



# WennoGESpräch

Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario

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## Mennonite Central Committee: Early days at the Kitchener, Ontario office

by Dorothy M. Sauder

Mennonites in the United States initially organized Mennonite Central Committee in 1920 in response to the emergency needs among Mennonites in Russia due to the Revolution, the subsequent famine, and the eventual resettling of many of these Mennonites in North America.

Later, MCC carried on limited relief operations in Spain following the Spanish Civil War, as well as in southern France. However, the catastrophic conditions in Europe following the Second World War launched MCC into high gear in a program of relief and services which has continued and diversified to the present. As early as the fall of 1939, commissioners were sent to battle-scarred areas of Europe like Poland to assess the needs, and a program of some magnitude was set in motion. MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania, coordinated the relief efforts of all the agencies and committees of the Mennonite churches. From 1940 on, hundreds of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ people made themselves available to bring help to war-sufferers in the European arena, first in England and then on the continent.

Canadian Mennonites carried on relief work through provincial relief committees. "Das Westliche Hilfswerk" covered the western provinces. In Ontario, the Non-Resistant Relief Organization was actively engaged in foreign relief efforts. Collections of clothing were gathered and packed at First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, and shipped to their destinations through Akron arrangements. M. C. and Maryann Cressman led in this effort.

In June, 1944, MCC Akron encouraged opening a center in Kitchener. With the help of Bishop C.F. Derstine, MCC located a large old house at 223 King Street East, (the location of the present Canada Life Square between Kitchener Dairies and the Pinto Shop) that was deemed suitable for the office and the staff that would be housed there. The Clothing Depot, an integral part of MCC's operation, was located on the second floor of the Kitchener Dairies building. Clara Snider (Nafziger)\* served as first supervisor of the Clothing Depot.



*MCC headquarters at 223 King Street East, Kitchener in 1944*

The MCC House was owned by Dr. J. Hett, a cancer specialist and a spiritualist, and the building was shared with him. A separate entrance led into the doctor's office. One room on the second floor served as his bedroom and another room was reserved for seances.

The MCC office was located in the large front room leading from a spacious hall. Living quarters for the staff occupied the rear rooms with bedrooms on the second floor. MCC expected staff members to "live in" as part of their remuneration.

On the recommendation of Rev. H.H. Janzen, Cornelius Rempel was invited to serve as the first MCC director in Canada. A young man in the early years of a career with Waterloo Trust, Corny and his wife Marguerite nevertheless took up the challenge and moved into the large old house. They provided a "home away from home" for the many young people who lived there for longer or shorter periods.

The Kitchener office, for all practical purposes, was an extension of MCC Akron. By means of carbon copies of all correspondence, Akron kept tuned in to the pulse of the operation in Kitchener. All Kitchener office personnel were approved by Akron. Applications

from potential workers were handled by Akron. Akron made arrangements for material aid shipments. The Kitchener office sent a monthly financial report to Akron. When funds accumulated, Akron instructed Kitchener office to transfer monies to foreign programs. This was done through the Foreign Exchange Control Office which monitored Canadian remittances to foreign countries.

The office operation of the '40's bore no resemblance to the streamlined operations of today! Manual typewriters, a hand-operated adding machine and a manual Gestetner were the technical aids. Dictation was taken by long- or shorthand. Multiple copies of reports, etc. were typed on onion skin with layers of fine carbon paper. Mail was carried to the post office by the armful.

At first, MCC had no car. When someone arrived from the Canadian west he was met by foot at the Canadian National Railway station. People arriving from points in the United States landed at the Canadian Pacific Railway station in Galt (now Cambridge) where they were met and brought to Kitchener by trolley and street car. Urgent trips requiring motor transport were kindly facilitated by sympathetic car owners. (con't. pg. 2)

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*MCC meat cans being loaded by volunteers*

The location of the Clothing Depot was less than ideal due to the exceptionally long staircase fitted to the outside of the building up which every shipment of clothing had to be "dragged" for processing and brought down again for shipping. Sizeable contributions of clothing came from many sources, near and far, for sorting, sizing and packing. Tons of material aid left this depot for Europe during the '40's and early '50's. The following Ontario people served in the Clothing Depot: Nelda Wagler (Cressman), Olive Brubacher, Melvin Shantz, Cornelius Barg, Elva Snider (Nafziger) and Nora Brubacher.

Shipments were made several times a year. Lists were typed of all the items in each bale or box. These were sent to Akron where shipping arrangements were made. The Kitchener office was required to gain permission from Ottawa for the goods to cross the border and this sometimes called for a trip to Ottawa on Corny Rempel's part.

A certain amount of excitement always accompanied "shipping night". Syndey Shantz, Irvin Cressman (Stirling Avenue congregation), and Charles Kramer organized the shipping, and called for crews from local churches. These crews loaded the bales onto trucks for transport to the train station where a railway car was standing by. Careful checking was necessary at each step to make sure that the Bills of Lading corresponded with the packing lists.

MCC also undertook a meat canning program. Beef, donated by local Mennonites, was processed and canned for overseas shipment. The MCC Food Depot was located in the basement of a building off Scott Street, behind the old Kitchener market.

The Kitchener office handled the paper work for shipments of material aid from the western Canada relief committees. As well, relief funds from all of the Canadian Mennonite constituent groups were channelled through this office. Reaction to the destitution

of the war-sufferers reflected a heart-felt desire to help and giving was generous, sometimes sacrificial. One couple in B.C. sold their new car, bought an older one and gave the difference in cash to MCC.

