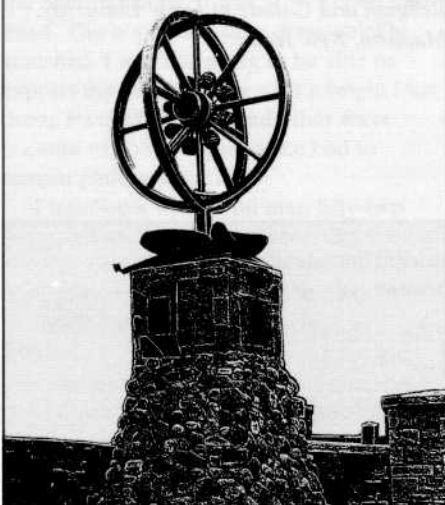


Ontario Mennonite History

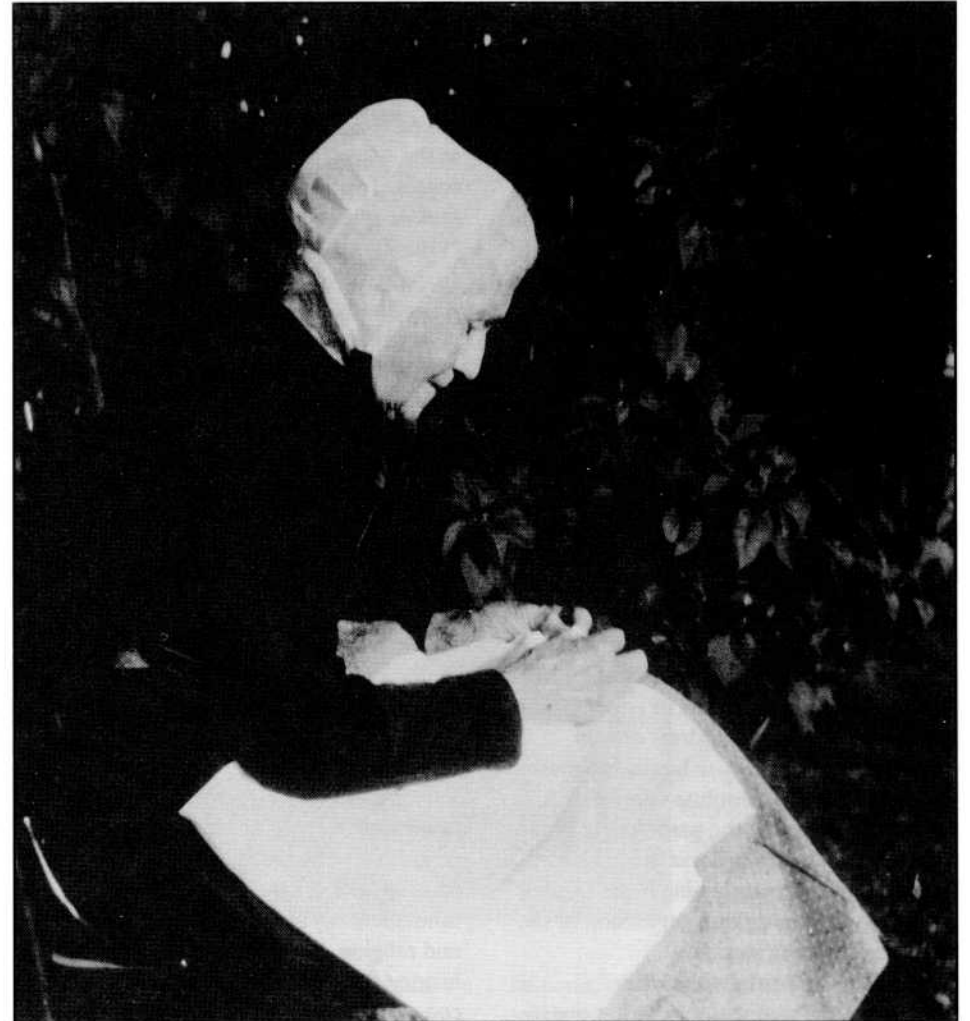
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Oral History and the Telling of Mennonite Lives

by Pamela Klassen



Catherine Brubacher Schmidt.

