

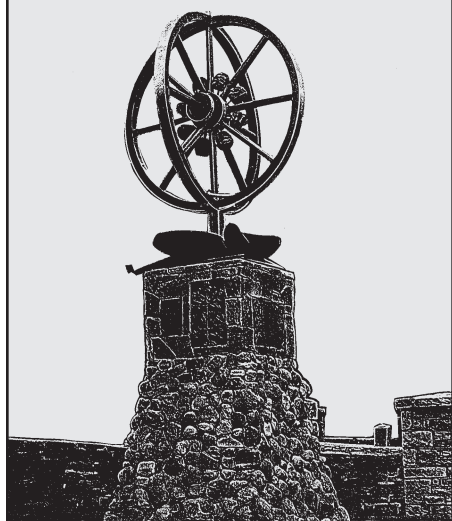
Ontario Mennonite History

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Signs of change:

Telling the Brubacher House story at 40 years

The Brubacher House at the University of Waterloo has been a site of Mennonite historical and cultural interpretation for over four decades. At the annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, held virtually on Oct. 21, 2020, Marlene Epp and Laura Enns explained the recent signage project which reflects the changing historical narrative at the museum. Marlene Epp is a professor at Conrad Grebel University College and Laura Enns is a host at the Brubacher House. Laura and her husband, Joshua, have been live-in hosts since 2017. They have an apartment above the museum with responsibility to maintain the house and gardens and host museum programs and events, including public tours.

Including a deeper history

By Laura Enns

We had hoped to host a “sign launch” and the fall meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario at the Brubacher House, but unfortunately the museum has been closed all season due to COVID-19. However, we were pleased to be a participating site in this year’s digital Doors Open Waterloo Region event. Our video (www.doorsopenontario.on.ca/en/waterloo-region) gives you an introduction to the museum tour, as well as some “behind-the-scenes” interviews with my husband Joshua and me, and even some footage of our 10-month-old son, Oran.

Joshua and I have enjoyed learning about, and interpreting Pennsylvania German Mennonite history, and the Brubacher family’s historical connection to this place. We have also seen it as our responsibility to learn more about Indigenous histories here on Block Two of the Haldimand Tract, and we have been fortunate to learn from Rick Hill at Six Nations Polytechnic, Phil Monture, and other respected Indigenous teachers.

As Mennonites, and Canadians in general, wrestle with the legacy of colonialism, and as we try to reconcile this with the much longer history of Indigenous peoples on this land, we have been working to unravel the story



The new outdoor signs at the Brubacher House give information about the museum. Many walkers and joggers pass by, often in the evening.

of our complicity in the colonisation and dispossession of Indigenous lands, and the cultural genocide that has taken place, as detailed in the 2012 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

Article 11 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states: “Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.”

While even today, in this community, Indigenous people are having to fight for basic recognition of, and access to their own lands, ceremonies, and cultural

- *New panel 1 gives local Indigenous history.*
- *Panel 2 gives an overview of local Mennonite history.*
- *The Mennonite purchase of Block 2 is explained in the third panel.*
- *Panel 4 tells the story of the Brubacher family.*
- *Panel 5 is a condensed timeline.*

Theo Wiederkehr and Dave Neufeld. We talked about many things including the information panels and outdoor signage. We viewed the film which is more than 15 years old and a bit too long at 15 minutes. It says nothing about Indigenous peoples and could present a more nuanced story of Mennonite settlement.

We also had interesting conversations about parallel histories so that attitudes to food, dress, technologies, mobilities, narratives of “hard work,” and gardening/farming practices might reveal commonalities and interactions between Mennonites and Indigenous peoples (the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabeg in particular). We imagined how this might be incorporated into museum displays and programming activities. We need to eliminate the “pioneering” motif attached to stories of Mennonite migration and settlement.

Together with the Brubacher House Committee members Lewis Brubacher, Marion Roes and Paul Penner, we decided to create completely new information panels. We are grateful that the communications staff at Conrad Grebel University College, Margaret Gissing and Jen Konkle, were eager to assist with this project. The panels were designed by Margaret Gissing.

The first panel talks about the history of Indigenous peoples who were here hundreds of years before white settlers. It mentions the Haldimand proclamation of 1784 and the Six Nations: Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Mohawk, Seneca, Tuscarora.

