century. It was their generation that moved Mennonite groups in Canada and the United States out of their agrarian communities and into “the world” through urbanization and higher education. The four-volume *Mennonite Encyclopedia* was in itself a project to this end.

As Rachel Waltner Goossen writes about the impact of the encyclopedia, “[s]ome contemporary scholars suggested that the Encyclopedia enabled Mennonites to establish themselves as a mainline Protestant church body during the post World War II



*Interior of the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Aylmer.
(Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo).*

years.”(www.gameo.org, “The Mennonite Encyclopedia”).

The shift that was embodied in the publication of the Encyclopedia required a re-thinking of Mennonite engagement with modernity. When the editors of the Encyclopedia described traditional Mennonite groups, they were also exposing their own cultural project. With a solid base on which to stand and “like-minded groups” to offer support, Mennonites in Canada and the United States would have the grounding to vigorously engage modernity and yet not abandon Mennonitism.

It is clear in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* entries that Old Colony and Sommerfeld Mennonites are deemed to have failed because they retreated from modernism rather than entered into it. The critique of Old Colony and Sommerfeld Mennonites sounds more like a justification for engaging and participating in modernism than like a realistic assessment of how why these groups engage or do not engage modernism.

Even though the assessment of Old Colony and Sommerfeld Mennonite culture as laid out in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* entries is dated, the entries do point to two opposing views of culture that persist today in how the *Dietsche* are understood and apprehended. (Dietsch/ Dietsche is the term used for themselves

by Mennonites from Latin America who migrate to Ontario. Old Colony Mennonites are the largest group within the *Dietsche*; Sommerfelder, Kleine Gemeinde and Reinlander are other significant groups.)

On the one hand there is a temptation to evaluate those who are different, those Mennonite groups that have rejected modernism, by our standards, by experiences, by our values. For Bender and Krahn, because engaging modernism was the context in which they shaped their understanding of what Mennonites should be, those Mennonite groups that pursued a different relationship with modernism, were deemed culturally irrelevant, to use a more contemporary assessment than “culturally retarded.”

Culture, according to these entries, is dynamic and flowing, filled with vitality, constantly engaging its surroundings, not static and definable. Culture is dynamic; it develops and changes as people interact with each other and as they live their lives within the structures around them. It is continually being formed as people interact with each other, as they attend church, as they raise their families, move from Ontario to Alberta or back to Mexico, as they find employment, or as they go grocery shopping.

While I appreciate the view of culture in the abstract that the *Mennonite*

Encyclopedia entries portray, what they fail to acknowledge is that Old Colony and Sommerfeld Mennonites have engaged the external force of modernity throughout their history. They have not absorbed modernity; instead they have chosen to challenge it.

A brief history

Old Colony Mennonites were one of several Mennonite groups that moved from the Canadian prairies to Mexico and Paraguay in the early twentieth century in an effort to preserve their religious freedoms. The memory of Canada's mandatory conscription during WWI was still fresh in the minds of this pacifist group when, in 1916, Canada brought in new school laws which only heightened their unease about living in Canadian society. Mennonite private schools were closed and attendance at provincially accredited schools was enforced.

No amount of lobbying and resistance on the part of Mennonites altered the resolve of the Canadian government to standardize education. As a result, those Mennonites most committed to preserving their values and lifestyle looked elsewhere to settle. Most Old Colony Mennonites and some Sommerfelder moved to Mexico, while other Sommerfelder left for Paraguay.

Beginning in 1922 approximately 7,000 Mennonites, immigrated to Mexico, primarily from Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In Mexico, Mennonites purchased and settled on four large tracts of land known as colonies. Here, following the biblical injunction to be in the world but not of it, they established themselves as distinct societies, separated from society around them.

Each colony was divided into villages in which individual family units lived and farmed. Each village had a school and churches were spread throughout the colony. The civic governance of the colony was looked after by the elected *Vorsteher*. The spiritual needs of the colony were attended to by the *Aeltesta* (Bishop) assisted by lay ministers and a deacon.

In the ninety years that Mennonites

have lived in Latin America, their numbers have increased dramatically. Ever in search of more land so that they can perpetuate their preferred agrarian lifestyle, they have established colonies throughout Mexico, in Belize, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Argentina.

Their engagement with modernity and its amenities is a constant matter of self-identity; some colonies have embraced some aspects of modernity while others work hard to keep it at bay, particularly electricity and vehicles. Initially each colony was a separate ecclesiastical entity and most were Old Colony. In the last twenty years or so, due to aggressive mission efforts by various evangelical church groups, mostly Mennonite ones, and a move towards modernity by colonies, many colonies now support a variety of churches.

