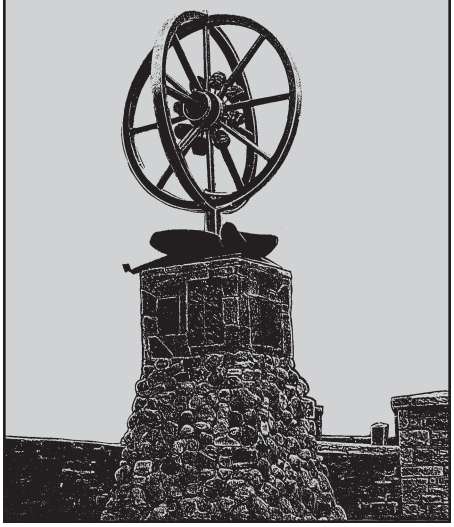
Ontario Mennonite History

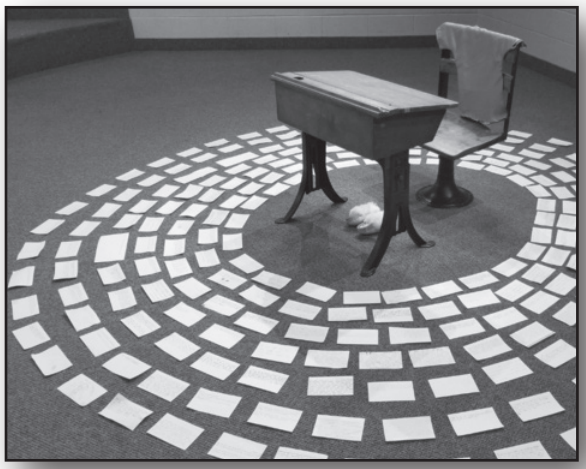
THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ONTARIO

VOLUME XXXX
NUMBER 2
•
OCTOBER 2022
•
ISSN 1192-5515



Indigenous-Mennonite Encounters in Time and Place

From a report by Marlene Epp



The "Sitting With the Truth" exhibit invited participants on a journey around an old desk and chair, taking in stories from survivors of Mennonite-run residential schools in Treaty 9. It was sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee's Indigenous Neighbours Program.

(Conrad Grebel University College photo by Sara Wahl)

An academic conference and community education event was held on the weekend of May 12-15, 2022, at Conrad Grebel University College, to offer stories and analyses of encounters and relationships between Indigenous peoples and Mennonite settlers from point of contact to the present. The purpose of this conference was to advance understanding on the part of Mennonites and other interested participants of their colonial histories, and to advance reconciliation and bring justice to Indigenous-settler relations. The event comprised academic presentations, community storytelling, artistic offerings, and both Indigenous and Mennonite ceremony in a time of listening, conversation and silence.

The four-day event was available in person and virtually with 131 individuals registered to participate in person and 151 for online participation. There was wide diversity in the papers presented with topics from across North America, the former Russian Empire and Latin America.

An Indigenous listening team of Adrian Jacobs and Mim Harder offered reflections at the end of each day that were probing, humorous and insightful. A ceremonial fire was lit throughout the conference and watched over by Indigenous firekeeper Al McDonald.

There were also art and archival exhibits that included materials on Indigenous peoples from the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, photographs and stories of people reflecting on the land, an interactive exhibit about Mennonite-run residential schools and an eye-catching conservative Mennonite buggy decorated by Indigenous artists.

Another part of the conference was a concert featuring premieres of commissioned music compositions on Indigenous-Mennonite themes and a performance by nationally recognized cellist and composer Cris Derksen of Mennonite and Cree ancestry.

Those who planned this conference were pleased with its success and it believe it was a step in the journey toward building peace, justice and reconciliation. It led to new understandings about Mennonite-Indigenous relationships, in particular Mennonite settler complicity in the displacement of Indigenous peoples. Selected papers will be published in a future issue of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*.