The second panel asks, “Who are the Mennonites?” and provides basic information. It acknowledges that the Mennonites met Indigenous people when they came to the land along the

Grand River, but we know very little about these interactions. It talks about Mennonite agricultural labour but notes that the Indigenous peoples also worked the land and derived food from crops, dispelling the myths that Indigenous people were not farmers. A recent archeological dig in south Kitchener proves that point.

We devoted a panel to the land purchase. The purchase of Block 2 was finalized in 1805 with Susannah Brubacher, grandmother to John E., as one of the shareholders in the German Company. Richard Beasley has often been the centerpiece of our understanding of this land transaction, but what is important to know is that proceeds from the sale of lands in the Haldimand Tract was to go into a government trust that would support the Six Nations for 999 years, in perpetuity. This did not happen, and that is the tragedy of this land purchase.

The fourth panel asks, “Who are the Brubachers?” Our efforts to expand the history were not an attempt to erase the Brubachers, who were a large family that we actually know very little about. We do know that Magdalena, the mother, gave birth to 14 children and died at age 49. This panel also calls viewers to trace their own family history.

We were encouraged to begin a thousand years ago with the long histories of Indigenous peoples rather than beginning with 1850 when the house was built. On the timeline panel, we decided to begin with the Haldimand Proclamation of 1784, a point where the lives of the Six Nations and the Mennonites begin to intersect. It is a winding timeline because history is never straightforward; we learn while we unlearn.

The impact of new outdoor signs

By Laura Enns

In addition to replacing the indoor information panels, we also created a new outdoor information panel in front of the house. We had been noticing for years that many walkers, joggers, and other people seemed to pass by the house without realizing what it was, or that they could come in for a tour. The sports fields and other green spaces around us also tend to be the busiest in the evenings, when the museum is closed. We wanted to provide an opportunity for the public to learn about and engage with Brubacher House from the outside.

Of course, when we envisioned the sign, we could not have known that the museum would be closed for this entire season. The outdoor sign has proven to be more valuable than we ever could have imagined, because no one has been able to come inside for tours this year. We have enjoyed watching so many people stop to read and discuss the sign, take a brochure, and maybe take a photo in front of the house. It has driven traffic to our website and social media pages, and it has sparked physically distanced conversations with folks who can't wait to come back and tour the museum when it re-opens.

For those who have always known Brubacher House and its beautiful surroundings as a significant cultural landscape for Mennonites, the sign's acknowledgment of Indigenous history serves as a reminder of the historical and enduring presence of Indigenous peoples, and the Dish with One Spoon Wampum agreement, under which we seek to respectfully share and steward the Land with Indigenous peoples, and people of all nations who live here today.

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Mennonite Clocks: The Heartbeat of the Home

By Rosmarin Heidenreich

When he was 13 years old, Neil Neumann and his family were forced to flee their home village of Einlage in southern Russia, seeking to escape the brutal Soviet regime by following the German army as it retreated from the area in 1943. His father had been exiled to a gulag in the 1930s, and Neil, his mother, grandmother and two siblings became part of the massive Mennonite trek that made its way westward by way of horse-drawn wagons, railway freight cars and on foot.

They took only the most essential items with them. On the perilous journey, Neil was entrusted with an important task: to carry and keep safe the family's Kroeger clock. This wall clock, with its large metal face plate and mechanism, pendulum, brass chains and weights, was heavy and unwieldy, even when taken apart to be carried as a bundle. Although most of the possessions the family had taken with them were lost or had to be left behind along the way, young Neil managed to hang on to the clock, which he faithfully carried through half of Ukraine all the way to Poland and thence to Germany. When the family was finally able to emigrate to Canada, the grandmother insisted that the clock be taken along.