Mennonites began returning to Canada as soon as they arrived in Mexico but initially they returned to their communities of origin in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In the mid-1950s, following a period of drought in northern Mexico that had devastating effects on colony life, Mennonites began arriving in Ontario where seasonal agricultural work provided much-needed cash for families.

Initially they came as seasonal workers and returned to Mexico for winter, but gradually they stayed on. By 1960 there was a stable enough presence of Mennonites from Mexico in Ontario to form the first Old Colony church. The steady flow of Mennonites to Ontario has not ceased. While the Old Colony church is the largest church group in Ontario, Mennonites from Mexico (and by now also from Bolivia and Paraguay) attend a wide variety of churches, mostly Mennonite and some do not attend at all. Alberta and Manitoba have also become an attractive destination for many Mennonites from Latin America, as have Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

Three Stories

Three women have gone from Mexico to Ontario, each on a unique route not only geographically, but also culturally and religiously. The *Dietsche* culture

is dynamic as people make choices as they live their lives. Culture becomes less what clothes they wear, how their churches are structured, what they believe, and more how they interact with these facets of their lives. This will not help us arrive at a definitive description of *Dietsche* culture or religion, but it will help us to see that Mennonites from Latin America are finding ways to make meaningful lives and communities for themselves.

Justina Loewen

Justina Loewen was born in Mexico on Durango colony. Durango is one of the original four colonies established in the 1920s. It is, by all accounts, bursting at the seams. "Durango is very full, very full," Justina said. When Justina and John were married, there was no possibility of owning enough land to support themselves as farmers. But when Durango colony decided to purchase land in Paraguay, Justina's parents, and by extension Justina and John, were unable to take advantage of this new venture because they lacked the resources to buy land on the new colony in Paraguay. For Justina, she and her family were caught up in an experience filled with contradictions:

We got married, had children; we were taught that we should have children, we shouldn't use birth control ... They were a gift from God. ... That's what we wanted, but there wasn't land. Why didn't [the colony leaders] make it possible for their people could stay there [in Mexico]? But they didn't, they didn't look after the need [for more land]. At one point land was bought in Paraguay but my parents, they weren't rich, I think just rich people could move there ... The poor weren't helped.

Justina wanted children, but Justina and John were left with a contradiction of their own. For them, the most viable option became to move to Ontario where they could make a decent living. But this could only be done by contravening the wishes of her parents who wanted her

to stay in Mexico. Her parents' wishes were not only based on a desire to have their children nearby. Canada was the land which Old Colony Mennonites had abandoned in pursuit of a godly life. For Mennonites to return, meant, at some level, a judgment on the initial immigration to Mexico and the ideals that it stood for:

Well, we had been taught that we weren't supposed to return to where our grandparents, our parents had moved from [literally: removed us from], well, my parents were perhaps two, three years, six years old when they moved from Saskatoon, that's where they were born, to Mexico. I was taught that we weren't supposed to return [to Canada]; they had moved from there and we weren't supposed to return. But because there wasn't land [on Durango], people just didn't have land, there wasn't work, people were returning anyway. ... I feel bad about this. My parents instructed us, don't, you're not supposed to. ... but we did anyway. I worry about that, we didn't obey, we didn't do as they taught us, but we had to! We also wanted to provide for our family [literally: we wanted to run our family] ... Did we do the right thing? They told us not to, but we did. It's confusing, isn't it?

Twenty years after initially moving to Ontario, Justina is still not reconciled to her family's decision to move to Canada, even though she knows they had little choice.

After living in Ontario for eight years, Justina and John had the opportunity to move to Bolivia, to a colony called Durango. Here they hoped to establish the kind of life they had eschewed by moving to Ontario, a life in which they could be self-sufficient, raise their family in a village and on a colony with like-minded people. This Durango in Bolivia was founded by members of the colony Durango in Paraguay (which is a daughter colony of the one Justina grew up in in Mexico) when the Paraguayan colony began to allow vehicles, and electricity. Some members

of the Paraguayan colony wanted to stay true to their commitment to remain anti-modern and so established a new colony in Bolivia.

On this colony the Loewens were able to purchase land. Justina and her family, although accustomed to a more modern life in Ontario, were willing to embrace the more demanding lifestyle that was expected of them in Bolivia.

"We wore clothing exactly like everyone else, we really changed. And it wasn't difficult, that's wasn't the most difficult thing. We could adjust ourselves to the climate, the clothing, everything, also to horse and buggy. No problem."

