

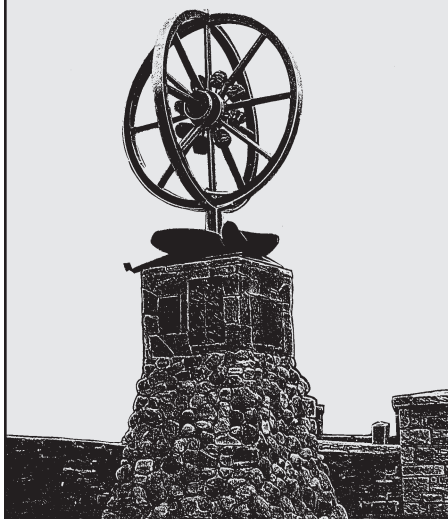
# Ontario Mennonite History

THE  
NEWSLETTER  
FOR THE  
MENNONITE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF  
ONTARIO

VOLUME XXXII  
NUMBER 1

•  
JUNE, 2014  
•

ISSN 1192-5515



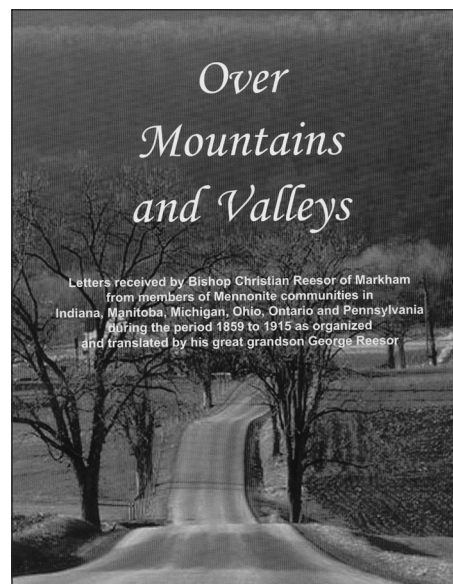
## The Role of Shoebox Historians

*This talk was presented to the  
MHSO fall meeting on Oct. 19, 2013  
at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church,  
Markham, Ont. by George Reesor.*

Many of us have experienced **M**it—the discovery of an old box, or perhaps an old shopping bag filled with documents from an earlier era. Its contents may include letters, church periodicals, newspaper or some other similar document. Many of these items likely were stored away by parents, grandparents or even great-grandparents. Each item was set aside for a reason. Letters were treasured contacts with loved ones in faraway places at a time when methods of communication were extremely limited. Church periodicals carried inspirational articles and news items including birth and death notices. Newspapers generally appear to have been kept because of events or local or national significance. Let me tell you about the three most significant items which have come across my desk, each being a personal letter collection.

In the 1990s, I received a package of letters from my cousin Ruth Baker Reesor who had carried out considerable research on our grandfather, Thomas Reesor. These letters had been written to Thomas from the Reesor settlement in Northern Ontario with which he was deeply involved and which bears his name.

Many of us are familiar with the tragic stories of the Mennonite refugees who fled oppression in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. The Reesor settlement near Hearst was but one of a number of attempts to re-establish these unfortunate people in permanent homes. While a number of books about the settlement have been published, it was abundantly apparent that the letters constituted a significant source of primary material which described the daily struggles of pioneer life and cast light upon the unending number of pressing issues which demanded constant attention.



*Letters to Bishop Christian Reesor were  
published by the Pennsylvania Folklore  
Society of Ontario in 2009.*

Fortunately, Thomas was sufficiently astute to have filed copies of his own responses, which adds tremendously to the value of this body of material. In 2008 the letters were scanned and, along with other related material, were published in book form.

The second collection appeared on October 28, 2000, at the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, again supplied by Cousin Ruth. She handed me an old wooden box which contained hundreds of letters and other documents, most of which were written in German. They were addressed to my great-grandfather, Christian Reesor who had served in the Markham area as minister from 1863 and as bishop from 1867 to his death in 1915. The box also contained a significant number of items for Grandfather Thomas, including 88 letters from preacher Frank Hurst of Ephrata, Pennsylvania. The Frank Hurst collection now rests in the capable hands of Amos B. Hoover of the Muddy Creek Farm Library by whom they were published in 2006.

My first exploration of the box proved to be almost overwhelming

~ Continued on page 2 ~



George Reesor

as many questions began to surface. Where had it come from? How had it been preserved? Then the story began to unfold. Christian Reesor had used the box to preserve correspondence received from family and friends, especially after he entered the ministry. Following his death, his son, Thomas continued using the box for the same purpose. After Thomas died in 1954, a family auction was held in the back yard of the homestead. Ruth's husband, Lorne Reesor, an avid stamp collector, purchased the letters for the value of the stamps. The box remained with the family for some 46 years, even though they had lived in four different homes! Ruth acknowledged that, since she had been unable to read the letters, several times she had considered simply disposing of them!

Then began a captivating eight-year process of translating, contacting families of the writers for additional information, and searching for persons who possessed the ability to read the old Gothic script. Most were written in High German, Pennsylvania German or a combination of both. Challenging hand-writing and creative spelling gave rise to many bewildering problems. Yet something akin to an obsession to pry open this window on the past drove the task forward. In 2009 the entire collection was published by the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario.

Approximately three years later I received a phone call from Clare Frey, a friend from Elmira, who inquired as to whether I would be interested in

a large collection of correspondence from Reesor, Ontario, addressed to my grandfather. I was completely taken by surprise as I had no prior knowledge of a second collection. The letters had been folded and stuffed into several pasteboard boxes. On the side of one box was written, "For Leonard Freeman or Noah Martin. Please preserve." Noah passed away in 1990 and it was one of Noah's children who passed the boxes along to Clare. The mystery of how they originally found their way to the Waterloo area remains unsolved.

The second collection from Reesor spans a longer time period, from 1924 and contains only 130 letters plus many additional documents. Hopefully this collection also will be placed in the new Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College, with scanned copies being forwarded to Leamington.