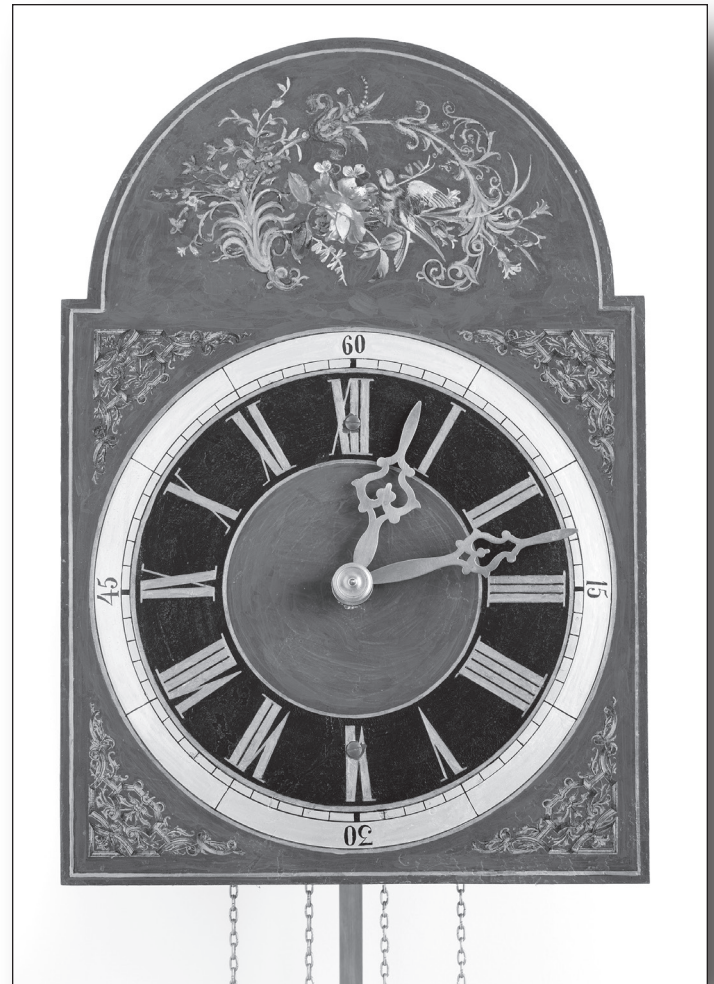
Kroeger clocks figure in many stories of Mennonite dislocation. Abram Reimer was only seven when he was charged with carrying his family's clock. The Reimers, following much the same trajectory as the Neumanns, were obliged to travel mainly on foot, through rain, snow, sleet and winter storms. The Reimer clock travelled even further than the Neumann clock, arriving in Canada after a ten-year sojourn in South America.

Arthur Kroeger, a descendant of the Kroeger clockmakers who had settled in Winnipeg, commented: "The clock was so highly cherished by the original owners that it simply could not be left behind, regardless of what was happening to them in times of war or peace."

What made these clocks so important to the owners that they hung onto them on unimaginably long and dangerous journeys, during which every non-essential item was a hindrance and an encumbrance? One explanation is that many clocks had family stories attached to them. They had been inherited from their families or received on occasions such as weddings or the birth of a first child. Others had been commissioned to mark the acquisition of a new home.

A further reason may be that the clocks marked the daily rhythm of the household and were associated with the normalcy of everyday life. With their constant ticking and the resonant bell sounding the hours, they were the heartbeat of home.

There are other factors that determined the attachment to the clock. Practical as they were, Mennonites usually possessed few material objects of symbolic value, artefacts that connected them with their past. The Kroeger clocks, proudly displayed objects of value, attested to their owners' hard-earned prosperity, the fruit of their diligence and thrift.



The clock faces had flowers and pastoral displays.

The ornamentation on the clocks depicted the flowers and bucolic scenes found in the landscapes surrounding their villages. The clocks represented the lives they had lived in peaceful villages in Russia and served as a reminder of how they had lived and who they had been before the cataclysmic events that forced them to leave.

In an illustrated volume on Kroeger clocks, Arthur Kroeger provides a wealth of information about Mennonite clocks manufactured from the late eighteenth century until the 1920s, first in the Danzig (Gdansk) area of West Prussia, now Poland, and then in southern Russia, now Ukraine. Kroeger offers readers not only substantial information about these clocks, gathered over a lifetime of working with them, but also stories about the clocks and their owners. These clock narratives constitute an important contribution to the social and cultural history of the Russian Mennonites from the early 1800s to the present.