In keeping with MCC's mandate to promote MCC in Canada, they sent a monthly *MCC Newsletter* and a *Women's Activity Letter* to churches across Canada. Corny Rempel also responded to many requests from churches and other organization to present MCC's program. In these ways the visibility of the relief program was strengthened.

All volunteers for overseas assignments applied to Akron. Canadians who were appointed were processed by the Kitchener office: documents, medical requirements, travel arrangements. Each Canadian appointee to the foreign field travelled via Kitchener for processing and via Akron for orientation.



*Dorothy Swartzentruber and Kathy Penner with piles of mail.*

Arlene Sitler (Woods) was the first secretary in the Kitchener office. She left in May, 1945, for England and was succeeded by Emma Loewen from Manitoba. When Emma left for Germany in December of 1945, Dorothy Swartzentruber (Sauder) took her place as secretary-bookkeeper, having begun her MCC service in the Clothing Depot in the fall of 1944. Other Canadian secretaries during the early years were Doreen Bell (Eckstein), Eileen Jantzi (Kennel) and Alice Snyder. Eileen followed Dorothy when the latter went to Europe in 1949 and Alice was secretary when the move to Kent Avenue was made.

In 1946, MCC in Akron recruited Katherine Penner (Hostetler) to handle the German correspondence and the CARE package work. By this time, many war victims had been recipients of the popular CARE parcels and this prompted requests for more aid. Thousands of Canadians (and Americans) who had relatives in the war-torn countries of Europe found the CARE program particularly useful. Persons wishing to remit a CARE parcel simply sent the required \$10.00, along with the address of the recipient, to the Kitchener office where the request, along with the funds, was passed on in long lists to the New York CARE office from where the parcels were handled by their overseas office. Many persons simply donated funds for CARE parcels which were remitted to New York for general distribution. Kathy began an overseas assignment in 1955.

Through MCC's general distribution of material aid in Europe, many people became acquainted with the MCC symbol and the Akron address with the result that many requests for aid followed. This led to another full-time position in the Kitchener office. Cornelia Lehn came from B.C. in 1947 to deal with these "Bittbriefe". Hundreds of request letters had accumulated in Akron so a Canadian, fluent in the German language, was recruited to work through these letters, along with those received in the Kitchener office. The letters were read and sorted. Addresses were listed and sent to the respective zones of Germany where the MCC persons in charge presumably investigated and, if necessary, supplied help from the MCC stocks already in Germany. In 1948 Cornelia went to Germany.

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*Cornelius J. and Marguerite Rempel*

In general, this was a dull task but occasionally hilarity took over when the writer thought he had better write in English so that his plea would be more readily understood. This sometimes called for imagination! A pastor whose scattered parish required considerable travel, wrote: "Before the war I a chariot had. Now after the war I still a chariot have but no circles of gum. Would you please send me circles of gum."

During those years, MCC enjoyed the steadfast support of the constituent churches. Representatives of the various supporting groups included: Jacob R. Bender, Amish Mennonite; John Wichert, United Mennonite; Jesse B. Martin, Mennonite Church; Ernie J. Swalm, Brethren in Christ, Thomas Reesor, Markham Mennonite, and Elven Shantz representing Stirling Avenue. These men were of great help in facilitating contacts with the various Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups.

The Kitchener office also had good rapport with the Canadian government. It was vital to foster such goodwill on behalf of the various programs for which government approval was required.

In 1947, Corny Rempel was sent on a four-month commission to South America during which time J. Harold Sherk managed the office. Wilson Hunsberger filled the gap in 1949 when Corny was on an assignment in Europe for four months.

In July, 1949, the MCC headquarters was moved to 10 Union Street East in Waterloo. By this time the Rempels had a family and the Waterloo home allowed for the Rempels and the staff to live separately.

Corny left MCC in 1951 and was succeeded by Julius Toews, a retired Manitoba schoolteacher. In 1953, Julius was succeeded by his son, Harvey Taves, who directed the MCC program until his death in 1965. Dan Zehr and Doug Snyder served as directors until 1975 when Ray Schlegel took office. Elven Shantz and Edward Snyder also filled brief directorships during the early years.

In the early 1950's, Mennonites began migrating to North America. The Kitchener

office facilitated the travel of those coming to Canada by meeting them at the Malton airport, helping them through customs and arranging transportation to their final destination, usually western Canada. This meant taking them and their luggage to either Union Station or the bus terminal in Toronto.

In the mid '50's, MCC was conducting summer V.S. units in Manitoba and Ontario. Harvey engaged Hedy Sawadsky to assist in recruiting personnel and directing the programs.

Another significant project initiated by MCC in the '50's was the establishment of Ailsa Craig Boys Farm at Ailsa Craig, Ontario.

In 1961 it was decided to sell the Union Street house. There was a smaller staff by this time and some of the staff lived out. The Taves family purchased a home of their own. The revenue from the sale was to help finance the

construction of a new headquarters office building. The new building would also accommodate the Clothing Centre which had earlier vacated the Kitchener Dairies location in favor of a large, two-floor building at the rear of the Golden Rule Bookstore, then located at 187 King Street East in Kitchener. The MCC office was temporarily located on the second floor of the Bookstore. The move to the Kent Street address was made in 1964. Since that time the Kitchener office functions independently of MCC Akron, and relates through MCC Canada in regard to international program.

(My thanks to Marg & Cory Rempel for their helpful reminiscences).