The planning committee included: Christy Anderson, Lori Campbell, Kelly Fran Davis, Marlene Epp, Laureen Harder-Gissing, David Neufeld, Reina Neufeldt and Karen Sunabacka.

Thank you to the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario for financial support for this event.

‘Landed Buggy’ Exhibit

By Rebecca Seiling, Indigenous Neighbours Engagement Associate for Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
Reprinted from the MCC Canada website (mcccanada.ca).

The “Landed Buggy” exhibit premiered at the Indigenous-Mennonite Encounters in Time and Place conference as an artistic land acknowledgement.

Why use a buggy? This is an artistic land acknowledgment that reflects a web of connections. It is a piece that is particular to a specific group of people—Swiss Mennonites, my ancestors, who migrated from Pennsylvania to the Waterloo Region in the early 1800s. The buggy evokes images of a quiet farming people devoted to simple living on the land.

For Swiss Mennonites who settled here years ago, we pass on narratives of the land, how we acquired it and ways that we care for it. This installation encourages reflection and questions such as:

- In what ways have our past/present stories between Indigenous and Mennonite people been told?
- Are there ideas that need to shift or be broadened or challenged?
- How can shifting our narrative inform our future together?

An Old Order Mennonite friend identified this style of buggy as a *Schüle kuch*, or a school bus for students. One Indigenous artists described this buggy project as “transportation toward reconciliation”—the buggy, a vehicle for learning.

Before its launch at the Indigenous-Mennonite Encounters conference at Conrad Grebel University College on May 12-15, 2022, this project included conversations with various people—Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Cree, Old Order Mennonites, Markham-Waterloo Mennonites, recent newcomers to Canada and many others.

Back: Where did we come from?

The back of the buggy represents a past before landing in Waterloo Region. The artwork, painted by Jeanette Seiling, displays a Pennsylvania German style of *Fraktur* art and reflects Swiss Mennonite origins and connections to place. The symbolism in *Fraktur* is often related to the land. This design features a *distelfink* (goldfinch bird) who ate thistle seeds in crop fields and was considered by farmers to be good luck. The “trinity tulips” symbolize faith in yourself, faith in others and faith in what you do. The tulip is seen as a spiritual flower, a symbol of our search for God and the promise of paradise.

The yield sign holds teachings too. For early Anabaptists (the root group for Mennonites), *gelassenheit* was a principle of faith, encouraging a yieldedness to God and to the community and a posture of acceptance. This sign also reflects the intersection of two worlds that are often held in tension: church and state. Plain communities like the Old Order Mennonites, have submitted to the law of the Canadian government by placing these signs on their buggies.

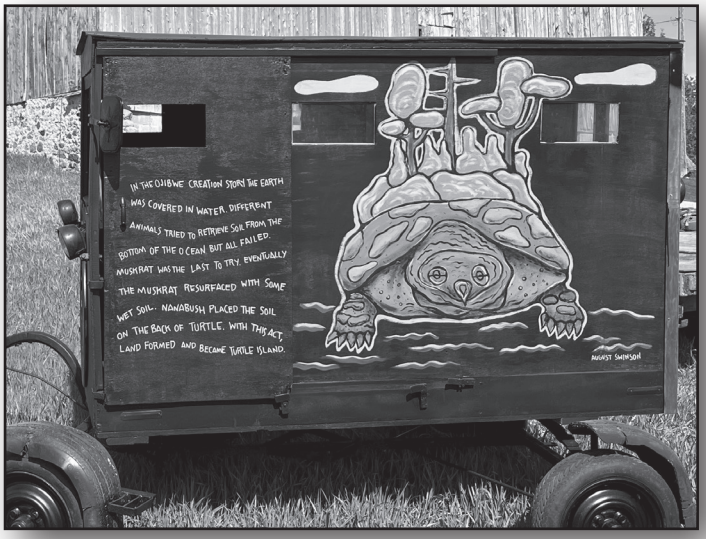
(Jeanette Seiling is a Swiss Mennonite artist who grew up in St. Jacobs and lives on a farm near Elora, Ont. *Fraktur* art has been in her family for generations. Her husband Ron was instrumental in the creation of this buggy project.)