History is made up of the telling of stories. Whether based on court records transformed into a scholarly narrative, or created through a retelling of others' stories, history is an art trying to express our (perhaps) universal desire to understand the twists and turns in the lives of people, cultures, and nations. Oral history makes plain these storytelling roots of history, and opens up the process of history-making to all.

I am a student of religion, whose method blends the techniques of ethnography, textual analysis, and oral history. My present interest is in the religious experience of twentieth-century North American Mennonite women. In my work I have found the sources opened to me through oral history indispensable to

my research and interpretation of women's lives. Hearing women tell their stories of such subjects as childhood games, wedding plans, and giving birth has helped me to develop an understanding of the complex influences on a woman's identity and religious life.

Given the paucity of written sources dealing with women, the work I do would be impossible without the techniques of ethnography and oral history. But the historical benefits of gathering people's stories do not stop with women—the stories of men and children, and of both "ordinary" people and those in positions of leadership are important historical resources.

For me, the ideal oral history project allows for relationships to develop between

the researcher and the participants. Oral history is not just a way of collecting "data;" it is a process demanding interaction between people interested in evoking and understanding lives—their own and others. Fast and abrupt entries and exits into people's lives, in which the researcher asks many personal and potentially upsetting questions, is not responsible research. This ideal, of course, demands time, which is not always in abundance for either the researcher or the participants. Taking the time, however, to engage in sustained conversations in comfortable, familiar contexts can enhance both the researcher's and the participant's experience of the project, in at least two ways.

First, within relationship, people grow to depend less on first impressions and projections of each other, whether their first impulse is to view the other as a saint or a fool. Instead, with time more nuanced understandings of each other are possible, based on a wider range of emotions and reactions. Secondly, with sufficient time devoted to a project, the participants can truly involve themselves in its outcome as collaborators to some degree. Their story is then not stolen from them, divested of its heart, and placed on sheets of paper. The researcher, seeking to address certain questions, can still pursue her or his goals without clinging to absolute control over the project. Keeping the participants shut out of the analytical process in life history, in the interest of maintaining some form of objectivity, is a mistaking perversion of the purpose in sharing stories.

Oral history works within the fascinating realm of memory. What people remember and why they remember is partly triggered by the questioning of the researcher, but also stems from unspoken or unconscious linkages of thought and sensation. The give and take of a conversation can turn what ostensibly was a conversation about baptism, for example,

into a story of a first kiss. The smell of warm bread can evoke a memory forty years old. Relationships between researchers and participants spanning months or years allow such memories and reflections to surface.

The fluidity of memory inherent in the process of doing oral history underscores the complexity of lives. Our experiences are not neatly categorized into separate chronologically arranged boxes, but are intersecting memories, brought into speech at the suggestion of any of our different senses. Trinh Minh-Ha writes of this sensate quality of memory in her essay, "Grandma's Story:"

In the process of storytelling, speaking and listening refer to realities that do not involve just the imagination. The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched. It destroys, brings into life, nurtures. Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and transmission. In Africa it is said that every griotte [storyteller] who dies is a whole library that burns down.¹

Mennonite women's memories are themselves libraries of Mennonite experiences of birth, food, healing, celebration, mourning, anger, and love, to name a few.

Listening to the stories and experiences of women not only broadens our historical and religious perspective, but also fundamentally changes how we see history and religion. Women's lives are the stuff of history; their faith and practice helps constitute religion. Paying attention to the self-perceptions of both women and men, to the rituals of everyday life, and to the shifting roles of emotions in women's and men's relationships, opens up a genre of history attuned to how people make their way in the world, and allows us a complex understanding of what it means (and has

meant) to be Mennonite, for diverse women and men.

¹ Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p.121.

Suggestions for further readings in women's oral history:

Anderson, Kathryn, *et al.*

"Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology in Oral History." In Joyce McCarl Neilsen, ed., *Feminist Research Methods: Exemplary Readings in the Social Sciences* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), pp. 94-114.

Brown, Karen McCarthy, *et al.*

"Roundtable Discussion: On Feminist Methodology." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 1(1985), 73-88.

Cruikshank, Julie. *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara.

"Authoring Lives." *Journal of Folklore Research* 26(1989)2, 123-49.

Lawless, Elaine J. "Women's Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography as Feminist and Emergent." *Journal of Folklore Research* 28(1991)1, 35-60.