But in spite of their willingness not only to accommodate themselves, but to embrace colony expectations, Justina's family encountered a kind of difference that made staying in Bolivia difficult. When the colony purchased more land and worked to clear it so that families could have an adequate supply of land, the Loewens were not entitled to benefit from this aid. They needed assistance because their cotton had rotted, but they were told that that they would have to pay for any work that was done on their behalf because they were not entitled to assistance. According to Justina, this was because everyone assumed that they had money because they had

worked in Canada when in fact they did not. But there was also a more subtle shunning at work that Justina sensed. The consequences of their move to Ontario haunted them.

We were looked at suspiciously, 'what do they want here? They're different. They've been in that [place, that godless] country where we weren't supposed to be.' We never felt as if we fit in. And they didn't assist us. We asked for some land, they were opening up some land, we asked if we could have some of that land, we really wanted some, we lived on a very small plot and we wanted more. We noticed that they helped others, they helped with the clearing, with a cat, they didn't have to pay because they were poor. We also approached [the colony] and asked if we could be helped as well. "If you have money, then we'll do it for you but not otherwise."

In the face of this rejection, things got so desperate for Justina's family that they turned to her husband's former employer in Ontario who had offered assistance if they would ever need it. He lent them the money for airline tickets to Ontario. Eventually the Loewens moved to Alberta which is where I spoke with her.



Old Colony Mennonite Church in Crosshill. Built in 1888, the building was a Presbyterian Church until 1949 when it was purchased by Crosshill Mennonite Church. It was purchased by the Old Colony in 2006 when Crosshill moved to its new location.

Justina's life has brought changes in how she understands her religiosity. She has had to make adjustments and accommodations in the various places she has lived. She lived in Bolivia on a colony that was less progressive than what she was used to and it ended any possibility of her family living on a Mennonite colony which would have undone the transgression she committed against her parents. Living in Canada exposed her to the opposite end of the spectrum, to the more progressive forms of the Old Colony church. She described the changes within herself that she experienced as she moved from Mexico to Ontario to Alberta.

"In Ontario the [Old Colony] church, well it wasn't like we were used to in Mexico, it was different. They called themselves Old Colony and we joined that church." Justina found it more progressive than what they were used to in Mexico, for example she mentioned they had a PA system. When they moved to Alberta, they encountered another form of the Old Colony church. "We lived in Ontario too long with our children," she acknowledged. They became too accustomed to the more modern ways of the Ontario Old Colony church and the Alberta Old Colony church just too restrictive. So now in Alberta the Loewens attend the more progressive Sommerfelder Church which is more like the Ontario Old Colony church.

In Alberta, Justina has encountered another expression of difference that has made her re-think about her commitment to living a non-conformist life. When young Mennonites get together on Sunday afternoons, her children included, to attend parties, or bunches as they are called, there are times when things get out of hand and the RCMP (police) are called in. In southern Alberta, community services including the RCMP, educators and health professionals are aggressively engaging the Mennonite community, including addressing bunches and talking with church leaders. The RCMP have pointed out a contradiction between Mennonite teaching and practice that makes Justina squirm a little.

The police come to [the ministers] and they remind them of the fact that we don't work on Sundays—the farmers here would probably like us to do but we don't, that's how we have it, we don't work on Sundays—and yet the police have to work on our behalf! ... They have to work because of what we do. They have to go out, they get called [to these bunches], here's a big disturbance, trouble." The police say to the ministers, "Then we have to take the call and sort it out. We have to work on your behalf."

The tables have been turned. The world, the very world which her parents wanted her to shun, in this instance embodied in the RCMP, is pointing out the inconsistencies within the *Dietsche*. The irony of this is not lost on Justina.

Justina's desire to be separate from "the world" has been important whether she lived in Mexico, Bolivia, Ontario or Alberta. In Bolivia she was unable to realize her dream of village and colony life for her family. Instead, she developed ways to live out her beliefs in Canada that would not be possible in Mexico or Bolivia, but always in the shadow of her decision to move to Canada in spite of her parents' teaching. She has had to rethink her relationship to the world in Alberta. This is creative cultural formation.

Maria Heide

Marie Heide also grew up in Mexico, but her family moved to Paraguay when she was sixteen years old because the colony in Mexico was modernizing. Colony Rio Verde in Paraguay offered her family the opportunity to retain their desire to shun the modernizing appeal of the world.