After Arthur Kroeger died in 2015, his daughter Liza sought to create a vehicle through which the accumulation of data on Mennonite clocks could be documented. The result was the founding of the Winnipeg-based Kroeger Clock Heritage Foundation (KCHF), a non-profit organization generally recognized to be the authority and research resource for Mennonite clocks. Under Liza Kroeger's leadership, the KCHF was able to create an interactive web site, the Virtual Museum of Mennonite Clocks (<https://www.kroegerclocks.com>), featuring a photographic gallery of individual clocks and detailed commentary on each of them. The site also provides an overview of the history of Mennonite clock-making and includes interviews and stories about the clocks and their owners.

The KCHF sponsored an exhibit of Mennonite clocks at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach, Manitoba, in 2018. A further exhibit is planned at the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg in 2022. Further exhibits in Canada are possible and perhaps in the future an exhibit can go outside of Canada since Mennonite clocks can be found throughout North and South America as well as in Europe.

In the meantime, the KCHF continues to research and preserve the rich heritage of Mennonite clocks, and welcomes communications and input from the community. Clock owners, people with clock stories, and anyone interested in the clocks and wishing to be put on the KCHF mailing list, can contact the foundation at clocks@kroegerclocks.ca.

Donations can be made online at Canada Helps, or by cheque, made out to the Kroeger Clocks Heritage Foundation and addressed to Anikó Szabo, Executive Director, Kroeger Clocks Heritage Foundation, 488 Newman Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 2V5. Donations allow the foundation to make more items from its extensive archive—clocks, photographs, letters, maps and drawings—accessible to the general public.

Rosmarin Heidenreich is a founding board member of the Kroeger Clock Heritage Foundation.

Picture to the right: The Neumann clock was among the few possession the family carried to safety when they fled from Russia in 1943.



J. Winfield Fretz Publication Fund in Ontario Mennonite Studies Sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

Dr. J. Winfield Fretz was the first president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.
This fund is named in his honour.

The fund is available to any individual or charitable, church or community-based organization that requires financial support for 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. Applications are accepted twice yearly, May 1 and December 1.

More information: mhso.org/content/fretz-publication-fund

Project to gather Goertzen family information

Dear Interested Community,

November 1, 2020

I have long hoped to produce an updated and more extensive Goertzen family history, and I have made some headway in researching and laying the foundations for this project. With the help of family and community members, my goal is to bring this history into print before the fiftieth anniversary of the last Goertzen family history.

The last Goertzen book [Goertzen, Peter. *Goertzen*. Edmonton: P. Goertzen, 1976] was published in 1976, almost 45 years ago, and since then our extended family has experienced extraordinary changes and growth. Our lineage has also faced some of the world's historic challenges, from Reformation to emigration to world war. It is a fascinating history of adversity and survival—and one that is still unfamiliar to many community members.

These years have also witnessed an explosion of genealogical resources, including Ancestry.com, Find-My-Past, My Heritage, the Mennonites' own GRANDMA program, and the global Find-A-Grave cemetery research site, not to mention dozens of new books. Unfortunately, much of this information is scattered, incomplete, and/or marked by errors. Compiling this research into one major, accurate work would be a meaningful gift to the whole Goertzen community.

In the foreword to his family history, the late Peter Goertzen stated, "All of us would of course like to see an updated version of the book." He also acknowledged that this "would be a major, costly and very time-consuming undertaking." But I have begun to plan and assemble a team of professionals with the ability to undertake different parts of the project.

Writer and historian Amanda Bidnall (PhD, Boston College) has laid a strong foundation of around 80 pages from which we can deepen our research work. Photographer Graham Osborne, who has worked for National Geographic, is qualified, and equipped to photograph historical and modern cemeteries, monuments, and settlements related to the Goertzen Mennonite experience.

But the creation of any true community history must be a community undertaking. To update the family tree, for example, I hope to set up a small group to gather information and visit Mennonite towns, allowing families to bring their genealogies, photographs, and stories in person.

We are in Canada today because of the struggles, faith, courage, and determination of our ancestors. Their legacy deserves a written history within the most honourable framework possible. It would be our recognition—and our willingness to show them due respect for their labour.

If you would be interested in supporting this project to preserve the Goertzen and Mennonite legacy, I would be happy to discuss it with you further.