— Dorothy M. Sauder

\*throughout this article the name in parentheses is the married name of women who worked with MCC.



*The MCC office at 10 Union St. E., Waterloo*

#### Early Ontario Foreign Relief Workers\*

Andrew and Reta Bean, 1947, France and Italy  
 Wesley Brubacher, 1946, Netherlands  
 John Coffman, 1940, England  
 Mabel Cressman, 1944, England and Netherlands  
 John L. Fretz, 1945, France  
 Vera M. Good, 1946, India  
 Erma Grove, 1949, Ethiopia  
 Wilson Hunsberger, 1946, Belgium and Poland  
 Edna Hunsberger, 1942, England  
 Henry H. Janzen, 1947, Germany  
 Margaret Janzen, 1946, Italy and Germany  
 Siegfried and Margaret Janzen, Netherlands and Germany, 1946  
 Lucinda Martin, 1946, England and France

Marion Nafziger, 1946 (deceased), India  
 Mr. and Mrs. David Schwartzentruber, 1948, Poland  
 Marjorie Shantz, 1945, Puerto Rico  
 J. Harold Sherk, 1944, India  
 Arlene Sittler, 1945, England and Switzerland  
 Elaine Snider, 1946, India and Sumatra  
 Alice Snyder, 1948, Germany  
 Lucinda Snyder, 1949, Netherlands and Germany  
 Dorothy Swartzentruber, 1949, Germany  
 Mr. and Mrs. Henry Thielman, 1949, Japan  
 Helen Witmer, 1949, Ethiopia

\*Taken from *In the Name of Christ*, 1952. Date indicates when service was begun.

# Harvey W. Taves: "One of Christ's Men"

by Marlene Epp



Harvey W. Taves

The story of the beginnings of Mennonite Central Committee Canada is not about the efforts of one individual with a vision for a cooperative and unified Canadian relief organization. The new organization would likely not have come about without the work of individuals at all the different geographical and constituency levels.

One of the persons who bridged the gap between the old structures and the new was Harvey W. Taves of Waterloo. Taves, who died less than a year after the formation of MCC Canada, was the last director of the Canadian headquarters of MCC in Kitchener, Ontario. When that office ceased to exist in 1964, he became the first director of MCC Ontario which was formed along with other provincial branches after the creation of the national agency headquarters in Winnipeg.

Taves' work with MCC was the primary, though not the only, vehicles for his efforts in furthering the peace mission of the Mennonites. Taves was an innovator, a man of ideas, and a creator of projects. For him, promoting peace was not something exclusive to wartime. It meant service to humanity at all times.

Taves grew up in Steinbach and Altona, Manitoba and was part of the group of Mennonites called "Kanadier" — those who had migrated to Canada in the 1870s. Between his graduation from high school and enrollment in college, Taves taught school in several native communities in northern Manitoba and also in the Mennonite community of Halbstadt. He attended school at Grace Bible Institute in Nebraska and also Goshen College, where he received a degree in history.

In 1951 Taves married Iva Sherk of Kitchener, who he had met while participating in a Goshen College peace team under the direction of her father, J. Harold Sherk. While Iva completed her resident internship in

medicine, Taves returned to Goshen, where he enrolled in seminary. It was during his second term in 1953 that Taves was invited by Orié Miller, then executive secretary of Mennonite Central Committee, to manage MCC's office in Kitchener.

The Canadian office had been established in 1944 as a way of coordinating Canadian relief efforts during World War II with the MCC operations in Akron, Pennsylvania.

The introduction of an MCC office to Canada, and the development of Canadian programs out of that office was not an entirely smooth endeavor. It fell on the shoulders of Taves, and his predecessors, to make an MCC presence acceptable to the Canadian constituency. This was no small feat when organizations such as the Non-Resistant Relief Organization in the east and Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and Mennonite Central Relief Committee in the west had for years been carrying out functions of relief and service. Taves was inevitably caught between his responsibility to Akron and a host of organizational interests particularly in western Canada.

More receptive to the office were the Mennonites of southern Manitoba, represented in the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee. The former secretary of this organization was Julius G. Toews from Steinbach, who also happened to be the father of Harvey. Toews became manager of the MCC office for a year after the departure of C.J. Rempel in 1951.

In his work as director of the first Canadian office of MCC, Taves had to be a path-breaker in ironing out administrative wrinkles which could occur with the head office in Akron, Pennsylvania. More than once he expressed concern to Akron that his work was being checked up on, and questioned the lack of trust from south of the border. Harvey felt strongly that the Canadian MCC office was a distinct and responsible entity and on at least one occasion, chastised the Akron office for its tendency to refer to the "Canadian Branch" rather than the "Canadian Headquarters" of MCC.

Despite this insistence that his office receive its just recognition, Taves did not carry Canadian nationalism on his agenda as did some of his colleagues. Though he supported the amalgamation of existing committees into a unified body, he did not seem to view the establishment of an MCC Canada as a gesture of Canadian nationalism so much as a triumph of inter-Mennonite cooperation. Taves was one of a rare breed of "ecumenical" Mennonites, one whose upbringing amongst the Kanadier, work with post-World War II immigrants from Russia, and involvement with the Swiss Mennonites in Ontario, helped him see beyond parochial boundaries.

His biggest fear was that a separate administrative structure in Canada would only duplicate what was already being done through MCC at Akron and Kitchener. Despite his own occasional difficulties in relating to the Akron office, Taves had developed a solid

working relationship with MCC headquarters. And so, when agitation for a national Canadian body similar to MCC surfaced, Taves was concerned that the cooperation across borders which he and others had worked so hard at defining would be jeopardized.