In addition to these three collections of letters, there have been many other items including several boxes of newspapers and periodicals and stacks of old books, Bibles and hymnbooks. A number of large envelopes contain family genealogy information, order of age and dates of birth and death of siblings in a particular family. There are collections of old photos and postcards, many of which definitely have historical value. An occasional invoice or bill of sale has been preserved. With each of these items comes the question, "What is its value?" As noted earlier, each item was set aside for a reason. Of what value is it today?

The letter collections especially contain much information of significant value. First, they provide a reliable basis for establishing dates and the occurrence of events. For example, in *A Brief History of Mennonites in Ontario*, L. J. Burkholder states that Abraham Brubacher, a minister at Mosa, Ont., moved to Ohio in 1883 because of his conservative leanings. Two letters from Ohio call the 1883 date into question. On Feb. 5, 1882, Abraham Lehman of Williams County, Ohio, inquires about an Abraham Brubacher who had moved from Canada to Mahoning

County. Approximately one month later, on March 8, 1882, Jacob Lehman of Mahoning County states, "The Brubachers appear to feel at home and pleased to be here." Thus we have two 1882 references to an event which is recorded as having occurred in 1883.

There are many, many references to difficult issues which confronted church leaders and how they were dealt with. There is ample evidence of the agonizing and distressing process of attempting to find acceptable resolutions. The correspondence from Reesor comments with regularity on a sharp controversy regarding ownership of the railway siding which simmered nastily for many years until finally it was resolved.

Minister Christian Risser of Brunnerville, Penn., having been of a very conservative viewpoint, often lamented the disturbing prevalence of pride and drift within the church. Following his ordination to the office of bishop at the age of 71 in 1896 he wrote, "Now this office was placed and entrusted upon me. How it will go I know not. At the present time people are so liberal that I am nearly discouraged." It is said that one Saturday afternoon when a neighbour called he found Christian seated at the table, tears streaming down his face as he prepared a sermon for the following Sunday morning.

Frany Hoffman, a single lady who lived with her parents two miles north of Heidelberg, Ont. corresponded regularly with Bishop Jonas Martin of Goodville, Pennsylvania. In a letter printed in the book, *The Jonas Martin Era*, dated Sept. 26, 1909, she provides a detailed and graphic description of the turbulent times and the divisive issues which weighed so heavily upon Bishop Paul Martin. She writes, "The enemy is so great and strong that one can hardly see how the poor bishop can survive." He was being accosted from all sides during the 1909 drainage ditch controversy to the point that, in Frany's words, "The poor bishop does not know what to do." She closes by instructing Bishop Jonas to, "Put this paper in the fire so no one else sees it so that no trouble occurs because of it."



# MHSO Fall Meeting

*Story and photos by Barb Draper*

The fall meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario was held on October 19, 2013 at Rouge Valley Mennonite Church where George Reesor talked about the joys and challenges of dealing with collections of historical documents. Lorne Smith also talked about his Hoover ancestors and some of the early pioneers who settled in Markham Township near the Rouge River.

Later in the afternoon George took us on a short bus tour, seeing various sites of interest and stopping at the Reesor cairn that commemorates the early Reesor pioneers to Markham Township and at the old Reesor Church. Because it was rain-

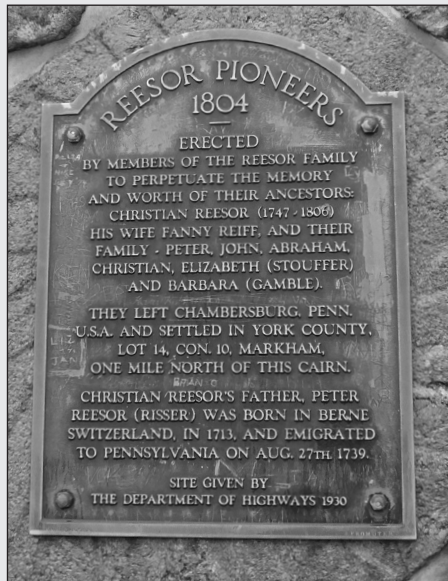
ing we only saw the Reesor pioneer cemetery from a distance.

In 1804, Christian Reesor and his family moved from Chambersburg, Pa. to Markham Township, coming with five Conestoga wagons. His son Peter purchased four plots of land along Steeles Avenue for his four sons. The Reesor Mennonite Meetinghouse, near the corner of Steeles Avenue and the York-Durham Line, was on the property of Preacher John E. Reesor.

At the time of the Old Order division, this Reesor congregation joined the Old Orders. In 1964 the congregation divided with a major part

joining the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. They called themselves Steeles Avenue Mennonite Church. In 1986 it amalgamated with Cedar Grove Mennonite Church to form the Rouge Valley Mennonite Church. The old Reesor church was shared between Steeles Avenue and the Reesor Old Order congregation during those years. The Old Order congregation dwindled through the 1970s and 80s until it officially closed in 1991.

A history of the Steeles Avenue Mennonite congregation by J. M. Nighswander was printed in *Ontario Mennonite History*, March, 1994 issue.



*A Reesor cairn with this plaque was erected in 1930 at the corner of Highway 7 and Reesor Road (Tenth Line).*



*The Reesor Mennonite meetinghouse was built in 1857 and received major renovations in 1950.*



*The old horse sheds at the Reesor church are still standing.*

**Ontario Mennonite History** is published semi-annually by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6, and distributed to all members of the Society. It is distributed free of charge to public libraries and school libraries in Ontario, upon request.

**Editor:** Barb Draper

**Editorial Committee:** Linda Huebert Hecht (Chair), Marion Roes, Bethany Leis, Herb Schultz

Financial assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture is gratefully acknowledged.

Inquiries, articles, book notices or news items should be directed to the Editor, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario c/o Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6 TEL. 519-885-0220, FAX 519-885-0014

~ *Continued from page 2* ~

Fortunately for us, the bishop did not honour her request.