Once married, Marie, like Justina, had to face the conundrum of choosing between making a decent living in Canada and staying faithful to the teachings of the Old Colony church she grew up in. Unlike Justina, her parents did not oppose their move to Ontario; they spared her the heartache that Justina lived with. In fact, Marie received a blessing of sorts from them:

There were some people that scolded my parents. 'How can you allow your

children to move?' 'Well,' my parents said, both of them said, 'what are we supposed to do? We can't help them out.' ... All they said was that they could see that it was very difficult for us in Paraguay and if we can make a go out of it in [Ontario] they saw no reason for us not to move.

Her older sister however, was not so accommodating. "If you move to Canada," she warned Marie, "do not consider me to be your sister any longer."

Marie was warned about the dangers of Canada. One woman said, "You're moving there? Be very careful or you and your husband be separated in a few months." Another woman warned her that Satan was sitting on every rooftop in Canada waiting to destroy the marriage inside. This was an image almost too awful for Marie to contemplate, but she had to admit that there was some truth to these warnings. Marie has met several women here in her English classes who have separated from their husbands. In fact, one of Marie's sisters has separated because of domestic violence.

Marie was unsettled about her sister's separation. On the one hand, Marie acknowledges how difficult her sister's situation is: "If I would have to live with the burden she carried, I don't know that I could that. My mother says this all the time, if you haven't experienced it, you can't judge." But on the other hand, Marie doesn't want to acknowledge that separation is an acceptable alternative. "I still think it takes more than one person to cause the conflict."

Unable to resolve the contradiction Marie feels about her sister's separation, she holds the different approaches within herself. This balancing act allows Marie to give her sister the latitude to separate and to remain committed to the belief that marriages should not be dissolved. In this way she can be faithful to what she knows to be right and yet find it possible to live in Canada where, she believes, Satan threatens in ways he does not in Paraguay.

More recently, Marie was condemned for sending her children to



*Old Colony Mennonite Church near Drayton.
The building was constructed by the Berea Mennonite congregation in 1952
and became an Old Colony church in 1991.*

a public school by a woman who had joined the Conservative Mennonite church. "If you send your children to a public school, you can be assured that their souls will not make it to heaven," she was told.

Marie and Wilhelm could have opted for the Old Colony school, but paying tuition would mean the Heides would not have been able to purchase their own property. It was one or the other. Many families would envy Marie's. To raise a family on a large rural property is as close as most families can get to their dream of village life on a colony and even this eludes most families who have moved to Ontario. Having chosen to purchase property, Marie now has to live with the fact that her children watch television at school. In exchange she has the satisfaction of teaching her children to garden. She monitors what her children are exposed to and looks through their bags when they come home from school. She knows from her own experience in English classes where she regularly encounters things that do not mesh with her worldview that Ontario is a different world than the one she grew up in and that it requires a different way of being in relationship to the world.

In the face of all the judgments she has encountered, Marie has worked out a different relationship with the world. Her family moved from Mexico to Paraguay because the Mexican colony was allowing

vehicles. Now the colony in Paraguay where she grew up is also beginning to allow vehicles. "You know, it made no sense to me that my parents moved from Mexico because of pickups," she says. "As far as I'm concerned, if you are careful with how you use a vehicle, they won't cause any problems." For Marie it is no longer the individual things that are right or wrong, vehicles, electricity, TVs, or public school. It is your attitude and how you use these things that determines whether or not they will harm you. Living in Ontario, in the face of contradictions and choices, she has had to re-think her ideals of marriage and family and her relationship with "the world." This is creative cultural formation.

Elisabeth Bueckert

Elisabeth Bueckert grew up in Mexico and like Justina and Marie has moved frequently throughout her life. She and her husband moved to Kansas where they lived for several years and then they moved back to Mexico. They then came to Ontario but returned to Mexico. Now they have returned to Ontario and have settled here permanently.

Elisabeth's church experience has been more varied than either Justina's or Marie's. She grew up in the Old Colony church and got married there but then she and her husband began attending the Kleine Gemeinde church. The Kleine Gemeinde have been influenced by

evangelicalism but maintain a teaching of non-conformity, though not as regimented as the Old Colony.

When the Bueckerts moved to Kansas, they initially attended a non-Mennonite church at the invitation of her husband's boss. Elisabeth found the evangelical aspects of this church appealing. She described the ritual of healing prayer that was available for anyone. At the front of the church several people, including the pastor, gathered around the person in need and prayed. She liked that they put their hands on the person in need and she and her husband participated. As appealing as this was, the Bueckerts wanted to be with fellow Mennonites and began attending an EMMC church which was a two-hour drive away.