Despite some ambivalence, Taves worked together with those who sought the creation of a national relief organization, at one and the same time keeping Akron informed of developments north of the border, as well as ensuring that the groundwork of MCC activity in the Ontario constituency did not become lost in the process.

It was Taves' personal opinion that the new relief and service entity should be re-organized from the bottom up, rather than be formed out of existing committees. He suggested already in 1958 the creation of a "Mennonite Central Committee of Canada" with representation across the country.

Taves had hoped that the Canadian Mennonite Council (forerunner to MCC Canada), created in April 1963, would locate its headquarters in Kitchener. He felt that since the Swiss Mennonites had no representation in the west, they would have difficulty channeling their communication to MCC via western Canada. The Russian Mennonites, on the other hand, with representation across the country, would feel comfortable with an office in the east. The fact that new facilities for the MCC office in Kitchener had gone up that year added further weight to this opinion.

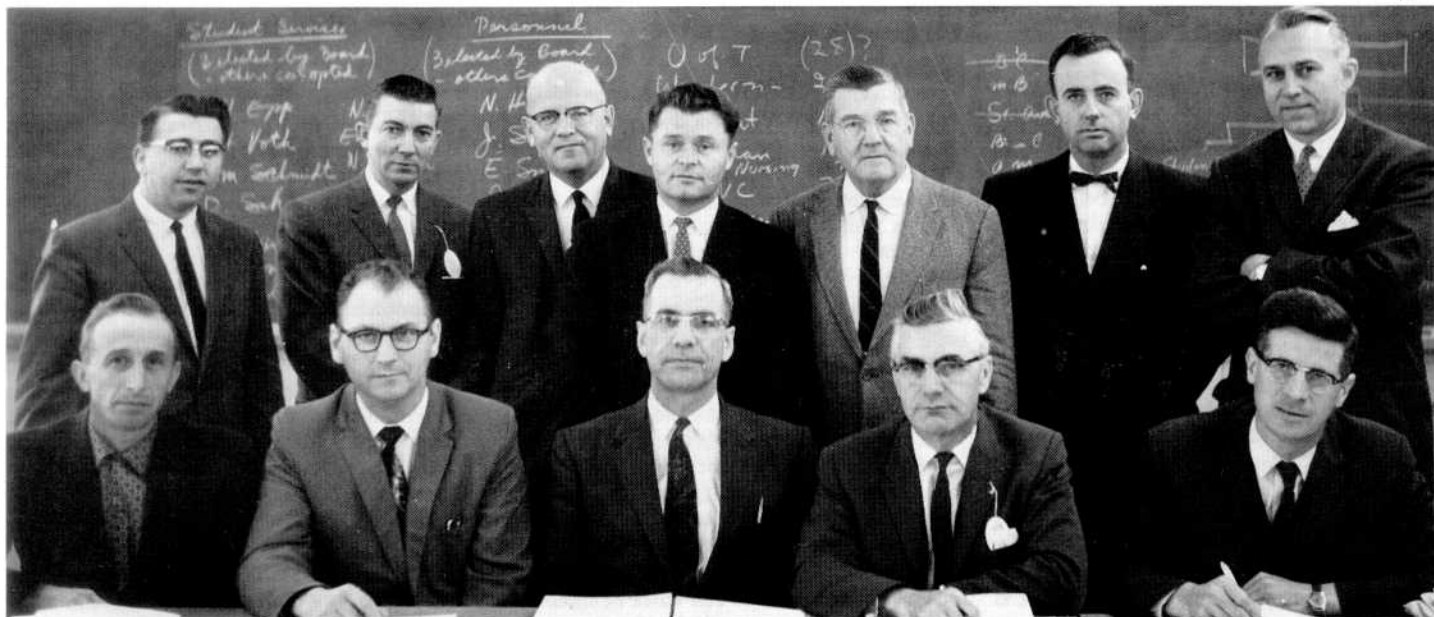
From Taves' perspective, it shouldn't matter where the head office was located, so long as strong provincial structures were developed across the country. When the decision was made to establish the headquarters in Winnipeg, Taves was deeply disappointed.

Once MCC Canada became a reality early in 1964, Taves was caught in the middle of making sense of the plethora of service organizations in Ontario. There was understandably some fear that the new national body in Winnipeg would attempt to assume control of programs which had been initiatives of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches together with the MCC office in Kitchener. The Ontario situation, with its long history of inter-Mennonite cooperation, required unique sensitivity. On several occasions,



Harvey Taves & Alice Snyder

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Taves offered to resign his position, concerned that his office was impeding negotiations.

By November, 1963 an MCC (Ontario) office had been created, with Taves as executive director, housed in the new building at 50 Kent Avenue. Unfortunately, Taves did not live to see the new national and provincial MCC structures develop and mature.

About his work with MCC, Taves once commented that it "is the most exciting part of the Mennonite witness." Taves' idea of mission and sharing the gospel was inseparable from material aid and sharing one's wealth with the world's poor. His promotion of MCC was integral with his idea of following Christ and making peace.

Certainly Taves put his own mark on MCC's work in Canada by introducing new and innovative programs. Among these were the MCC teaching and nursing sites in Newfoundland, which were the first MCC Voluntary Service programs in Canada, the Ailsa Craig Boys Farm, and Mennonite Disaster Service.