Much may be learned about methods of travel and of time required to journey from place to place. On Dec. 9, 1889, Christian Lehman of Lectoria, Ohio, mentions a visit from preachers Mensch and Wismer from Bucks County, Pennsylvania. During an 8-week tour of the Midwest, they had travelled 4,000 miles on the train and 1,000 miles on wagons! On May 22, 1878, Amos Cressman provides instructions for travelling from the Twenty to the community of Bright. On Dec. 13, 1882, Jacob and Elizabeth Risser of Milton Grove, Pennsylvania, report a safe and speedy return from a visit to Canada. Of the 22-hour journey they observe, "One thinks that it cannot be, so quickly to drive for such a distance over mountain and valley!"

Health issues, serious illnesses and accidental deaths are mentioned with great frequency. Typhoid fever, dropsy, brain fever, diphtheria, heart sickness and tuberculosis appear to have been among the most prevalent illnesses. A young man of 32 who died suddenly while in the barn left a wife and five children. Another young man drowned while doing laundry in a mill pond. Christian Lehman writes of two men who were struck by the cow catcher of an oncoming train. One was carried along until the train stopped; the other was killed instantly. Jacob Mensch tells of a family in western Kansas who perished during a long, bitterly cold winter. They burned the couch, the chairs and everything combustible, yet were not able to save themselves from the cold and they were all frozen.

Crops, weather and commodity prices generally are topics of interest. On July 13, 1898, Andrew Miller of Elizabethtown complains of poor crops since there has been no rain since May. He adds, "The war between Spain and the U.S.A. is making hard times." Another writer, on a more philosophical note,

observes that the low prices are good for the poor people. A writer from the Vineland area notes that there is almost no demand for the abundant apple crop, however they were able to sell several barrels of apples for 50 cents per barrel.

Human interest stories abound. For example, Jacob L. Huber of Salunga, Pennsylvania hints of the well-known Pennsylvania German appreciation of good wholesome food. Of his neighbours Michael Millers he writes, "Both work hard. In the evening their table is richly laden with meat, sausages, liverwurst, sweet potatoes, pies, cakes, fried mush, bread and coffee, then they set down and eat a hearty meal and sleep all night without pain."

There is one unwritten human interest story which intrigues me greatly. My great-grandfather kept no fewer than five travel diaries of his frequent trips to the U.S.A., two of which have been recorded in a small writing pad. Within a compact pocket inside the front cover have been placed four benedictory prayers, all hand-written in German. This in itself is not surprising, since he would have been invited to preach at each Sunday morning service, plus at additional appointed weekday meetings. What I do find interesting lies in the fact that, among the Old Order people, the use of written sermon notes, especially written prayers, was thoroughly discouraged, or even frowned upon. May it not be construed as being disrespectful of my great-grandfather when I pose the question in his use of these written prayers, might he have been cheating, or crossing the boundaries of accepted protocol?

These written prayers provide several insights. First it is safe to assume that Christian usually preached in German. Second, since he preached so frequently, perhaps he found it a challenge to come up with an original benediction for every service. For me, this hand-written prayer is a very real connection to my great-grandfather. It tells me that he was very much an ordinary human being, and with that I am able to readily identify.

These few examples provide only a brief glimpse of the great wealth of historical information which may be found within a dusty old shoebox or a wrinkled paper bag. As these assorted items find their way into the hands of the shoebox historian, invariably they pose a puzzling dilemma—to keep or not to keep. Upon what criteria may we rely to make such a judgement? My father related a story which caused me to ponder the above question seriously. While working with Christian's letters, it occurred to me that his father, John Eby, and his grandfather Peter, surely would have kept in touch with family and friends in Pennsylvania. I asked my father whether he had any idea as to what may have become of their correspondence. According to my father, following the death of one of John Eby's grandsons, the family carried out five bushels of old letters and documents and burned them!

There will be many shoebox historians among us today. What is our role? How are we best able to make a worthwhile contribution? May I offer three suggestions:

First, at some point a decision is required as to which items are of value and which may be discarded. It would be unrealistic to expect our archivist to have sufficient time or energy to process bushels of old documents in order to make that judgement. Perhaps our most significant role might be to act as a filter by means of which this preliminary task would be performed.

Second, if a body of potentially significant material is found, it ought not simply be stuffed back into the shoebox and forwarded to the archives. Surely the archivist will find it helpful if the items have been filed carefully by chronology and by subject matter.

A third and final suggestion would simply be: If in doubt about the value of any item, contact Laureen Harder-Gissing, archivist at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, located at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario.

# Jacob Harder's Escape from Russia

*By Astrid Koop, who interviewed Jacob Harder in 2013.*

I was born in the Chortitza hospital in what is now Ukraine in 1934, the second child of Elizabeth and Jacob Harder. My sister Herta was born in 1932, and my younger brother Dietrich died at the age of 11 months.

My first memory goes back to about 1938. Mother had just baked *Zwieback* and I recall Dad grabbing me and two *Zwieback* and going to hide in the closet together where we ate them.

Chortitza was a town in Russia, now Ukraine, with about 15,000 residents. One evening at midnight, in March of 1938, the secret police knocked on our door and took Dad away with other Mennonite men. The back of the truck they loaded him on had a canvas cover. He was put in prison in Saphorosche for nine months. I remember Mom bringing him food and clean clothing. Dad shared a pillow with his brother Willy there. Willy was sent to Siberia, released after three years, and came back to Chortitza in 1941. The judge accused Willy of:

- a) Not plowing the middle of the field deeply enough.
- b) Not looking after the state's property well. One of the horses on his team had a colt. During a thunderstorm, the colt got excited and caught his leg in the wagon wheel and broke it.
- c) A Russian claimed that Willy hoped that the Germans would come and things would get better. Willy said "No, when the Germans come, things will get worse."

As a result, the judge reduced Willy's sentence from five years to three years. He spent his time in the Siberian forest at a logging camp.