When they moved to Ontario, they attended an EMMC church but this did not satisfy their desire for familiarity and continuity with their past in Mexico. In spite of their turn towards evangelicalism, the Bueckerts wanted to be a part of a church that shared their Old Colony roots. They started attending the Old Colony church again and even though they were late the first Sunday because they couldn't locate the church, they immediately felt at home. This was a church that resonated with their roots.

Elisabeth is very conscious of the religious shift she made by embracing evangelicalism. What she likes best, is hearing about "coming to Jesus," and "accepting Jesus into your heart." She has integrated an evangelical understanding of conversion into her religiosity.

Elisabeth is less concerned about differences and contradictions than Marie. She can be evangelical and Old Colony. She can pursue her desire to be a part of the church of her childhood and yet raise her children in ways foreign to those she was raised with. Elisabeth has found that multiplicity enriches her life.

Conclusion

In recounting of the stories of Elisabeth, Marie and Justina I have tried to illustrate how Mennonites from Latin America create culture. They have brought

their own histories to bear wherever they have lived and the histories they have encountered have in turn, shaped them. Perhaps these changes are not perceptible; institutions, ideals, habits, and patterns of behavior are often slow to change, but they are not static.

The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* entries are wrong in their assessment that Old Colony Mennonites, and other groups like them, are culturally and religiously stagnant. They are not. If we take seriously that culture is as dynamic and

fluid as the people who make up that culture, we cannot stand at a distance and identify, evaluate, encapsulate who and what these Mennonites are. To understand them and ourselves, we need to step into proximity with them, and take seriously why they live and act as they do.

As Robert Orsi has written, "It is chastening and liberating to stand in an attitude of disciplined openness and attentiveness before a religious practice or [group] of another era or culture on which we do not impose our wishes,

dreams, desires, or fears." (*Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*. Princeton University Press, 2005, 8). I hope, in some small way, I have done that with this presentation.

This presentation uses material from the research project, "Homemakers across Borders" of which Luann Good Gingerich of the School of Social Work at York University is the principal investigator.

MCC Ontario's work with the Low German population

By Lily Hiebert-Rempel

Lily Hiebert Rempel is the Low German Program Coordinator at Mennonite Central Committee Ontario.

When the Low Germans first started to arrive in Ontario, the established Mennonites in Ontario who were fluent in the Low German language assisted the newcomers. During the 1970s larger numbers were arriving and moving into areas where no established Mennonites were living. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Ontario received numerous requests to become involved and after discussions and a study, MCC Ontario opened an office in Aylmer, Ontario.

During the first year, MCC Ontario primarily assisted families in obtaining legal status either by applying for permanent resident status or Canadian citizenships. MCCO also had two nurses, serving on a volunteer basis, one in Aylmer and one in Leamington, who addressed some emerging health needs. After this first year MCC no longer provided direct health care services. (See *Build Up One Another: The Work of MCCO with the Mennonites from Mexico in Ontario 1977-1997* by William Janzen, 1998, MCCO)

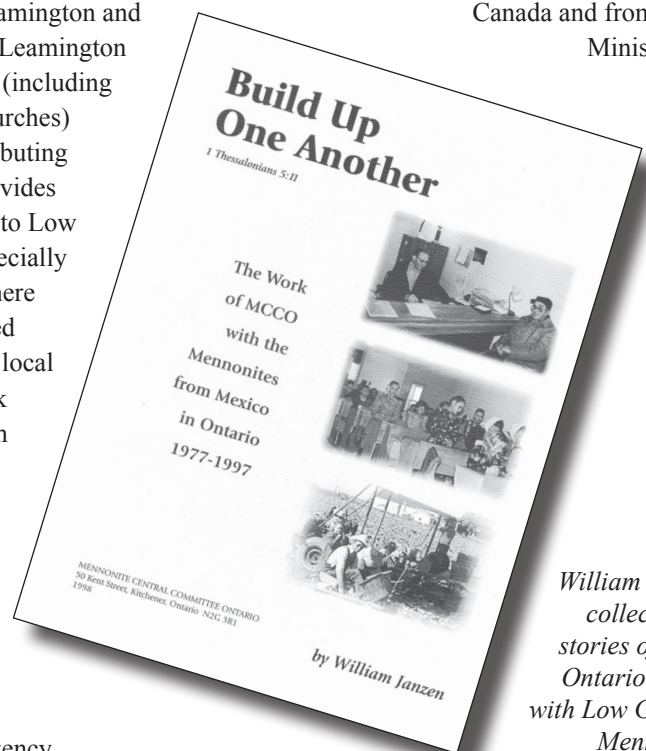
Most of the Low German work has centered around documentation—helping people acquire Canadian citizenship or

permanent resident status. Bill Janzen worked tirelessly with politicians and Citizenship and Immigration officials to expand the criteria for legal status for the Low Germans. Most of MCCO's direct services have been assisting newcomers to obtain government documentation.