Sides: Where did we land?

The two sides of the buggy represent two people groups, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, who have a much longer history in this place and who remain here to this day. This installation seeks to recognize and honour these Original Peoples for ongoing contributions, deep traditional knowledge, laws and land-based teachings. We are all treaty people with responsibilities to uphold.

“Turtle Island,” designed and painted by Anishinaabe artist August Swinson, is a depiction of the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe creation story where land is created and flourishes on the back of a turtle.

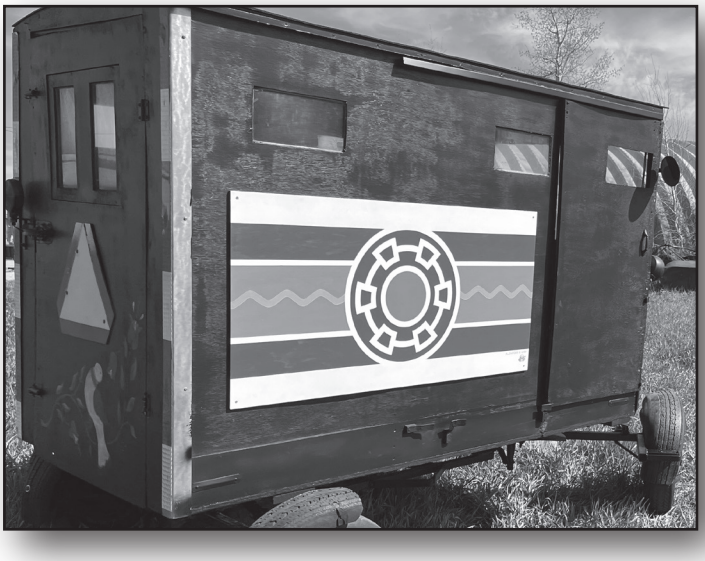
In the Ojibwe creation story, the earth was covered in water. Different animals tried to retrieve soil from the bottom of the ocean, but all failed. Muskrat was the last to try. Eventually, the muskrat resurfaced with some wet soil. Nanabush placed



the soil on the back of the turtle. With this act, land formed and became Turtle Island.
(Artist August Swinson grew up on the small reserve of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation. Early memories of life connected to nature have influenced his work as an artist.)

"Six Nations Flag," designed and painted by Onondaga Chief Arnold Jacobs, represents Haudenosaunee teachings and history, including the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784. Arnold explains his work: "The orange at the core represents the fire, or the desire to unite us all. The purple circle surrounding the fire is derived from the original Hiawenta Wampum Belt. The 'Six Nations' are represented as being connected to one another through brotherhood. The green on both sides represents our land from Dunnville to Dundalk, according to the Haldemand Proclamation, six miles on either side of the winding blue ribbon which represents the Grand River. This fits our saying: 'The land is ours as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows.'

"The purple bars, top and bottom, represent the Two Row Wampum. The Two Row represents two cultures that can live side by side along this river, not interfering with beliefs or government. One row represents non-Native culture and the other represents our culture and the path we follow."
(Arnold Jacobs is an Onondaga artist raised in the traditional society of the Ogweho:weh Civilization and is steeped in its languages. His art expresses his connection to his spirituality and its theology.)



Front: Where do we go from here?

Facing the front of the buggy orients you to the past depicted on the sides and back. This installation invites you to broaden and challenge your view of this complex history and to look ahead with this in mind. Through the mirror participants are invited to take a look at their feet on the land, ask themselves about their connection to the land and imagine a way forward—together—as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

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. Back issues available at **mhso.org**.