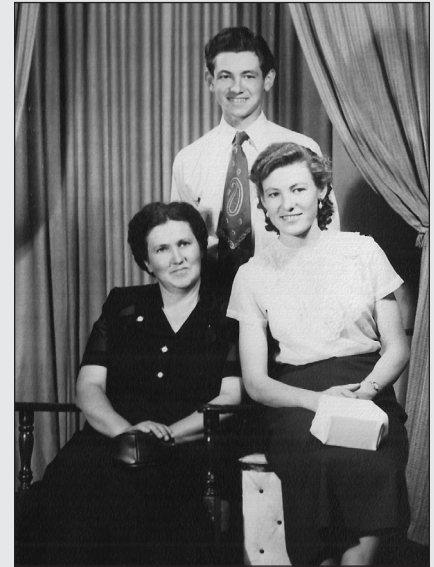
Each family got 2 ½ acres of land where we grew vegetables and corn for the cow which we shared with our aunt Anna Pauls, who lived across the street. We lived here until October of 1943. I attended the Mennonite school until 1941, then switched to a German language school with grades one to four and 20 to 30 students in each class.

My grade three teacher was Mrs. Janzen, mother of Waldemar Janzen. One of my classmates was Jake Goertz, whom we now visit in the Niagara area. All classes were taught in the German language. Mom worked at a collective farm doing field work with other Mennonite women. My grandfather, Aaron Harder, lived with us. He looked after us while my mother worked.

## Our Dad is sent away

Dad was sent away in 1938 after spending nine months in prison. We didn't know what had happened to him until 1956, when Dad's sister Maria Wiebe, who was sent to Siberia with her family in 1945, discovered that Dad had been sentenced to work in the coal mines in Siberia. The official letter, written in 1956, said that Dad had died of pneumonia in 1943.

The men sent to work in the coal mines never saw the light of day. Mom's dad and three brothers had all disappeared. When the Russians herded all the cattle to the east with the retreating army, Mom's youngest brother, who was 15 in 1941, was sent east with the cattle and found his sister, Katherina Schoenke after many years. He was heartbroken and died one month later.



*Jacob Harder with his mother and sister.*

Our Uncle Martin Woelk was not sent to Siberia because he was a book-keeper. Mom's younger brother, Dietrich Pauls, also a book-keeper in a machine factory, was allowed to stay because they needed him and was not sent to Siberia. Dad's father Aaron Harder was about 60 years of age and too old to work.

## Flight from Russia

In 1943, the German army retreated to the West. They came to our village and moved all the people of German descent to Germany. We, Mom, my sister and I, and my aunt, left by train in early October of 1943 to East Prussia. There were thirty people in each boxcar. We travelled for many weeks; when the army trains needed the tracks, we needed to wait for them to pass.

We arrived in East Prussia in late fall of 1943. We were housed in a big complex of 20 buildings, an insane asylum like that at Cedar Springs in Ontario. Each family got one cubicle

*~ Continued on page 6 ~*



which included bunk beds with straw mattresses. Blankets were hung between families for privacy. There were about 30 individuals in each room. We had school during the day in the barracks with a teacher from Russia. The adults cooked in the big kitchen which was similar to army barracks.

We stayed there until August of 1944. Then they found a place in Poland for our group of five near the Russian border. One day, my sister and I were looking for blueberries when someone told us that we had crossed the Polish border and were in Russia!

My grandmother, Maria Woelk, and two aunts, Katharina and Maria Woelk, lived 20 kilometers from us and in that same village also lived Dad's sister Maria Wiebe with her husband and three children.

On January 20, 1945, the Russians came close and families like us had a young Polish man come with his horse and wagon and pick us up with our belongings, which consisted of one suitcase apiece. We lined up with other wagons and left at 6 p.m. for the west because the Russians were coming. Mom, our aunt and her daughter, and my sister were walking. The wagon followed ours and had feed for the horses.

By 11 p.m., the women thought that someone should sit on the wagon with the feed. At first, they were going to let the girls sit on the wagon, but on second thought, my aunt and cousin rode on the feed wagon. That was the last time we saw them; they were sent back to Russia. I was able to see them again 54 years later in 1999, after they had emigrated to Germany.

At midnight, a German soldier came and said, "The Russians are coming; they are two hours behind us!"

We all scattered and never saw my aunt and her daughter again. Many years later, we heard that they had been sent to Siberia. Our Polish driver stole Mom's purse and took off. Mom took the reins and suddenly a German army truck came along and they said, "You're going in the wrong direction, turn around!" Mr.

Rempel and his 14-year-old daughter had a wagon of feed with his horses. He said they should take the three horses and hitch them to one wagon which made five people and feed for horses on one wagon.

We pulled off the road and stayed in an empty house for night. To preserve such food as potatoes, beets, carrots, onions, etc., we covered them with straw, then soil was put on top. On the south, warm end of the pit, we'd dig to get the vegetables. We'd check out the pits when we travelled.

We travelled this way for two weeks and found a village still occupied, further from the front. At night, we left the main road and tried to find food and shelter. Early the next morning, we went to the main road to join the trek. We travelled West in one line on the right side of the road. The other lane was for the army to deliver supplies to the front. Some days we travelled four or five kilometres. The year 1945 was one of the coldest winters on record.

After we had spent 10 to 12 days on the trek, we looked back and noticed that the third wagon back of us was the Wiebe family with my grandma, two aunts and another family. The adults decided to change places with the other family so my relatives could travel together. Uncle and Aunt and three children, my grandma, two aunts and mom's sister and I switched to my uncle's wagon. The others switched to Rempel's wagon.

After travelling west for almost a month we were getting near the American zone. But when we got to the river, the army stopped us. They wouldn't let any more people into the American zone. They directed us to the next village where they had good food. We stayed in a barn and slept on straw. It was January and we were trying to get into the American zone.

Uncle Peter Wiebe asked around and after two weeks, the Russians wanted to send us back. We were terrified and hid in bushes until dark, then two 14-year-old boys took us across the river in a rowboat. We waited on the other side for six weeks for Uncle Peter Wiebe and

his family, but they never came. They were sent back to Russia. After the Iron Curtain collapsed in the early nineties, they were able to come to Germany. I saw my cousin Erich Wiebe after 59 years when we visited him in Germany; his brother Helmut visited us in Canada. He had escaped to Lithuania, then Germany.