Taves was also part of the team of individuals who were instrumental in the establishment of Conrad Grebel College, another innovative, inter-Mennonite project. In the early stages, Harvey's name was put forth as a possible part-time executive secretary to develop the plan for the college until such a time as a full-time president or administrator would be appointed. In considering the offer, Harvey suggested that the head office of the Conrad Grebel board could be shared with the MCC office, however, this idea did not meet the approval of MCC in Akron and so the position did not materialize.

Taves' involvement in the Conrad Grebel endeavor was evidence of his strong belief in higher education, which he continued to pursue for himself on top of his work for MCC. He boasted of being both a "founding father" of Conrad Grebel College and also its first student, since he enrolled in a course taught by Winfield Fretz in the college's first year of operation.

*The Conrad Grebel Board of Governors on which Harvey Taves was a pivotal member. This photo is from the Boards Oct. 14, 1961 organizational meeting. L-R front: Orland Gingerich, Amish Mennonite; H. H. Dupck, M.B.; Norman High, MC; Milton R. Good, Stirling Ave.; John W. Snyder, MC; Back: Dale Schuman, Amish Mennonite; Doug Millar, Stirling Ave.; Henry H. Voth, M.B.; Hugo Harms, United Mennonite; Earle Snyder, Stirling Ave.; Harvey Taves, MC; John Sawatsky, United Mennonite. Not pictured: Edward Gilmore & Harold Nigh, BIC; Elmer Schwartzentruber, Amish Mennonite; Walter Wiebe, MB; Henry H. Epp, United Mennonite.*

In his final years, Taves was working on a graduate degree in sociology from the University of New York at Buffalo.

Taves died on May 11, 1965 at the age of 39 as a result of heart failure while undergoing treatment for pneumonia. He had suffered severely in his last years from asthma.

After his death the *Canadian Mennonite* editorialized that Taves had brought "enthusiastic, aggressive, and forward-looking leadership" to the Mennonites in Canada and had become "almost indispensable".

J. Winfield Fretz, then president of Conrad Grebel College, observed that Taves was "socially almost fearless when it came to unmasking illogical thinking clothed in pious language." He was known to be forthright in personal conversation and at meetings, not beating around the bush, but seeking the truth as he saw it, occasionally defying the conventions of Mennonite institutions. He also called Taves a philosopher, one who possessed a

"restlessness" and "dissatisfaction with the status quo".

After his death, a plaque was installed at the MCC Ontario headquarters which eulogized Taves: "As one of Christ's men, he devoted his life in the service of the church to the ministry of alleviating human suffering". In his short life, Taves accomplished much as diplomat and activist amongst the Mennonites in Canada.

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MCC (Ontario), Harvey Taves Collection, Conrad Grebel College Archives.

## Book Notes

*Diary from the years 1907-1908-1909-1910-1911-1912* by Gerhard Thiessen (Leamington, Ont.: G. Thiessen family, 1989?), 227 p.

This is a fine addition to the growing number of translated diaries that reflect everyday Mennonite life in the Ukraine. This diary is particularly interesting since it reflects the happier days prior to World War I and the Russian Revolution that followed.

Gerhard Thiessen was a successful farmer who most often wrote short summaries of the day's activities — be it work in the fields,

socializing with neighbors, or church activities. The volume concludes with short articles that trace the Thiessen family's move to Ontario, as well as some maps and photographs of family members.

The book would have been strengthened if explanatory notes of unusual terms and all persons mentioned in the diary had been included. Nonetheless the book is a valuable addition to libraries of persons interested in this era of Russian Mennonite history.

Enquiries about the book should be directed to Peter A. Epp, 57 Danforth Ave., Leamington, Ontario N8H 2P8.

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# Documents Do Tell Stories

by Lorraine Roth

When members of the Steinmann family began thinking seriously about compiling their family history, Walter Steinman and Ervin Bender took the occasion of a family wedding in Goshen, Indiana to drop in at the Archives of the Mennonite Church to photocopy the Steinman papers and documents which H. S. Bender had collected on one of his visits to Ontario several decades ago.

Some of the papers are fragments only, and usually they are in handwritten German gothic script. This is enough of a hurdle that most of us are not able to cross. If we do manage to decipher the letters, the words may still escape us — either because they are dialect or misspelled and not found in the dictionary, or they deal with subjects foreign to our knowledge; so the meaning still remains locked up, defying our comprehension.

When the twenty odd documents (or pieces thereof) arrived at my desk, I attacked them with my German-English dictionaries and reading glass in hand. After an attempted transcription and first translation (some had already been transcribed and/or translated by staff at the Archives) photocopies of everything were sent to my friends, Hermann and Gertrud Guth of Saarbrücken, Germany. When they came back, the Guths had usually been able to suggest translations for the dialect and misspelled words as well as interpretations of life and history in the various areas of Europe. After a while things begin to make sense.

So what did the Steinmann documents tell us?

The only Steinman history we had was the meagre oral tradition that Christian Steinman and Veronica Eier (Oyer) had come to Wilmot with two-year-old Christian Jr. Christian was a minister and a baker and they had come from Bavaria.

Since Swiss Amish or Mennonites did not go to Bavaria until after 1800, and since Christian was born in 1792, where was he born? Millard Osborne, a descendant of Peter Steinman from Ohio who was believed to be a brother of Christian, claimed that Peter was born in Marienthal, Lorraine, France. A fragment of passport says Christian was from "Mergenthal" German Lorraine, thus confirming that Marienthal was the residence of the Steinman family in the early 1790s. A receipt issued to Jacob Steinmann in 1800 at Macheren (a short distance from Marienthal) indicates the Steinmann family was still there. Was Jacob the father of Christian and Peter?