Editor: Barb Draper

Editorial Committee: Bethany Leis, Marion Roes, Ruth Steinman, Harold Thiessen

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

Waterloo County Fraktur artist Anna Weber: A study in disability and giftedness

By Nancy Silcox, specialist in Special Education

Lauded today as one of North America's most admired and prolific Mennonite *Fraktur* artists, Anna Weber's (1814-1888) schoolgirl accomplishments were few. But seen through the lens of modern educational theory, it is likely that Anna Weber was learning-disabled. Today the gifted artist would surely be identified as Dyslexic with possible Attention Deficit Disorder (inattentive type).

School records from her student days at Earl's Township Parochial School in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, label her "slow" and "unbrilliant of mind." She lagged behind the rest of her class in reading and her written work was rife with spelling errors. Inattentiveness, occasional disobedience and emotional outbursts only added to young Anna's classroom difficulties.

Anna Weber, "22 Birds."
Sold at auction, Oct. 23, 2021,
Miller & Miller Auctioneers, New Hamburg

Dyslexia, which affects reading and writing abilities in both children and adults, was first identified in 1877 by Adolph Kussmaul, a German professor of medicine. Working with subjects of normal intelligence, Kussmaul called the condition "word blindness." He believed that it occurred as a result of an eye deficit. Not until 1939 and the research of Dr. Alfred Strauss and Dr. Heinz Werner was the term "dyslexia" coined. More research and support for those affected slowly followed. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) (with or without hyperactivity) was not recognized as a learning disability until the 1960s.

Usually identified in early grade school, dyslexia manifests itself variously: for some affected, letters (and numbers) appear in mirror image; the symbols may be unrecognizable. Written communication is also affected by the disorder.

ADD is more complex to diagnose and presents as inattentiveness and distractibility. With hyperactivity, it can result in uncontrolled outbursts, even aggression. Both conditions occur in individuals of average to above-average intelligence and are not linked to neurological deficits. Giftedness and talent in non-academic areas often accompany the diagnoses.

Records report that Anna Weber, born on June 3, 1814, in Earl County, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, was routinely chastised by her parochial schoolteachers at the Thal Mennonite Parochial School. The oldest daughter of John Weber, a Mennonite deacon and his wife Catherine, Anna was widely considered to be "defective of intelligence." Slow to read, unable reproduce the alphabet accurately, she was also labelled as inattentive and occasionally disruptive. In one area only, did Anna shine. *Vorschriften* or calligraphy practice was as integral in the Mennonite parochial schools of Lancaster Country as reading, spelling and arithmetic instruction. Anna Weber passed her tedious schooldays waiting for this magic interlude of time.

Calligraphy, developed and refined as a form of written communication by European scholar monks during the 15th and 16th centuries, was prized by high government, church and royalty in these nations. These calligraphic letters became modified from their original graceful and delicate form into a script called *Fraktur*. The name derives from the pointed and "fractured" form of the letters.

Brought to Pennsylvania by Mennonites and other exiles fleeing Europe wars and religious persecution in the late 1600s, the intricate script was taken up by Lancaster Country schoolmasters. By the early 19th century, *Fraktur Vorschriften* (penmanship exercises) had become a key part of the Mennonite and Amish parochial school curriculum.

Occasionally texts became "illuminated" by borders or representations of the natural world. Birds, flowers and trees were common adornments. Still, certain rules prevailed: no *Vorschriften* writings could be signed by the writer. To do so was a sign of pride. Nor could illuminations be represented realistically. Exodus 20:4 ("You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below") declared that art was a sin.

Schoolgirl Anna Weber, struggling in reading, writing and arithmetic, was drawn to the delicacy and artistic beauty of her *Vorschriften* exercises. And while she invariably might present a "b" as a "d"; she might form her "s" backward, even omit an alphabet letter entirely, the exercises sustained the youngster. But these times were not to endure.