After six weeks, we moved west. The Americans, British and Russians negotiated about how they were going to divide Germany. The Russians wanted more of Germany, including Berlin. The people we were staying with gave us a wagon to pull; it was a four-foot long wheeler, and we went further west in the American zone. We arrived at an American sentry station. "Wrong permit," they said, "Go to the headquarters." My aunt said, "Don't look back." We heard guns firing and bullets flying over our heads. We got to the next sentry who had stopped a car pulling a horse trailer without proper papers. The man's fine was to give us a ride for 20 kilometres. We loaded our wagon onto the trailer, got into the car and drove away. It saved us a day's walking.

### **Memories of the Great Trek**

After one week, we arrived at a deserted cheese factory in Poland. Mom ran over and got a big piece of cheese. As a result of all the cheese consumption, many people became very constipated. To this day, I eat cheese only in pizza and lasagna.

We became very hungry and tired of walking. Mom had a little flour left. She gathered rain from the eaves into a container, mixed it and baked it on a wood stove sitting in the train station, a building where workers warmed up in. The bread tasted terrible but we had nothing else to eat. We got to Pflaumloch, Bavaria. Here my aunt found work and my grandmother stayed with her. We went to the neighbouring village of Nachermemmingen where mother found work at a flour mill along with field work, all for room and board for the three of us.

My sister Herta and I went to the village school where classes were held from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. with one recess. The school consisted of one room, eight grades and one teacher. In the afternoon I looked after the cows in the pasture in exchange for a slice of bread. Mom milked the seven or eight cows. Gerstmeier, the farm owner, was in the army and never returned. He had three children under eight years of age. I was 12.

### **An eventful day**

It was early March 1945, after one month on the Trek, when we stopped at a small village in East Germany to rest. My mother, sister and I shared a small wagon with my uncle and aunt, their three children, my grandmother and another aunt. We travelled together since my uncle was the only one capable of handling the horses.

We were fortunate to find lodging in three different households in the same village. On this particular morning, my cousin Erich Wiebe came over to play board games with my sister Herta and me. My mother was in the basement doing laundry. The owner was cultivating in the garden with his oxen. He did not want to go out into the fields because he had been shot at by passing fighter planes. The family had given up their living room with a big picture window.

This early March morning, as we sat and played games, we suddenly heard the noise of an airplane engine getting louder and louder. As I looked up I saw a fighter plane coming straight for the room we were in. When the plane was just across the street from us, the wing tip hit the house, slightly changing its direction.

The room we were in was not damaged, but when we opened the door to the hallway, we saw that the rest of the house had collapsed. Part of the plane was on fire in the house, ammunition was exploding and people were running around trying to put out the fire. After some time we were able to get to the basement to find our mother.

We were thankful that we were a

unharmed. The owner, however, who had stayed home to cultivate his garden because the snipers had shot at him in the fields, was killed. The fuselage of the plane had hit the gable of the neighbour's barn, which was made of bricks that fell on him. The pilot and the co-pilot did not survive the crash.

### **After the war**

A hired man from the mill picked up wheat and rye and took it to the mill and brought the flour back in two weeks time. During the winter and spring season I got up at 4 a.m., went out with a load of flour on the wagon pulled by a third horse, two kilometres to the highway. I rode the horse back. To take the harness off the horse I had to climb onto the feed trough. They were big horses, almost like Clydesdales. It was an all-day job to pick up the milled grain and deliver the flour. We lived there for about one year. During this time, after the war, people were trying to find their families. We found my Uncle Willie Harder and his family and my 70-year-old grandfather, Aaron Harder, in 1945.

Then we moved into one room in a hotel. We ate downstairs with the owners. The town had a pasture with apple trees where I looked after sixteen newly hatched geese until they were grown. We went swimming in a little river which had a water mill nearby. It took approximately six weeks for the geese to grow until they were penned. For this I got an extra slice of rye bread and butter.

We found more relatives of my uncle, namely Willy Harder's wife's family. They also moved to Nacher-memingen. We had a visit from Peter Dyck of North America. He discussed organizing Mennonite people who wanted to emigrate to Paraguay. My uncle Willy Harder said, "We will be on the first boat that leaves Europe. We want to get away from the Russians as far as possible."

The first boat left for Paraguay in 1947. We had tickets for Paraguay, but Mom got sick and needed to spend one

week in the hospital in Noerdlingen. So we missed the boat to Paraguay. Then we found Mom's cousin Abe Froese from Manitoba who sponsored us and so we were able to come to Canada. Later, cousins could act as sponsors.

### **Canada**

After an 11-day trip, we arrived in Quebec on May 6, 1949. I was seasick most of the time and spent all day on deck in the fresh air. All men and boys had lodging in the bow of the ship where we slept in bunk beds. I was 15 years old. Of the 600 total passengers on the boat, only five were Mennonite. Some went to work in mines in Northern Ontario.

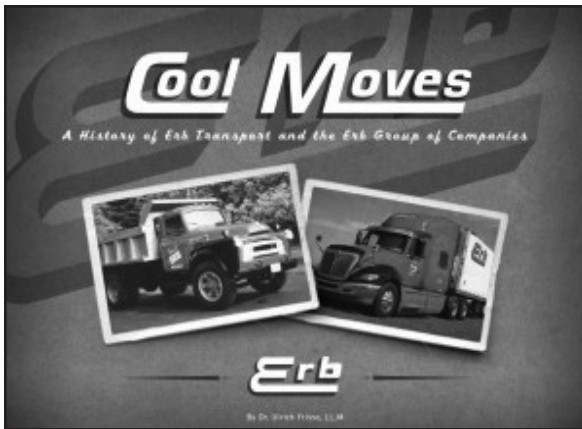
Our Aunt Katherine Woelk and Anna Pauls, who had also come to Canada in 1948, told us to come to Leamington, as there was no work in Manitoba. We took the train from Quebec City to Toronto. When we got to Chatham, the conductor told us that this was where we had to get off. Uncle John and Aunt Agnes Enns had gone to Windsor to pick us up. When the train got to Windsor, we were not on it, so they went to Chatham, but we were already gone.