Direct services such as assistance in applying for citizenship, immigration, OHIP, birth certificates, or Employment Insurance are still carried out in the Leamington and Chatham areas. The Leamington Mennonite churches (including the Low German churches) are financially contributing to a position that provides these direct services to Low German people. Especially in Chatham-Kent where there is no established Mennonite network, local service agencies look to the MCC Chatham office for help with language barriers.

MCC has applied for a variety of government grants. Since 1993, Health and Welfare, now the Public Health Agency of Canada, has been granting financial

assistance used by grassroots community organizations to provide assistance for high-risk young families. MCC Ontario holds the contract with Public Health Agency Canada and disburses funds to four sites that offer family support: Aylmer, Norfolk, St Jacobs and Chatham. These programs have grown considerably but the funding has not. MCC Ontario has also received financial assistance from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and from the Ministry of



William Janzen collected the stories of MCC Ontario's work with Low German Mennonites between 1977 and 1997.

Training Colleges and Universities.

Six or seven years ago, MCCO created a new position (Low German Program Coordinator) as it moved from providing direct services to playing a networking/coordination role. MCCO wants to assist churches and agencies who deliver the services. The intention is to build a strong relationship with the Low German leaders and to build capacity within Low German communities and within community agencies to respond appropriately to newcomer needs.

The former Aylmer MCC office has grown into an independent charitable organization called Mennonite Community Services, providing employment, settlement and family support services. They also operate a MCC thrift store and Low German radio programming that is now also available on the internet.

When MennoHomes was building affordable rental housing in the village of Wellesley in 2009, MCCO's partnership helped bridge many connections with local service providers and also with the Old Colony leadership.

Since the 1990s, Low Germans are living in Perth County, Wellington

County, Waterloo Region, and also in Huron County. MCC Ontario has been involved with these programs in a supportive role for the past 4-plus years. Niagara Region has a growing number of Low Germans and MCCO has received requests to assist with organizing services in this area. To date we have not been able to respond to this request.

Building trust and collaborating on joint projects is a very slow process. Inter-Mennonite dialogue is challenging. Old Colony Church leaders, trying to balance their work, pastoral calling and home life find evening meetings challenging.

The St Thomas and Elgin County Family and Children's Services has created an agreement with the Old Colony leadership with a protocol that guides how their workers will deal with a family that has been referred to the Children's Aid Society and they are engaging with the Old Colony leadership in resolving family concerns. Elgin-St Thomas has not apprehended any children since this agreement was made. After several years and numerous meetings, a similar arrangement was worked out with Children's Aid in Leamington.

Old colony leadership has indicated that their relationships with CAS are more collegial and CAS has indicated that the church leadership is helpful in encouraging family members to cooperate and fulfill their end of the agreement. Mutual respect and cooperation is growing. The hope is that these protocols will become common practice in all areas.

While working as a public health nurse I started organizing information-sharing days for service providers such as nurses, social workers, and teachers. The first networking conference was held in April, 1996 with about 20 people attending; in more recent years we have had between 220 and 340. These conferences have been very effective in providing culturally sensitive information and have helped non-Mennonites and Mennonites gain a better understanding of the diversity that exists within the Mennonite fold.

This past year MCCO created a series of web pages to provide resources for people working with Low Germans. It provides information about their faith and their way of life. Check it out at mcco.ca/openingdoors.

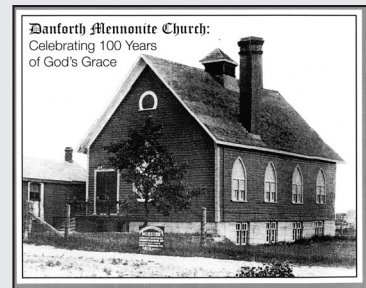


Feeding the Neighbouring Enemy: Mennonite Women in Niagara during the War of 1812.

Jonathan Seiling, illustrations by Cynthia Disimone. 2012, 28 pages.

Jonathan Seiling spent a lot of time researching the role of Mennonites in the War of 1812. This illustrated children's book is a succinct collection of stories about how Mennonites living in the Niagara Peninsula during the war responded to the conflict around them. Copies are available at www.gelassenheitpublications.ca.

New Books



Danforth Mennonite Church: Celebrating 100 Years of God's Grace.

Danforth Mennonite Church, 2012, 96 pages.