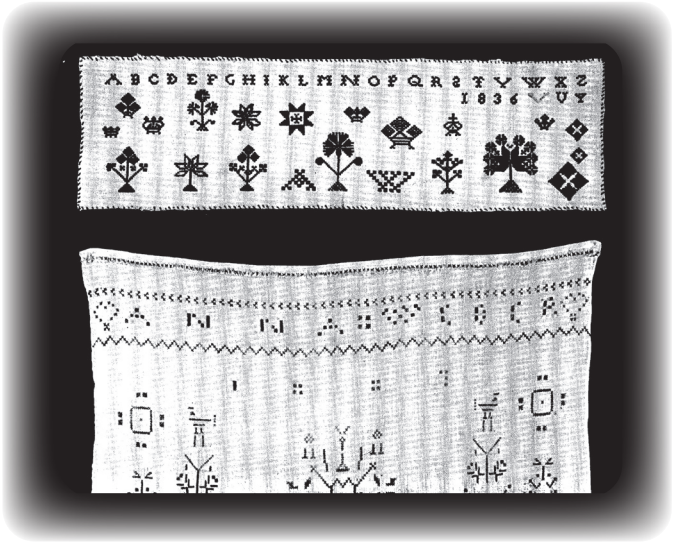
In 1824, deacon John Weber and his family left the comfort

and safety of Lancaster County to begin the long and arduous overland journey north to British territory. Anna was ten at the time of migration. Seeking more land to farm, the Weber family joined a number of other Mennonite families moving to an area along the Grand River. By the time the Webers arrived in the Canadian "wilderness," there were approximately 1,000 Mennonites living and farming in the area.

Anna Weber's schooldays came to an end with the Canadian relocation. She would now assist at home, with childrearing and farm work. Given Anna's poor records at school in Pennsylvania, one might have anticipated her relief at the release. Anecdotal reports of her years as mother's helper tell the opposite reaction.

One observer reported that "Anna was unable to give attention to household tasks . . . but could spend hours following the movement of household flies." Surely Anna pined for the loss of Vorschriften practice that had inspired her. Reports of her lashing out at family and neighbours became numerous. One family visitor reported her, as a teenager, spitting in fresh milk.

Undoubtedly embarrassed and frustrated by her daughter's aggressive behaviour, Catherine Weber directed her to embroidery. Creating "show towels" for a "hope chest" was a time-honoured Mennonite practice.



Anna Weber's "Show Towel" in Anna's Art
by E. Reginald Good, p. 12
(Note the omitted J; backward S; misplaced Y and U).
Used with permission.

A rare example (1836) of an early Anna Weber "show towel" shows her as a careful stitcher, with patience for such minute work. The piece also reveals Anna's continual struggles with the written language. Close inspection reveals the omission of the cross bar in the A; the omission of the letter J; a misplaced U; a backward S; bar. U and V are out of sequence.

The death of John Weber in 1840 (Anna was 40) seems to mark a shift in Anna's artistic activities. She rediscovered her love (and skill) of art fostered in her early schoolgirl illuminated *Vorschriften* exercises. Her first known painting (1855) features four colourful songbirds—the larger two appear to be cuckoos.

Anna Weber, 1878.
Property of Nancy Lou Patterson estate.
Used with permission.

Anna Weber, 1873.
Property of Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

Daringly presented in multi-hues of rose, yellow and blue, they dominate a pair of smaller, yellow-breasted, magenta-winged birds. No script accompanies the piece.

The passing of Catherine Weber in 1864 brought more artistic flowering—albeit in challenging settings. Judged incapable of caring for herself, over the next 22 years until her death in 1888, Anna began a circuitous route of "foster living." It is estimated that between 1864 and 1888, she lived with no fewer than eight caregivers.

In his book *Anna's Art*, Reginald Good suggests that "people got along much better with Anna if she didn't stay in one place too long." And her painting output blossomed! Using "found" paints: the colour red from soaked rose petals; blue from laundry blueing, yellow from daffodils, and purple of the bearded iris, Anna's imagination soared. Fantastical beasts—blue and white checkered horses, calico dogs, multi-coloured cuckoos, sheep bedecked in purple geometric "trousers" and flowers bursting from the tails of distelfinks dominated Anna's output.