Myerhoff, Barbara. "Telling One's Story." *The Centre Magazine* 13(1980)2, 22-31.

Patai, Daphne and Sherna Berger Gluck, eds. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. New York: Rutledge, 1991.

Personal Narratives Group, eds.

Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

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Lizzy's Story

told by Shirley Martin

I'm surprised that there are so many people who wish to hear my story. My story seems simple, not very exciting. I have not left as big an impact on the world as others I know. I'm 78 years old, very arthritic, and have many health problems, but I'm sure you don't want to hear about it. I'm a small woman, but heavy set. I've internalized many of my disappointments, my feelings of inadequacy, my pain. My body could tell you many more stories than my memory can recall.

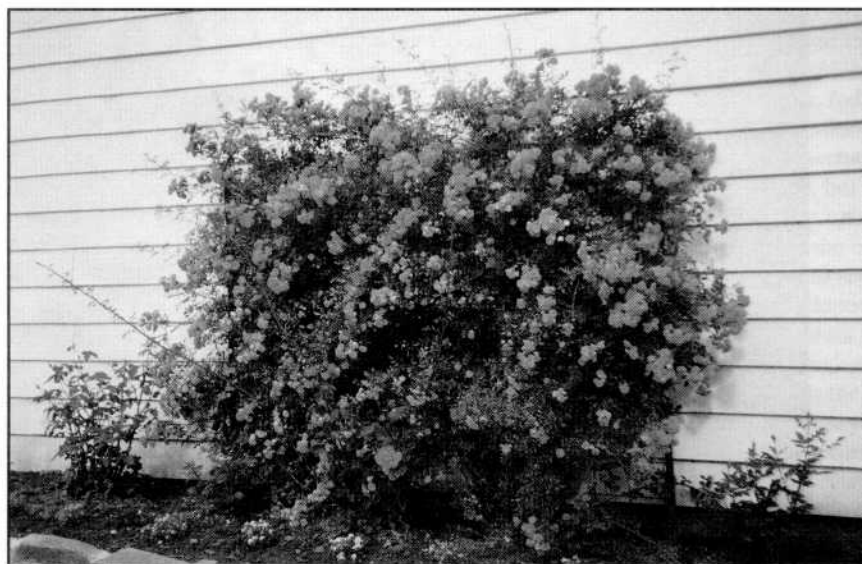
I grew up in a large family; there was twelve in total. We were a very poor family, but we hung together. I think that's so important—family. We worked hard for every penny and rewards came seldom. I remember having to work out as a hired girl. I had no contact with my family for three months. I was so hungry to see them. I remember once when I was a little girl my mother promised me a blue dress. It was going to be my first new dress (at least that I remember of course) and it was going to be special. The blue, I imagined, was almost a royal blue. I began to fantasize. One

day I picked potatoes at my grandparents all day and as usual my grandfather gave me twenty-five cents. However, my grandmother wanted to give me something special because I worked so hard and diligently. She would give me material for a new dress. I could hardly wait. But when the material came, it was grey. I cried and cried. The hope for a blue dress quickly vanished. I was not going to be able to express my joy for living with a bright blue dress. I would have to find other ways because my outer appearance had to remain plain and dark.

I married a wonderful man fifty-two years ago. He came from a wealthy family and married me despite his family's disapproval. I still feel inadequate at moments. We have three beautiful children. Pregnancy was difficult for me and I miscarried two children. I had one child that was stillborn. I was in labour for three long and gruesome days. The pain was unlike anything I had ever experienced and I wanted to shout, "My God! My God!

Why hast thou forsaken me?" Because of this birth, perhaps improperly handled by the doctor, I ruined disks in my lower spine. For the rest of my life I have worn a back brace. At the age of 45, the doctor told me that he thought I should have a hysterectomy. He assured me it would be a routine surgery. Something went wrong during surgery and I almost died. I was in the hospital for several months.

My husband became ordained as a deacon when he was 37 years old in the Markham Mennonite Church—that was



Lizzy's rose bush.

thirty-nine years ago. I knew my husband felt God's call, but how was this going to change my life? How would this affect my children? How would this ordination affect their relationship with their father? Was I going to like sharing my husband with the church? Could I handle seeing my husband struggle as he tries to deal with conflict in the church and with persons within the church? I sometimes wonder if my husband had not been called to church ministry, and particularly at such a young age, if my children would still attend this church. Maybe they would have left anyway. I had to sit with all the ordained men's wives. I had to entertain people from the States. I had to go to all the ordinations and many funerals—all long services. I felt I had to be and live the way I thought I should live as a deacon's wife. I always worried about what people thought and would think.