A policeman asked where we wanted to go. We told him Leamington. A taxi took us and the policeman came along to Leamington to Poplar Street. Mrs. Wieler served us coffee and *Zwieback*. Uncle John and Aunt Agnes walked in at 2 a.m. Their children Kurt and Louise (11 and 8 years) were sleeping.

We stayed in Leamington and lived upstairs in a converted tobacco kiln, complete with kitchen on "Store" Dyck's chicken farm. Several years later, we bought a small house. My sister Herta married John Kosciw in 1952. I met Helga Dyck in 1956 and we were married in 1958. Today we have four children: Eric, Ellen, Robert and Karen, nine grandchildren and one great granddaughter. We still live in Leamington.

*Reprinted from the November 2013 Historian, the newsletter of the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association.*

# New Books

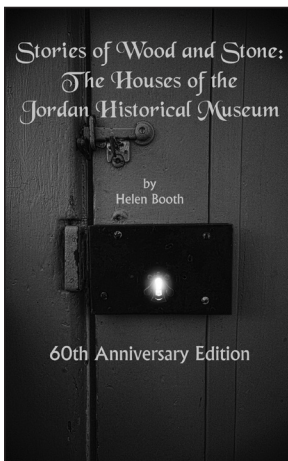


## ***Cool Moves: A Corporate History of Erb Transport and the Erb Group of Companies..***

Ulrich Frisse.

Transatlantic Publishing, 2012.

This hardcover book traces the history of Erb Transport from Vernon Erb's childhood to today when it is a company with more than 1,300 employees and the market leader in temperature-controlled, time-sensitive food transportation. Erb began with one dump truck in 1959. Today the company has a network of 10 terminals and 3 sub-terminals across Canada and the U.S. It is a company that still holds the founder's values in spite of its growth and the need to adjust in the ever-changing world of refrigerated trucking. The book is available at Erb Transport in Baden.



## ***Stories of Wood and Stone: The Houses of the Jordan Historical Museum.***

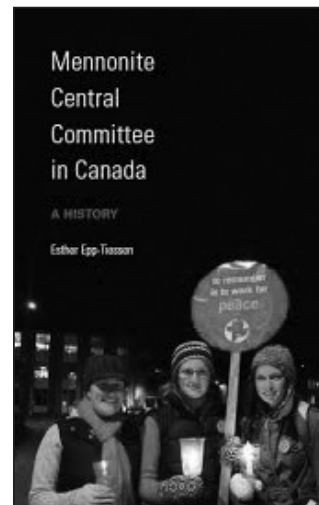
Helen Booth.

Jordan Historical Museum,  
Jordan, Ont., 2013, 100 pages.

The Jordan Historical Museum and the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society Twenty Chapter celebrated their 60th anniversaries in 2013. To honour these anniversaries a book has been published entitled, Stories of Wood and Stone: The Houses of the Jordan Historical Museum.

It details the history of the 1815

Mennonite farmhouse that belonged to the Fry family and the stone schoolhouse built in 1859. It also includes the story of the museum and something about the Mennonite people and their faith. It is available at the Jordan Historical Museum for \$12 or can be ordered at [museum@lincoln.ca](mailto:museum@lincoln.ca) for an additional \$5 S&H fee.

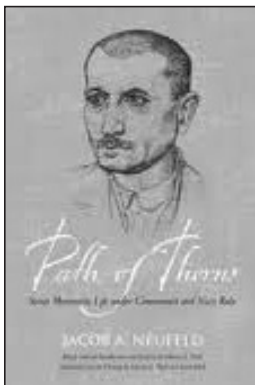


## ***Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History.***

Esther Epp-Tiessen.

Canadian Mennonite  
University Press, 2013,  
328 pages.

Esther Epp-Tiessen not only tells the story of the many accomplishments of MCC Canada in the last 50 years, she also analysis how and why the organization has changed over the years. She identifies many of the criticisms and challenges that have made MCC Canada's on-going work seem like something of a miracle.



## ***Path of Thorns: Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule.***

Jacob A. Neufeld,

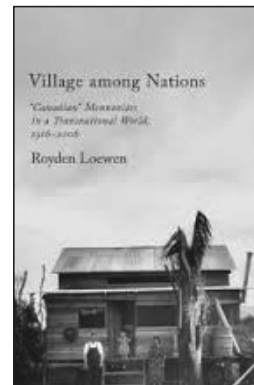
edited by Harvey L. Dyck,

translated by Harvey L. Dyck and  
Sarah Dyck.

University of Toronto Press, 2014,  
445 pages.

Jacob Neufeld wrote his memoirs in German before his death in 1960, describing the horrifying experiences of Mennonites living in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and

1940s. Neufeld and his family fled from present-day Ukraine during the war and eventually were able to immigrate to Canada. The book includes a significant introduction by Harvey Dyck who edited and helped translate this English version of Neufeld's memoirs.



## ***Village Among Nations: "Canadian" Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006.***

Royden Loewen,

University of Toronto Press, 2014,  
301 pages.

This book begins with the migration of Low German-speaking Mennonites from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s. It goes on to describe how these traditionalist Mennonites continued to move, some back to Canada, including to Ontario, others on to several other

Latin American countries. Loewen says these Low German Mennonites see themselves as resident aliens in whatever country they find themselves, but keep a sense of "village" through a strong sense of family and by reading letters in *Die Mennonitische Post*.



# Book Review

## New Book Gives Insight Into Mennonite Estate Life in Ukraine

Review by Barb Draper

*A Mennonite Estate Family in Southern Ukraine*

Nicholas J. Fehderau, translated by Margaret Harder

and Elenore Fehderau Fast, edited by Anne Konrad.

Pandora Press, 2013, 340 pages..