The next document (in chronological order) is dated 1818 and several others follow in 1820. Two receipts for malt are issued at Thalhausen to Jacob Steinmann, resident of Saulochhof. An inventory list dated 1820 gives the residence as Seilhof. The family members listed were Peter Steinman, Jacob Steinman, Christian Steinman, das Madlen (Magdalena) and "Father". Place names given were Kirchdorf and Ampertshausen, a short distance nor-

theast of Munich. Although I cannot locate Saulochhof or Seilhof on a map, these place names begin to get a little closer to a specific location.

A discharge from baker Johann Schofter to Jacob Steinman dated 1822 is the closest we can come to the baker tradition. It must have been Jacob who was the baker rather than Christian.

The bulk of the remaining papers are letters. Several of them were written by Jacob Steinman to his brother Christian. Jacob eventually married Catherine Stoltzfus and settled in Pennsylvania. He probably made several trips to Canada to administer the Stoltzfus properties in Woolwich Township. Christian Stoltzfus had invested in over a thousand acres of land, the last sale of which Jacob was still writing about in 1852. An unsigned letter was probably written by Peter since he names all the other members of the family except himself.

Family connections to Peter Steinman who settled at Tavistock and to John Steckly's wife, Barbara Steinman are also confirmed because of their frequent mention in the letters. It would be another letter which remained in the family that would give us some clues to the Eier (Oyer) family. It was from Peter Holly in Ohio. At least two brothers, Christian and Andreas, and a sister Magdalena married to Huesser or Hieser are mentioned. Christian was in Ohio and the Hiesers in Illinois.

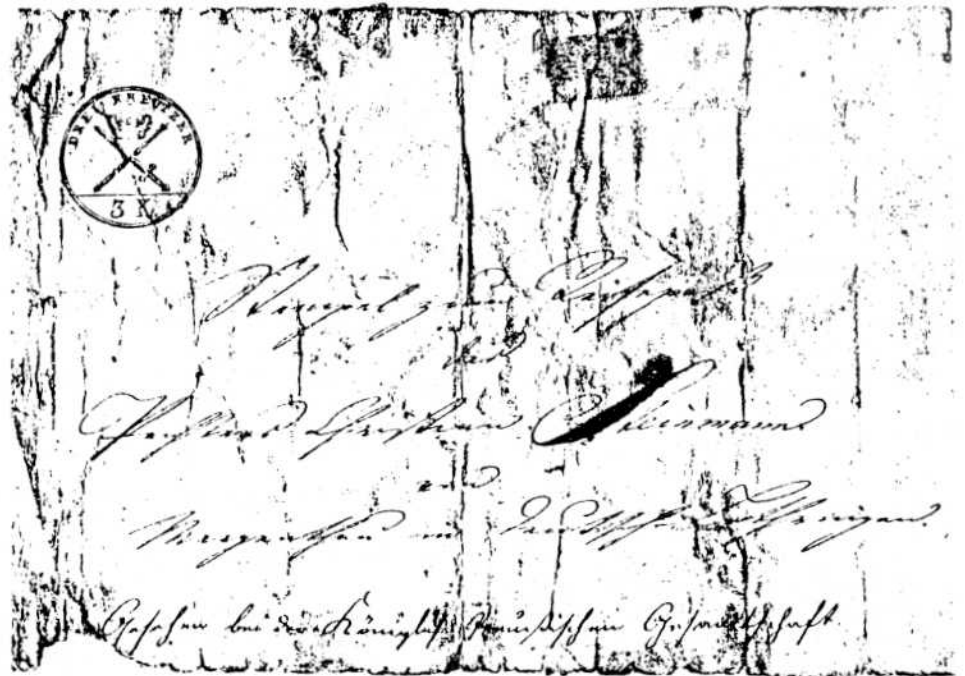
One is also able to learn a number of other things about the Steinman family in addition to family connections. The buying of malt and the amount of brandywine and equipment for making such on the inventory list indicates the Steinman family was in the distilling business as well as farming in Europe. There is no indication that they continued this business in Wilmot, although other Amish families did.

In one of his letters, Jacob says he started off for America along with John Oesch on June 1, 1824 from Neuburg on the Danube. It would be from the ship passenger lists that we would learn that Christian and his wife, two sons, Jacob and Christian, and 75-year-old Jacob Steinman boarded the Ship Nimrod in Amsterdam, arriving in Philadelphia on August 18, 1826. By now, it seems we have ample proof that Christian's father's name was Jacob. On the same ship were the Christian and Peter Nafziger families.

Peter's letter asks for a supply of herbs and the "doctor books". The various papers having to do with medicinal recipes indicate an interest in this subject.

In 1843 Christian Steinman was elected school trustee when the settlers in his area convened a meeting concerning the building of a school. The land on which the Steinmann Mennonite Cemetery is now located was initially reserved for both a burial ground and school site. However, there is no record that

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Fragment of Passport:  
(lettering in circle of stamp)  
three Kreuzer (3 shillings or cents)  
3 K

Stamp of the Passport  
of the  
Farmer Christian Steinmann  
from  
Mergenthou (Marienthal) German Lorraine  
Seen by the Royal Prussian Legation  
(in different handwriting)

## Waterloo Mennonites in 1867: some observations

[This letter was brought to our attention by Reg Good. We thank him for this interesting description — editor]

Berlin, Upper Canada  
March 1st, 1867

To the Editor of the Huron "Signal".