Channeling the rebelliousness of her youthful days, Anna Weber also dared to sign her name. In laboriously scripted bold, block print she wrote: "ANNAWEBERHATDASGEMACHT." The date and the recipient of the work was frequently added as the artist mixed uppercase with lowercase letters, used backward script (b for p; q for p), often omitting alphabet letters. Anna Weber's paintings broke all the rules of her time and her faith.

And how were these transgressions viewed by her conservative society? Weber scholars explain that "excuses" were made, on account of Anna disabilities and advancing age. Indeed, author Michael Bird, in his 1977 book, *Ontario Fraktur. A Pennsylvania-German Folk Art Tradition in Early Canada*, offers that Anna's life and circumstances "stretched the limits of what was considered typical among Pennsylvania-German Mennonites."

It remains uncertain how many paintings Anna Weber completed before her death in 1888. Bird suggested that at the time of writing, "60 to 70 Webers exist." It was reported that her final days of life saw Anna prone in bed with the paper held aloft to paint.

Anna Weber sold none of her paintings in her lifetime. Her work was given as gifts to neighbours, usually children. Many are, no doubt, lost to time; others have passed on through the generations—treasured by their keepers.

Her legacy stretches far beyond extraordinary artistic abilities. Learning-disabled in an era where "beyond the ordinary" indicated defectiveness, she serves today as a model for creativity and giftedness.

Anna Weber, 1878.
Property of Nancy Lou Patterson estate.
Used with permission.

Bibliography:

Bird, Michael S. *Ontario Fraktur: A Pennsylvania-German Folk Tradition in Early Canada. Toronto: M.F. Feheley, 1977.*

Good, E. Reginald Good. *Anna's Art: The Fraktur Art of Anna Weber, a Waterloo County Mennonite Artist*. Kitchener: Pochauna Publications, 1976.

Harper, J. Russell. *A People's Art: Primitive, Naïve, Provincial and Folk Painting in Canada* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.

Patterson, Nancy Lou. "Mennonite Folk Art of Ontario in Ontario," in *Ontario Historical Society*. Vol. LV #3, September 1968.

Selikowitz, Mark. *Dyslexia And other Learning Difficulties: The Facts* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Wäber/Weber/Weaver House Painting for Sale

This painting, "Fall at the Settlement: the 1724 Wäber/Weber/Weaver House," is by watercolorist and educator Marita Hines.

It depicts the 1724 house of Hans and Margarethe Weber/Weaver family who immigrated to colonial America from Switzerland in 1717.

Contact John Weber to learn more and order a copy: 115 Barn Owl Rd., Lititz, PA 17543, or 1724weaverweberpainting@gmail.com.

Memories of Christmas past: Russian and Swiss Mennonites celebrate Christmas in 1924

By Ferne Burkhardt

Reprinted from Mennonite Reporter*, Jan. 6, 1986, as part of a series called "Bicentennial anecdotes." In 1986, Mennonites in Ontario were celebrating 200 years since the first Mennonite immigrants from Pennsylvania came to Ontario.*

Peter Toews flipped the pages of the Eaton's Christmas catalogue, his five-year-old eyes wide with wonder and longing. The pictures of strange and marvellous things fascinated him. If only he had the one thing that was missing—a pocketful of money.

Money was scarce in Peter's family as it was in many of the Mennonite families who had recently come from Russia. While Peter dreamed of toys and treats, his mother sewed practical things like winter underwear for her six fatherless children. She was glad for the opportunity to bring her two youngest, Peter and Agnes, to the Cressman home where two other daughters, Lena and Mary, aged 10 and 11, were staying. For two weeks Ida Cressman's new sewing machine was kept busy as the two women outfitted the children for their first Canadian winter.