When I first read the article, “Nicholas Fehderau in Canada: My First Impressions and Experiences in my Adopted Land,” published in *Ontario Mennonite History*, Oct., 1999, I was puzzled by Fehderau’s attitude. He description of his 1924 arrival in Waterloo as a Mennonite refugee is somewhat disparaging of Swiss Mennonites and he portrays his host in a very unflattering light. Although he was thankful for the assistance from the Mennonites in Waterloo, he found them uneducated, unsophisticated and thought they spoke a terrible type of German.

But reading *A Mennonite Estate Family in Southern Ukraine* was very helpful to understand Nicholas Fehderau’s impressions of Waterloo County. Although he had suffered through the Russian Revolution and the subsequent civil war, he was from a very wealthy and prosperous family and he probably couldn’t help comparing the Waterloo Mennonites to the life his family had once enjoyed. Although Mennonites in both places were farmers, his childhood experiences and his family’s values were significantly different from those of his host family in Waterloo.

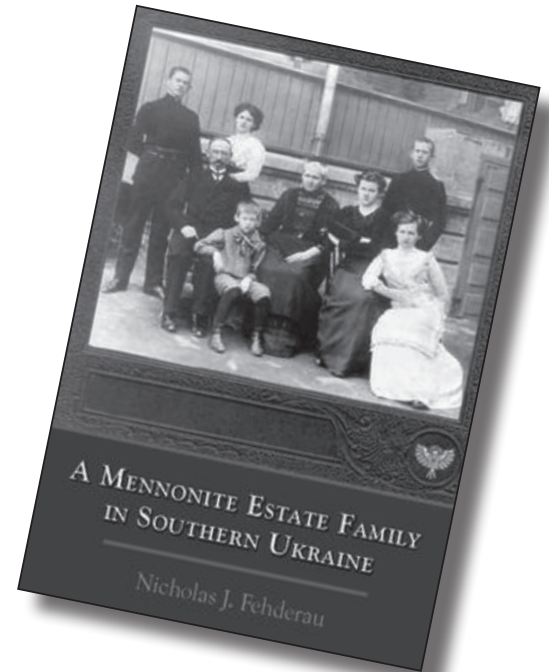
Nicholas Fehderau was born in 1904 and arrived in Waterloo at the age of 20 years. Between the years of 1953 and 1970 he wrote his memoirs in German, calling his manuscript *Aus der Höhe in den Tiefen* (From the Heights into the Depths). Several years after his death in 1989, his daughter, Elenore Fast arranged to have it translated into English. John B. Toews, a former professor of history at Regent Col-

lege and the University of Calgary encouraged the family to have it published as there are very few accounts of daily life on a Mennonite estate before the Revolution. Most Mennonites in Russia lived in colonies; only about three percent of them lived on large private farms or estates that were outside the colonies.

Writing many years after he came to Canada, Fehderau has an amazing memory for details about his early life when the family had one house in Halbstadt, part of the Molotschna settlement, and also owned a large estate with an impressive residence where they employed many servants and farm labourers. Later in the book he describes the challenges that came with the loss of their estate in 1916 and the suffering that resulted from the aftermath of the revolution and civil war with much violence against estate owners. They also struggled due to a typhus epidemic and famine.

Throughout the book, Fehderau describes his growing up years as the best time of his life. As the youngest in a well-to-do family he enjoyed life and the demands on him were not onerous. He was very proud of his family’s accomplishments and what they were able to acquire, such as a touring car. No wonder he found the refugee experience humiliating.

This book is interesting and easy to read. It has 20 pages of black and white photographs at the back, most of them taken in the glory days before 1914.



Fehderau expresses himself simply and honestly; he does not hide his emotions and reactions and he doesn’t gloss over difficult situations. For example he describes the Mennonite self-defence units in detail, and says, “many of our young men eagerly took part in the training, and I noticed no qualms of conscience because of this. . . Clearly non-resistance was a superficial principle among us, and blinded by German militarism we parked our principles” (p 212).

The book is well worth reading for anyone interested in how Mennonite estate families lived in the days of wealth and prosperity 100 years ago.

# Hymn Book Collector Looking for 1841 or 1849 Edition

By Barb Draper

Orvie Bearinger, a retired Old Order Mennonite farmer, has been collecting old copies of the hymnbook used by horse-and-buggy Mennonites in Ontario. He has 28 copies of *Die Gemeinschaftliche Lieder-Sammlung* (usually known simply as *Lieder-Sammlung*), many of them from the 19th century. He is looking for copies of the 1841 and 1849 editions to complete his collection. He says he began collecting these old books about 25 years ago, "just for the fun of collecting."

It is believed that the hymns in the *Lieder-Sammlung* were put together by Bishop Benjamin Eby so that the Mennonites of the Waterloo area would have a common hymnbook. It was first printed in 1836 by H. W. Peterson, the first printer in the town of Berlin. It was a small book with just over 200 hymns borrowed primarily from the Lancaster Conference hymnbook of 1804 and the Franconia Conference hymnbook of 1803. Some of the hymns from the Lancaster Conference book were from the old *Ausbund*, used by Anabaptists in Europe, but most of them were newer German hymns borrowed from the Lutheran and Reformed traditions.

Bearinger's most recent acquisition is the second edition of 1838, also printed by H. W. Peterson. He found this small hardcover book with a clasp at the estate sale of a widow of an Old Order Mennonite Deacon. His copy of the 1836 edition came from a Steckle family who brought it with them when they moved to the Elmira area from Stanley Township in Huron County.

Since the 1857 edition, printed by Baedeker & Steubing of Berlin, Ont., the number of hymns of the *Lieder-Sammlung* has remained constant and the lay-out hasn't changed. There are 222 hymns, arranged by topic. The songs are words only, but each song has a tune name and metre number, telling the song leader which tune is appropriate to use. The numbers correspond to songs found in the *Philharmonia*, a collection of tunes compiled by Martin D. Wenger in 1875.