Although there is some text, the glossy pages of this book primarily contain a pictorial history of the Danforth Mennonite Mission in Toronto. There is a wide collection of photos through the decades. The book is available from the church at 2174 Danforth Avenue, Toronto, ON M4C 1K3.

Old Order letter collection a valuable link to the past

BOOK REVIEW:

By Levi M. Frey

Over Mountains and Valleys:

Letters Received by Bishop Christian Reesor of Markham

George Reesor ed. *Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario, 2009.*

Most of us enjoy, to a greater or lesser degree, listening to older people talk about bygone days and things. Some of us Mennonites especially enjoy the stories which pertain to bygone times in the life of the church.

Unfortunately, most of the historical accounts which we have access to are biased. Those stories which Grandpa tells are biased by years and by the fact that all we hear is what one person observed from whatever vantage point he had access to at that point in time. A story coming from a book may be researched from more sources, but it still contains an element of the opinion of the author. We are left to draw our own conclusions as to the accuracy of these observations because we do not have the advantage of having intimate knowledge of the time period in question.

Unless, like George Reesor, we chance upon a clear window into the past!

When George received the old wooden box from his sister Ruth, he did not yet realize what a treasure it contained. To her it was a box of old letters which she couldn't read anyway, purchased years before at Grandfather's auction sale because of the stamps on the envelopes. She never did get around to throwing away the box and its contents, probably because of that (unconscious?) sense of connection to the past, the seductiveness of nostalgia. To George, the 477 letters written by his great-grandfather's friends became an obsession, a previously-undiscovered window into the past, glimpses of life as a Mennonite bishop in the 1800s.

George Reesor spent the next eight years preparing the letters for publication

in *Over Mountains and Valleys*. Many of them were in the old Gothic script, with local dialects and poor spellings. Translators had to be found and commissioned. Letters were sorted by author. It was a daunting task!

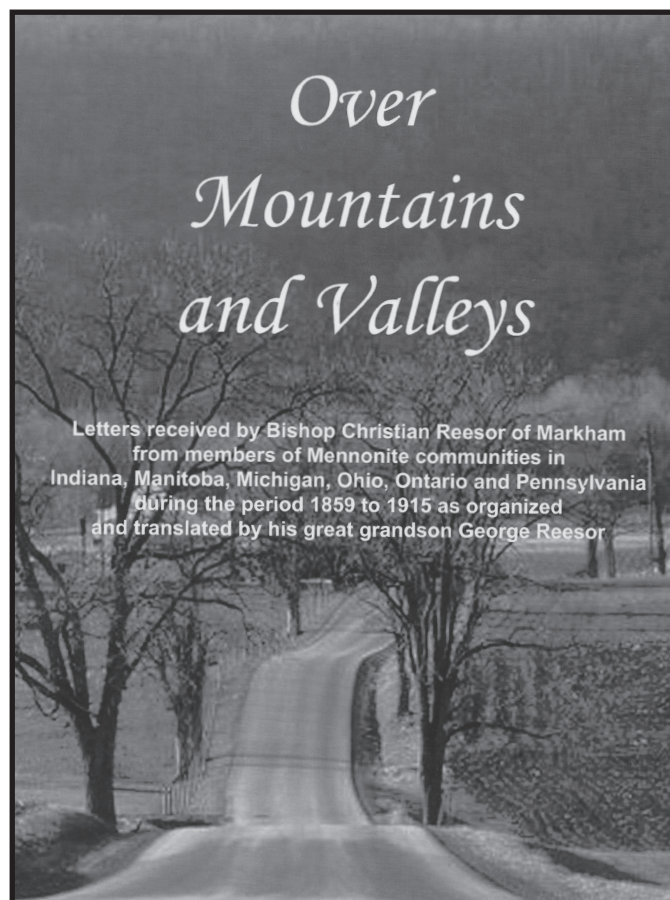
The result of the labours of George and his many friends is a worthy tome, a valuable addition to the library of the serious student of Mennonite history. It is not as much a historical reference book as it is a look at the day-to-day life and thought patterns of the Mennonites of that time. One finds nuggets of important historical information buried in accounts of mundane living.

There is another exciting angle to this project for some of us, one which George may not have realized. Some of those letters were written by our great-grandfathers! They are the only connection of that type which we have to some of those old men, those men whom we read about and hear about when church history is re-told.

Would it not be interesting if some of us found boxes of old letters in our attics—letters which Christian Reesor wrote in response to friends who asked for his advice? One

is bound to think that he must have been a rich mine of good advice when one analyzes the source of his letters. They came from a wide range geographically, and a wide range of personalities and viewpoints. His advice was obviously valued, because sometimes he received letters from people on both sides of a controversy.