Sincerely,
Peter Goertzen

Low German Mennonites use WhatsApp

By Anna Wall

After my great-grandfather, Reverend Johan P. Wall, moved a large portion of his congregation in the early 1920s from Saskatchewan, Canada, to the remote desert lands of Durango, Mexico, it was next to impossible to stay connected with family left behind. Telephones were not allowed in the conservative Mennonite community.

As the years passed and the rest of the world evolved, more and more of us became illiterate. Living in a Spanish-speaking country, speaking *Plautdietsch* (Low German) at home, and reading and speaking only High German at school and church, writing letters as a means to stay connected became more and more challenging, to say the least.

As more of us returned to Canada, four languages have become a consistent passenger during our complex journey—*Plautdietsch*, High German, Spanish, English. Only the necessary basic parts of these languages make it onto our verbal vocabulary list, just to get us by during our common journey back and forth between Canada and Mexico. Though *Plautdietsch* is the dominant spoken language, we wouldn't necessarily know all information in the *Plautdietsch* language because we literally experience particular parts of our lives divided by languages. More often than not, we seek medical treatments from either Spanish or English-speaking people, therefore, we do not necessarily know the context of that communication in our everyday language. We know one or both of the other languages better in terms of that specific context.

When leaving the gates of our tightly knit Mennonite community, we're often asked, "What is your nationality?" in a language, we may or may not understand well, and the answer becomes messy very quickly. "I'm Mexican, holding Canadian citizenship. I don't really speak Spanish or English, I speak *Plautdietsch* which is a non-written language, and the High German written language I was



supposed to learn, I didn't really learn. You can take back this pen and paper because it's useless to me!" This is a brief glimpse of how the story unfolds more often than not. All we can do in moments like that is hope and pray the person next in line is generous enough to help us out.

Skipping ahead many years and a large number of us have strayed and integrated somewhat into modern society, though still lacking much knowledge of worldly matters. Today the majority of us own a smartphone and most of us have downloaded an app called WhatsApp. This app has the ability to meet most, if not all, our complex communication needs in whatever form or language our hearts desire. Not to mention that we can use the app to communicate without needing to change plans or phones. It doesn't affect what country you are communicating from as regular cell phone features would.

WhatsApp is a text and voice messaging app that launched in 2009. It has become increasingly popular in our community since then, thanks to its voice messaging features. The app has made my job as a Low German community health worker and interpreter much easier and faster to do. The app has made it not only possible for me to stay connected to my loved ones back in my colony, but I have also been able to reach the community far and wide with important updates regarding public health and safety during an ever-changing worldwide pandemic.

The status-sharing feature of the app allows everyone on my contact list to have access to what I have shared

and then share it with their contacts and so on. It has made it possible for me to do my job safely, and more effectively. It has made it possible to continue to run community health groups in collaboration with service providers that without the app would be much more difficult to achieve especially during a pandemic.

Here is one example of how I have used the app to do my job remotely. I record voice messages in English, and then in *Plautdietsch*, which then can be played to the service provider communicating with the *Plautdietsch*-speaking client and vice versa, making my physical presence not necessary, in not all but a few cases. When the client is done with the appointment and has received written instructions, he or she will then take a picture of it to send it to me. I read it and record, verbally, the instruction in their language and send it back to the client.

If modern technology is the solution to all forms of communication even in a Mennonite community, one might ask why not take me, the human interpreter, out of the equation altogether, and just use Google Translate? That would be possible if it were any other language. Google Translate does not speak *Plautdietsch* because it is not an official written language. Even if it were, the unique way that we have adopted and become accustomed to the use of multiple languages has basically made my job as an interpreter that much more important. Because it is not just a language that we use to communicate with each other, it has become somewhat of a cultural code language unique only to this particular group.

Reprinted from Woolwich Community Health Centre newsletter, Update, Spring 2021, page 11.

Anna Wall is a health worker and interpreter at the Woolwich Community Health Centre with headquarters in St. Jacobs, Ont.

Kehl/Rosenberger family had strong Ontario-Saskatchewan connections

By J. Lester Kehl, retired Mennonite pastor now living in Floradale, Ont.