[Re:] The Pennsylvanian settlers of Waterloo Township

Dear Sir,

Being unavoidably called to the East, I have been unable to resume my narrative at an earlier date, which, with your indulgence I now proceed to do:

You will remember I was to spend an evening with Herr Schawkelpferde — who is probably as pure a specimen of the genuine Pennsylvanian as is to be found in Ontario. As I promised something of the Pennsylvanian manners in my next, perhaps an account of Mr. S's. might prove as fair a mode of illumination as could be adopted — on my arrival I found him quietly smoking his pipe. He made no excessive demonstrations of welcome yet by a free and easy method of action made me see I was so. I was obliged to make the circuit of the room and shake hands with all and sundry, viz: Moses, Aaron, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, & c., and turning to the fair portion of the household, with Ruth, Eve, Magdalena, Rachel, Esther, & c.; never before having squeezed hands with so many sacred and historic characters, I felt duly impressed with the awful importance, and when finished felt much relieved. I was shown a chair, rough, strong, clean, and free of paint; taking a survey of the room I observed that the furniture consisted of two strong pine tables, a dozen chairs, old and rough, a large pine cupboard, a sink, and the ever-present wood box, all except the

chairs being painted red, a large cooking stove at one end of the room and a box stove at the other, gave heat to the room, a large eight-day clock ticked in a corner, while the walls were hung with a [sic] coats, caps, tins, basins, & c., & c., in blissful confusion, still all looked clean and tidy.

The female part of the family were busy spinning flax on old fashioned crepie wheels, pur, purring away, as earnestly as if the safety of the universe depended on their diligence. — Speaking of flax culture, Mr. S. said he would not grow it on his own farm, except for his own use, but cottons were now so dear and worthless he found it to pay well; he commonly made a hundred yards of linen cloth each year, which cost only ten cents for weaving, the rest being done by home labour. The cloth is made into shirts, sheets, pants, bags, & c., of a quality not often found in an English farmer's house: in this species of industry the Germans are far ahead of us. Each female in a day spins thread for a yard of cloth, the cloth is well worth 75 cents per yard, by this process female labor is made valuable.

I went out with my host to view his farm; it consisted of 500 acres, nearly 300 of which were cleared and cultivated — if ploughing and dragging can be called such — much of his land is cold and wet. I suggested the benefits of a few drains, he shook his head and said emphatically 'that's humbug, we just grow as good crops in Waterloo as any other place and I don't think there is a thousand rods of drain in the township'. 'You English' he continued, 'have strange notions about ploughing, draining, cropping, & c., you plough so narrow, and deep, you've subsoils and cultivators, but it is all humbug; our ploughs turn from 18 to 24 inches, and we can plow from 3 to 4 acres every day, and we grow fair crops too'. Reasoning was useless, as he belonged to a class that never change. On looking at his plough I observed it turned the furrow to the left, in-

stead of the right hand. 'Aye', said Herr S. 'that is a real, genuine Dutch plow', and he went on to show its advantages over the English plow.

His farm implements were all clumsy, awkward, unhandy and a full century behind the times. Now he is one of the most progressive of his people; he believes in manuring, if one don't put on too much; he tries to improve his stock, though he abhors Agricultural shows, and occasionally changes his seed, though he is skeptical of the benefit. His buildings were devoid of taste, but very comfortable, his barn, a bank one, of course — a Dutchman will have a bank barn though the spot he builds on is as level as Lake Huron — his house seemed to defy all systems of architecture, and looked as if each room had been built separately and tossed together with a pitchfork, then roofed over as they chanced to light, his orchard consisted of apple trees alone, and bore evidence of much neglect.

The fences were fair but irregular, his stock was numerous but inferior, especially the sheep; taken altogether his method of farming was very unobjectionable, though by artful economy and hard-working he realized fair profits.

On re-entering the house, we were taken into a large uninviting room, which served all the purposes of a drawing-room, reception-room, sitting-room and dining room: the furniture was rough and bush-like, not a picture graced the walls, the windows were small and without hangings, a common box stove heated the apartment. On sitting down to supper no blessing was asked aloud, each one bowed his head a few minutes in silence, before eating; the viands consisted of rye coffee, sweetened wit maple sugar, cabbage, apple and other butter, elderberry pie, pork, bread, potatoes and sausage — not one article was there that his own farm did not produce, nor one article of

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## Book Notes

(continued from page 5)

*A mighty flood: the House of Friendship story* by Ferne Burkhardt. (Kitchener, Ont.: House of Friendship, 1989), 219 p. \$10.00 + \$3.00 postage & handling.

Hot off the press, the volume takes an unflinching look at the history of what has become an institution in Waterloo County. The House of Friendship has always had strong Mennonite ties, though it is part of the larger social service network in the Region of Waterloo. Many Mennonite congregations have donated hours of volunteer labor to distribute hampers or to assist in other ways. The growth of the program beyond simple housing for transients reflects the strong leadership experienced by the House for most of its years.

As this issue of *Mennogespräch* goes to press, I have not had opportunity to carefully read the book. It is beautifully illustrated and includes a number of useful appendices. It includes an index, but is not footnoted. It should be read by anyone interested in Waterloo County Mennonite history.

— Sam Steiner

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*A bibliography of Mennonites in Waterloo County and Ontario* by Calvin W. Redekop. 2nd ed. (Waterloo, Ont.: Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1988), 19 p. \$4.50.