That first Christmas in a new land is forever etched in the memory of Herbert Enns of Waterloo who was then a boy of 12. His family and his uncle Herman's family, nine people, lived together in the second house on the Walter Snyder farm north of Waterloo where the County Fair shopping mall now stands. They remembered Christmas in Russia and the three-day festivities, decorating their houses, and going to church on December 25 and 26. Christmas was a religious festival. They were surprised that there was no service at the Snyder's church on Christmas day and that threshing grain continued on December 26. A community concert at the local school and a parade in Waterloo seemed to be the important pre-Christmas events. They couldn't understand what clowns had to do with Christmas.

Their hosts had the same question about a Christmas tree, but they consented to let Peter Enns top one of the tall pines on the farm. When it was set up in the house and trimmed beautifully with paper chains and homemade decorations, the Enns family invited the Snyders to come and see. "It's like heaven on earth," they exclaimed.

Sixty years later, Herbert isn't quite sure, but he thinks dinner was the traditional ham and plume moos. He does remember clearly his one gift—Robinson Crusoe.

Avon Witmer, now living alone in her Fairview Home apartment remembers sharing Christmas dinner with the Johann Friesen family who lived with Avon and her husband Willard on their Nine Pines (now Kitchener's Forest Heights) farm. There were small gifts for the two five-year-old boys, Gordon Witmer and David Friesen, and a new brown dress for 10-year-old Mary which her mother made from one of Avon's.

"She was good at sewing. She could make a dress without using a pattern," recalled Avon. Mary, who lives in Calgary now, still sends Avon a Christmas card each year.

Abram Harder (left) and Edwin Eby prepare to unharness a team of horses on the Eby farm. Abram A. Harder, son of Abram H. and Anna Harder, was a Russian Mennonite immigrant to Canada who was billeted briefly with the Eby family after his arrival in 1924. (Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo)

Almeta (Bauman) Martin of Waterloo, then a girl of 13, remembers how teenage Marie and Katie Braun decorated their quarters with green branches. They lived in the doddyhaus (grandfather house) with their father Jacob. She will never forget the homemade gifts—a lovely vase made from a chipped water glass and knitting needle holders made from hazel nuts and scraps of fabric.

"They made such beautiful things out of almost nothing," Almeta recalled. And they enjoyed singing together—traditional German songs and the new English Christmas carols Almeta, an Old Order Mennonite child, learned at school.

Nicholas Fehderau was 20 years old that first Christmas in Canada. He had left the Ben Shantz farm where he had worked through the summer and got a job at the Freeport Sanitorium. He had to work on Christmas day.

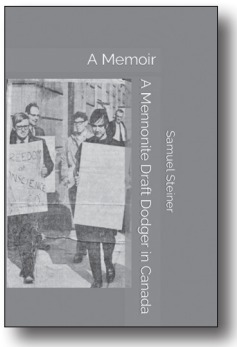
A young girl who came on the same boat as Nicholas, worked on the Shuh family farm in Kitchener. Nicholas was invited there for Christmas dinner. Turkey and all the trimmings, pie and Christmas cake were all new foods for Nicholas.

Another highlight was a young people's Christmas party at the home of Grace, Gordon and Ira Good on Cameron Street. They sang, played games and ate more of the strange, fruit-filled cake. There was a Christmas tree and small gifts for everyone, even Nicholas.

"I got a pair of socks, very practical. I needed clothes," he said. He has warm memories, especially of Mrs. Good, called "The Russian Mother" because of her care and help in getting jobs for many of the young immigrants.

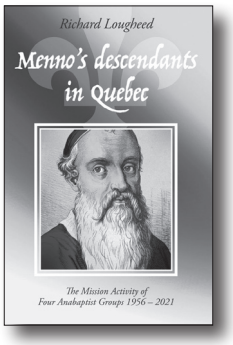
The Swiss Mennonites who also were new arrivals in Canada nearly a century and a half earlier, welcomed their German/Dutch Mennonite brothers and sisters 60 years ago. They shared that Christmas in 1924.