My maternal grandfather, Isaiah S. Rosenberger, was born in Oxford County, Ont., on Aug. 15, 1867. He grew up in the area and married Persida Shantz on Sept. 29, 1891. She was part of the Shantz family from Wilmot Township. They were Mennonites who migrated from Pennsylvania in the 1800s. In 1897 he was ordained to the ministry and served as a pastor at the Blenheim Mennonite Church.

In 1905, he sold his farm near Haysville and spent the next three summers building a homestead in Saskatchewan, while his family remained in Ontario. He returned each fall but then moved the family to a homestead near Guernsey, Saskatchewan in 1908. My mother was three years old and the youngest of five children when they moved. Two younger siblings followed her in this family while an older sister died of the "Spanish" flu in 1918.

My grandfather and other families began the Sharon Mennonite Church near Guernsey Sask. He continued to serve as a lay pastor along with Moses Schmidt who came from Alberta and who was later ordained as Bishop. Grandpa lived on this farm until 1936 when he retired from farming and sold his farm to his son.

My father, Herb C. Kehl, was born of German Baptist immigrants who came to Ontario in the 1860s. They first settled in Essex County and later moved to the Waterloo area and attended First Mennonite Church in Kitchener. My father, born in 1898, was the second son of William Kehl. Both he and his brother John attended high school at Kitchener Collegiate. John was ordained as deacon at First Mennonite and served for many years through significant church changes. He was the last ordained deacon; subsequent leaders were appointed as elders. He and his wife Stella faithfully served the church and died in their late 90's.

My father's parents both died of lung problems in the 1920s. The doctor had recommended that my father live in a drier climate and so he moved to Saskatchewan where he had acquaintances. He met my mother as part of the Mennonite church community and they were married on Jan. 1, 1928 after the Sunday morning church service. For their honeymoon they travelled to Ontario by train to visit friends and relatives there.

They returned to Saskatchewan, bought a farm, and lived there for about twelve years during the Depression years. They had the misfortune of experiencing a house fire in their second year. Everyone got out safely as the two-year-old was with her mother, milking cows in the barn when the fire broke out. Five additional children were born in Sask.; I was the youngest.

In the fall of 1940, my parents finally gave up trying to survive on the farm and decided to move back to Ontario. With help from family and friends, they held an auction sale and after paying their debts had just enough money to travel by train to Ontario.

My father then worked as a farmhand, receiving housing for his family of five at three different farms in six years. They were then able to purchase a small farm west of New Dundee. Dad worked at



The Isaiah Rosenberger family lived in Saskatchewan in 1918, attending Sharon Mennonite Church. From left: Ada, David, Chester, Clista, Bessie, Mary, Leona, Isaiah, Alda, Persida.

the New Dundee Creamery until his retirement when he was in his 70's. Mother guided us as children to work in our vegetable garden, growing produce to sell at the Kitchener market. We also raised chickens and sold them as dressed fowl at the market.

Two more girls joined our family. In 1956 my younger sister was stricken with polio, affecting her leg and she spent many months in the Hamilton General Hospital. We made many Sunday afternoon trips to visit her during her illness and celebrated that she was able to recover enough to have a significant life.

My parents were involved in the life of the Blenheim Mennonite Church. Dad served as a Christian father, balancing long workdays and working some Sunday mornings as milk was brought to the creamery on Sunday during the summer months. Mother practiced her gift of hospitality. Frequently we would have cousins from Saskatchewan come to visit and have Sunday meals in our house. At times cousins from Saskatchewan would come to Kitchener for winter work and young people, relatives, and friends attending the Winter Bible School in Kitchener would frequently visit with our family. This tied the Mennonite church communities in Saskatchewan/Alberta and Ontario together. Many marriages strengthened these friendships across communities.

My grandmother Rosenberger died in 1938 and Grandpa travelled from Ontario to Saskatchewan many times, visiting with his children in both communities. Several of my aunts and uncles stayed in Saskatchewan as the economy there gained strength during the 1940s and 50s. Grandpa was remarried in 1945 to Nancy Moyer, a widow from Vineland, Ont. He then lived in that community for four years until his death.

Over the years, my family and I have made many visits to the Guernsey, Sask. community. We have close relationships with our first cousins who are now elderly. Sharon Mennonite Church closed with a final service in June 2004 as the number of families near this rural church dwindled.