This is a wide-ranging bibliography of items on Mennonites in Ontario, with emphasis on Waterloo County. Most of the citations are of monographs or articles, but some unpublished papers are also included. The level of scholarship ranges from undergraduate papers to Ph.D. theses to congregational histories to intricate sociological analysis.

The listing would be enhanced by greater organization and annotations pointing to the most valuable entries, but this reference tool is an essential place to check for researchers working on Ontario Mennonites, if only to see what he or she has missed that might be relevant. Almost all items listed are held in the library at Conrad Gebel College.

— Sam Steiner

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clothing did I observe but such as was home made, and in this stringent system of home production, I believe lies the proverbial "well to do Dutchman's" wealth. He never buys in a store, he grows his living and makes his own clothing. Herr S. assured me that in the course of a year he did not, perhaps, spend ten dollars in the way of shopping.

Examining the library I found it to consist of a Bible, hymnbook and almanac, all seemingly held in equal respect; his almanac is consulted daily, the signs of the zodiac guide him in all his labor, nothing can be undertaken save under a favorable sign. Never did Roman consult the Auguries, or Grecian his famous Delphic Oracle with more faith than do these people the zodiacal signs: all sowing, gardening, reaping, dyeing, & c., are referred to these wonderful signs.

His bible though little read is firmly believed, and the melodies of his hymn book while many a tedious hour away. The evening was passed in talking of farming, horses, cattle, & c., enlivened with copious draughts of cider, and smoking home grown weed. On retiring I found the bed uppermost, and I was of opinion the good hostess had forgotten the covering, but on inspection I found that there were two beds, one above the other, and I crawled in between them, and there ensconced bade defiance to cold and comfort alike. Though warm such beds are as comfortless as sleeping in a hay stack.

Next day being Sunday, I accompanied Herr Schaukelpferd to church, who himself is a minister in the Mennonite body. The manner of choosing preachers, by them, is somewhat singular; supposing one is to be chosen, a meeting is convened in the needy locality, at which each member has the right to propose a candidate. Allow six are proposed, the bishop then places six bibles in a row, one of which contains a card of election, the candidates then step forward and draw each a bible, which are opened publicly, he who draws the card is duly elected. All good Mennonites maintain heaven

selects the proper man, hence their ministers are all heaven appointed, to their holy office.

The church is a long, low, unpretentious building, having two small doors in front, one for each sex. — The interior looked extremely naked, the seats were benches, about fifteen feet long, unpainted, and rising from the pulpit in the form of a gallery, a few had a rest for the back, these were intended for the aged, more had none. Over each bench, suspended from the ceiling ran a narrow board, having pins for the hats to hang on; on the female's side there is none of this, as there is an anteroom, or wardrobe, in which the ladies place their bonnets, shawls, or any extra article of apparel. Each woman young or old wears no bonnet, or shawl in meeting, she covers her head with a white muslin cap, sometimes bordered with a frill; but this is a piece of gaiety much denounced by the more rigid. Round her neck is a plain white handkerchief over her dress; each chooses to her fancy, though all must be free of gaiety.

The pulpit is raised about six inches from the level of the floor, is about twelve feet long, looks like a school desk, and is unpainted, behind it is a rough board nailed to the wall, for the preachers to sit on, overhead are pins to hang their hats on. I have counted as few as six and as many as ten pins, so I drew the inference that ten is the maximum number of divines ever expected to be present on any occasion. All their places of worship look alike, to see one is to see all. The preaching was such as is heard every day from illiterate men, but entirely free from polemics, as all their teachings are. To the outer world it is the most liberal church in christendom, to its own members, perhaps, the most exacting.

It being sacrament day I had the pleasure of witnessing their peculiar rites — before dispensing the Lord's supper the members arranged themselves in couples, in front of each couple was placed a small tub containing water, a piece of soap and a towel, when all set to, and washed each others feet. When finished each saluted his neighbour with a holy kiss, then

all partook of bread and wine, and the service was concluded.

Mr. Schaukelpferd and I then parted, I much delighted and he seemingly happy. With regard to the Mennonite body, I might say they were originally a puritanic sect in Germany, which immigrated about 200 years ago into Pennsylvania, where under the mild rule of the British Government they enjoyed liberty of conscience. A number of them colonized Waterloo about 65 years ago, and be it said to their honor they form the backbone of the township at this day. They are honest, frugal and industrious, most unassuming in manners, they never swear, vote or hold office, they never go to law one with the other, they support their own poor, pay no clergyman, but help all needy. They are simple in life, austere in manner and free from ambition, they despise learning, and are hence ignorant, hate arms, hence unpatriotic, they never examine the world around them, hence they are unprogressive, they love money, and being frugal and industrious, are mostly rich.

Yours, & c., SAUERKRAUT

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#### Documents Do Tell Stories

a school was ever built here. It was probably the school in Baden or the one across from Hostetler's Cemetery that was built at this time.

In 1849 Christian Steinman insured his buildings and grain in the barn with the Provincial, Mutual, and General Insurance Company. According to family tradition, Steinman (an Amish minister at that) was reprimanded for this. It was not until twenty years later that the Amish organized their own Storm & Fire Aid Union.

Perserverance eventually unlocks some of the secrets hidden in these yellow and tattered pages, which at first glance seem to contain only incomprehensible scratches of a pen or pencil. Do not give up!

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

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Memberships:

Student - \$5.00  
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at same address  
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#### Mail to:

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