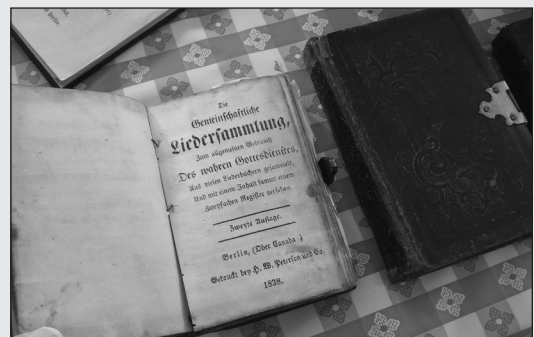
The *Lieder-Sammlung* was subsequently published in 1883, 1892 and 1908 by Baedeker & Steubing. Bearinger's copy of 1918 has no publisher listed, but the 1937 and 1950 editions are published by Mennonite Publishing House of Scottdale, Pennsylvania. His most recent copies were printed by Economy Printing Concepts of Berne, Indiana in 1961 and 1970. There have been subsequent printings, most recently in 2013, but Bearinger has not yet begun to collect them.

Today the *Lieder-Sammlung* is used by Old Order groups throughout Ontario and by horse-and-buggy Mennonites in Indiana. It is no longer used by the Markham-Waterloo group. When more books are needed for a new meetinghouse, the deacons of the various congregations work together to get some printed. The hymnbooks are kept in the meetinghouses in slots on the backs of the benches and are used for Sunday or holiday worship. They are also used for funerals and weddings. Children are taught to read the German Gothic letters at school because the words can be a challenge to read for those only used to Latin letters. Families often give their children their own copies of the hymnbook at about age 14 or 15.

As well as hymnbooks, Bearinger also has a collection of the *Kalendar*, the listing of meetinghouses, ministers and where services will be held for each year. He has a few from the days before the Old Order split, but most are from the 20th century. He is interested in completing his hymnbook collection and would be interested to hear from anyone who has an 1841 or 1849 edition for sale or to trade for another edition. His contact information is: Orvie Bearinger, RR. 1 Wallenstein, ON, N0B 2S0, 519-698-2106.



The title page of the original printing of the *Lieder-Sammlung*.



This 1838 printing is Orvie Bearinger's most recent acquisition.

# Amish Settlements in Ontario

Compiled by David Luthy and Joseph Donnermeyer

Reprinted from *Family Life*, January, 2014.

A directory of Amish settlements across North America was printed in the January, 2014 issue of Family Life.

It was updated to October 31, 2013. This information about Ontario is taken from that list.

It is reprinted with permission from Pathway Publishers, Aylmer, Ont.

Total Amish Settlements and Church Districts  
by State/Province (Oct. 31, 2013)

SETTLEMENT LOCATION	YEAR FOUNDED	# OF DISTRICTS
Milverton/Millbank (Perth & Waterloo Counties)	1824	9
Aylmer (Elgin County)	1953	3
Norwich (Oxford County)	1954	4
Chesley (Grey County) "Swartzentruber"	1954	3
Lakeside/St. Mary's (Oxford County)	1958	1
Mossley (Middlesex County)	1962	2
Lucknow (Bruce & Huron Counties)	1973	5
Chesley (Bruce & Grey Counties)	1979	1
Kincardine/Tiverton (Bruce County)	1995	2
Clifford/Harriston (Perth & Wellington)	1998	1
Cameron/Lindsay (Victoria County)	1998	1
Powassan (Parry Sound District)	2001	1
Stirling/Belleveille (Hastings County)	2005	1
Iron Bridge (Algoma County)	2008	1
Englehart/New Liskeard (Timiskaming District)	2009	1
Earlton (Timiskaming District)	2013	1

STATE	# OF SETTLEMENTS	# OF DISTRICTS
Arkansas	2	2
Colorado	4	5
Delaware	1	10
Florida	1	1
Idaho	1	1
Illinois	18	50
Indiana	23	336
Iowa	22	57
Kansas	7	13
Kentucky	36	78
Maine	5	5
Maryland	3	11
Michigan	39	92
Minnesota	16	29
Mississippi	1	1
Missouri	38	86
Montana	4	5
Nebraska	4	4
New York	50	115
North Carolina	1	1
Ohio	54	475
Oklahoma	4	7
Ontario	16	37
Pennsylvania	55	430
South Dakota	1	1
Tennessee	7	16
Texas	1	1
Virginia	6	8
West Virginia	3	3
Wisconsin	49	131
Wyoming	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>2,012</b>



# J. Winfield Fretz Publication Fund in Ontario Mennonite Studies

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

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

For more information, see

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

Secretary

Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario

Conrad Grebel University College

Waterloo, ON N2L 3G6

[mhso@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:mhso@uwaterloo.ca)

## 2014 Schürch Family Reunion

The 2014 Schürch (Shirk, Sherk, Sherrick) Family Association Reunion will be held on August 1 & 2 at Millersville University. The Reunion provides many opportunities to have fun and learn such as:

- Participating in tours and other group activities
- Auction including an 19th century sewing machine made by inventor Joseph Shirk
- Learning about Schürch ancestors and present-day Schürchs

- Visiting Schürch cousins and meeting new ones
- And much more including activities for children

Details of the Reunion including daily agendas and schedules, activity descriptions, fees, meals, lodging and registration forms are available on the Schürch Family Association website (<http://www.schurchfamilyassociation.net>) or from Sue Shirk ([suesbug@msn.com](mailto:suesbug@msn.com), 717-394-2947).

## Conrad Grebel University College's GRAND OPENING



### Celebrate with us on Sunday, June 22, 2014 at 2:00PM

Conrad Grebel University College is pleased to invite you to the Grand Opening of our new building! The Grebel community's support of the Next Chapter Campaign has resulted in a beautiful 4-storey building to house the College's growing academic programs, music department, the Mennonite Archives of Ontario and Milton Good Library, and an innovative space for the birth of the MSCU Centre for Peace Advancement. Celebrate with us on Sunday, June 22, 2014 at 2:00PM for guided tours, a dedication program at 3:00PM, and refreshments to follow.



**The Next Chapter**  
C a m p a i g n  
From our Past Will Come the Future

[grebel.ca/building](http://grebel.ca/building)

Conrad Grebel University College  
**GREBEL 50**  
Inspiring Mind and Spirit since 1963