NEW **BOOKS**



A Mennonite Draft Dodger in Canada: A Memoir.
Samuel Steiner.
Privately published with Amazon, 2022, 162 pages.

Sam Steiner tells the story of his early life in Ohio, his conflict with the U.S. government regarding the military draft and his departure to Canada. He describes the development of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario as well as changes to church organizations from his perspective as a board member. His wife, Sue Clemmer was a pastor and he tells some of her story.



Menno's Descendants in Quebec: The Mission Activity of Four Anabaptist Groups 1956-2021.
Richard Lougheed. Pandora Press, 2021, 255 pages.

Richard Lougheed got to know Robert and Lois Witmer in Rouyn-Noranda where he was a pastor. Attracted to Anabaptist values, Richard studied at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). He and his family moved to Montreal where he continued to study in Protestantism in Quebec. There are four Anabaptist groups included in this study: Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Church Canada, Brethren in Christ (now Be in Christ) and Church of God in Christ Mennonite (known as Holdeman).

BOOK **REVIEW:** Sam Steiner memoir reflects on life

By Barb Draper

While working on his book *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario*, Sam Steiner began writing a weekly online blog about his research and occasionally he would include personal stories. In this memoir, *A Mennonite Draft Dodger in Canada*, he has expanded and updated those personal blog stories.

Sam was born in Ohio, the youngest of six children, to a family with generations of Mennonite church leadership. Instead of following his forebears' footsteps, Sam was something of a rebel. When he turned 18, he registered for the military draft without applying for conscientious objector status which was the expected route for young Mennonite men.

In March 1965, while a student at Goshen College, Sam attended a civil rights protest in Montgomery, Alabama, an event that Sam describes as a "conversion experience." Recognizing that he could not kill another human, he embraced pacifism along with a strong belief in the importance of social justice.

When Sam was suspended from Goshen College for participating in a controversial alternative student newspaper, the draft became a major issue. A student of the 60s, Sam wanted to live out his convictions. He ripped up his draft card and held a public protest rather than be inducted into the army. As the consequences of this action appeared on the horizon, he finally allowed his friends to assist him in avoiding arrest.

Sam writes with affection about the Mennonites who helped him find his feet in Canada. He says, "Sue Clemmer became my emotional lifeline as I adjusted to a new world and battled my guilt feelings for not going to prison." Sue and Sam were married in the summer of 1969, less than a year after he came to Waterloo Region.

Over the next decades, Sam played an important role in Mennonite circles. Employed at the library and archives at what was then Conrad Grebel College, Sam also began to sit on church conference boards and committees. He writes, "I served as secretary on almost every committee I joined. I believed that as the memory of the committee, the secretary's work was often as significant as that of the chairperson." His participation on many committees gave him an inside look at Mennonite church politics.

Sam reflects on the integration of three Mennonite conferences in Ontario into the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada. He was very involved in the process and writes that "I believed I had made a difference in the process and have always felt the creation of MCEC was a good decision." He is also positive about the creation of Mennonite Church Canada but questions whether the merger that formed Mennonite Church USA was a good move in the long run.

His writing projects have also made a contribution to the Mennonite community. As well a biography of Jacob Y. Shantz, Sam wrote a history of Rockway Mennonite Collegiate and the definitive history of Mennonites in Ontario.

Sue's work also greatly influenced Sam's life, especially after she became a pastor. Her ordination was part of what Sam describes as "the second wave of female ministers among Ontario Mennonites" and he says St. Jacobs was a good place for her to begin her ministry. Sam experienced several congregations from the inside as Sue served at different congregations. He makes a few astute comments about each of these congregations.

Sam writes with honesty and keen insight about the major events in his life and his community. He writes candidly about pain and turmoil, including church politics and Sue's illness and death. He reflects on his own spirituality with integrity, never pretending something he does not feel. Anyone who knows Sam personally or is interested in his perceptions of the Mennonite church will find this book interesting.