This letter collection is one of very few primary sources of 19th century Old Order viewpoints. Through great effort, George Reesor has provided us with an extremely valuable link to the past.



Summer in the Archives

Going to school, recalling escapes, remembering a life!

By Laureen Harder-Gissing, Archivist

What a summer in the archives! Several small but treasured records of Mennonite history were added to our collection:

Going to school: John E. Brubacher

A copy book from John E. Brubacher's (1822-1902) schooldays was donated by relative Kevin Ann Reinhart on behalf of the family. Brubacher recorded mathematical formulas and problems, notes on time, weights, measures, currency, and financial transactions, and penmanship exercises. Brubacher indicates that his teacher was Elias Eby, and that he went to school for 50 days in 1843-1844.

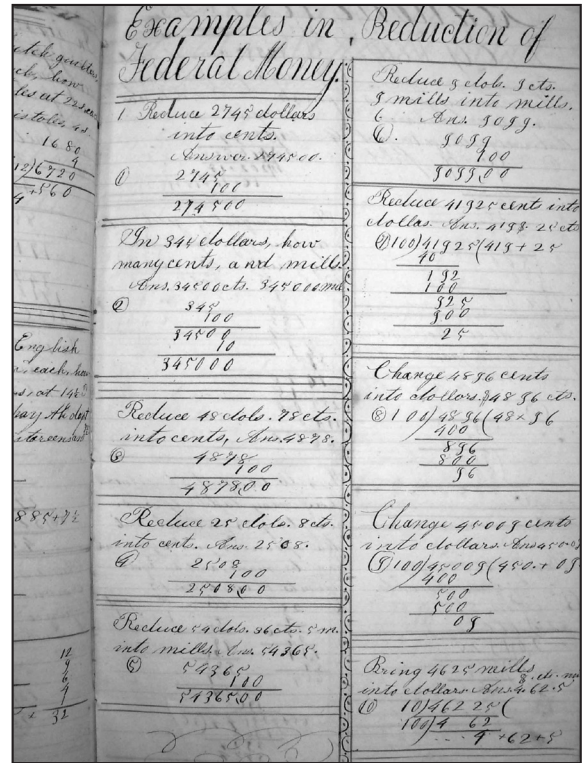
Recalling escapes: Katharina Duerksen, Maria Loetkemann, Gerhard Wiebe

Katharina Duerksen was the wife of an estate manager in the Russian Mennonite Terek settlement in 1908 when her husband's employer, Hermann Neufeld, was kidnapped by bandits and held for two weeks. In 1950 in Paraguay, Katharina recounted the incident to schoolteacher Maria Loetkemann, who wrote it out in 15 typed pages. The original manuscript has been donated to the archives by Loetkemann's nephew, Arnold Neufeldt-Fast.

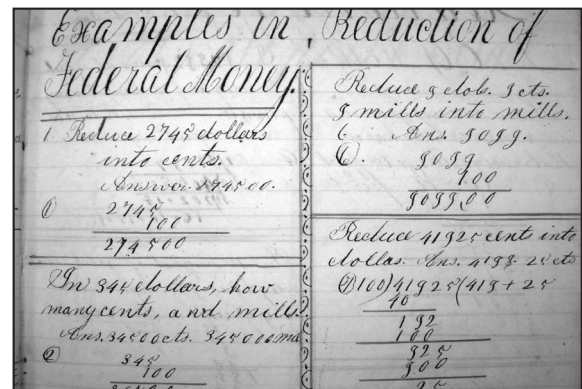
Gerhard Wiebe, his wife Agatha and their three children were able, through a series of fortunate events, to obtain permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union and join other Wiebe family members on Pelee Island, Ontario in 1933. In a letter to his family, Gerhard relates anecdotes of life during the famine of 1932-33, describes a trip to Odessa and through former Mennonite villages, and recounts his emigration story. The manuscript was originally obtained by Frank H. Epp while researching his "Mennonites in Canada" series.

Remembering a life: Barbara Davis Hoover (1821-1900)

Barbara Davis was born in Alsace, France, in 1821 and came to Canada with her parents at age nine. She married Benjamin Hoover of Rainham, Ontario in 1838; the couple had six children. A brief note written by Noah Stauffer (minister) to read at her funeral was saved by Lorna Bergey for the archives. Together with her obituary, these brief documents give small hints, but leave much to the imagination regarding the life of an Alsatian-Ontario Mennonite woman.



A page from John E. Brubacher's copybook.



A close-up from John E. Brubacher's copybook.