Later in life my daughter and her husband left the church. I really struggled with that. And then my daughter wanted to cut her hair. Did she not know that was

wrong? How could I have failed in my teaching so? She came to see me and we talked all afternoon and I have decided to accept her and her family nevertheless. Family has always been important to me and I will not let this separate us. Two years later, my daughter's husband died unexpectedly. She needed me—we all hurt so deeply. How could hair, patterned clothes, shorts, pants, radios, etc. keep me from ministering to someone in need? I decided then that relationships were far more important than any external objects I didn't agree with. People matter and I want to do all I can for them. This decision has caused my husband and me to struggle, however, as we see our granddaughter go into the ministry. We were not brought up that way. I do not believe it is biblical. Still, I am fulfilled when I can meet the needs of others, so I continue to love my granddaughter.

I also find pleasure in my talents. The garden is just a beautiful place to be in the Summer. The sun shines, the birds sing and the flowers are in full bloom. My clothes may be plain, my husband may be head over me and many times I am not able to express who I really am. I cannot express my own beauty. But you know, I find beauty in my roses and in my glads. I raise beautiful roses, one bush has lasted twenty years and another over fifty years. My quilts are neatly quilted, with care in sewing and colour in the design. When I give my roses or sell my glads or when I present my grandchildren with my quilts, see the joy and take in their smiles, I know then that I have expressed my creative and beautiful self. I have shared my beauty, for my roses and the quilts are truly a part of me.

What has kept me going all these years? My faith in God—a simple faith that someday God will take me home and all my pain will cease. I know heaven will have my roses.

Shirley Martin is preparing for pastoral ministry. This story was prepared while she was serving as pastoral intern at First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, ON.

Let Me Introduce You to Barbara Sherk...

by Carol Penner

Where does our theology come from? As a student of theology this is something which occupies much of my time. It's a difficult question. It comes from our own relationship with God, from the teachers we have, from the Bible, from our parents, from our tradition, from our culture...the list goes on and on. Without a doubt, though, we can't understand what we think about God without understanding what people have thought before us.

As a Mennonite woman, I am interested in the lives of other Mennonite women, and the ideas which their lives produced. Yet studying this can be a big challenge since the history of Mennonite women is only beginning to be written, and the ideas of these women are even more elusive. Many Mennonite women were not literate and could not leave written records of their ideas. Other Mennonite women did write, but their writings were not published, or their papers were not preserved. Yet some theological writings by Mennonite women are available to us, and it's important to listen to what these voices were saying. I begin the journey to meet these women, these voices from the past, admitting my own agenda; how was their theological understanding shaped by their experiences of being women? What questions were Mennonite women struggling with in their time?

This article is the record of my journey into the past to encounter one Ontario Mennonite woman—her name was Barbara Sherk. I owe my acquaintance with her to Reg Good who came across her articles in copies of *The Herald of Truth* from the 1890's. He introduced me to her by showing me a manila folder overflowing with articles which he had photocopied, as well as some photocopied letters which he had come across; I couldn't wait to meet her!

I remember reading her articles for the first time with a growing sense of disappointment. They were filled with flowery religious language and the stock



Barbara Sherk (far left) with her sister, Elizabeth Sherk Gingerich (to her immediate right), her brother-in-law, Jacob Gingerich (seated at centre) and other relatives.

phrases of theological fundamentalism. The articles seemed so ordinary, so generic—as if anyone could have written them. I had hoped to encounter a personality in these writings, and what I seemed to be encountering was a stereotype of devotional literature. My questions about the connection between her theology and her life as a woman seemed unanswerable. There were practically no references which might contextualize her ideas—the articles contained practically no mention of specific people, books, historical events or personal encounters.

After some thought I realized that my expectations had been unrealistic. They had probably been shaped by my earlier research into Nellie McClung, another Canadian woman who was a contemporary of Sherk. McClung wrote novels and social commentary, all of which were peppered with her theological observations. Sherk, on the other hand, was writing in another genre entirely. That genre could be termed devotional literature—its subject was the spiritual life of Christians. The subtitle of *The Herald of Truth* which published Sherk's articles, stated that it was a "Religious Semi-Monthly paper devoted to

exposition of Gospel Truth and the Promotion of Practical Piety.” Sherk contributed to this promotion of piety through her regular submissions to this periodical.

Having accepted that Sherk’s writings would not explicitly link her experiences as a woman and her faith, I began the more specifically historical task of finding out the facts about her life. Who was this Barbara Sherk? This was the first step to understanding some of those articles that I had read.

Unfortunately Barbara Sherk seems to have escaped the attention of Mennonite scholars, and so I was unable to locate any specific historical research about her life. Luckily, she happened to be the daughter of a prominent Ontario minister who has received some attention from historians. Barbara was one of the ten children of Rev. David Sherk, a Mennonite preacher at Preston, Ontario, and of his wife Elizabeth Betzner. Barbara was born on October 31, 1847 and died September 24, 1920, shortly before her 73rd birthday.

Information about David Sherk is available in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*. He is described there as being “one of the leading ministers of the Ontario Mennonite (MC) Conference.” It states that he was the author of a book entitled *Nonconformity to the World*, which was published in 1882. He was also a contributor to *The Herald of Truth*. So Barbara Sherk grew up in a household where church work played an important role and writing was a way of communicating the gospel.

Like most other Mennonite women of her time, there is no indication that Barbara Sherk received any formal education beyond grade school. Elizabeth Betzner Sherk’s 1894 obituary states that her daughter, Barbara, was living at home with her in Breslau; Barbara would have been 47 years old by that time.¹ She apparently never married.

When Reg Good gave me the file of articles which Sherk had written, he also had several letters written by her which he had come across in collections of prominent Mennonite men, namely J.S. Coffman and John F. Funk. The first series of letters addressed to Coffman provide interesting details about Sherk’s life. They are written on stationery from the Chicago Home Mission, one of the first city outreaches of the Mennonite church. Founded in 1893 on the south edge of Chicago’s downtown, this mission ran a number of different programs for the poor and disadvantaged of the area. Theron Schlabach comments that the backbone of its staff were several young women.² From the letters, it is apparent that

Sherk worked there from as early as Christmas 1894 until August of 1895. The starting date would have been shortly after the death of Sherk’s mother.

Interestingly, a list of workers included in a history of the Chicago Mission does not list Barbara Sherk. It does, however, name a Barbara Shantz of Canada as a worker in 1894.³ A Barbara Shantz may indeed have worked there and the omission of Sherk’s name was an oversight, or if oral history played a role in the research, it may have been that Sherk’s name was slightly misremembered.

How did Barbara Sherk become involved in the mission? J.S. Coffman is undoubtedly the link. Her letters to him suggest that he was a type of mentor for her. This is not unusual, for through his revival meetings in the Mennonite church he had influenced many young people. Coffman had spoken in the Waterloo area as early as 1882, and was invited to hold evangelistic meetings many times in that area.⁴ One of Sherk’s letters suggests that her acquaintance with Coffman began as early as 1892.⁵ He preached extensively about the importance of service for all Christians. Sherk’s choice of the Chicago Mission may have been due to the fact that the superintendent of the Chicago Mission was S.F. Coffman, the son of J.S. Coffman.

Sherk’s letters to J. S. Coffman reveal that she enjoyed the work at the mission, and felt that she was becoming more adept at it. The mission closed temporarily in August of 1895, and this probably prompted her return to Ontario.⁶ Her decision to leave the Mission permanently may have been influenced by finances, as workers were expected to pay their own expenses, or to solicit support from their home congregations and conferences. Indeed in one letter she asks Coffman whether he could solicit funds for her in Waterloo County.⁷ The tone of subsequent letters suggest that no funds were forthcoming. This did not seem to surprise Sherk, as she comments that Canadians were hesitant to send their charitable givings south of the border.⁸ She writes that she is confident that God will provide her with an opportunity to continue working with missions, whether in Chicago or at home.

In her last surviving letter to Coffman from Berlin (Ontario) in 1898 she states that her brother Isaac with whom she was living had had a conversion experience, and she felt that it was her task to guide him; “I see I have a work before me that is to try and lead my Bro.[sic] He seems just like a little child that is just learning to walk... I am willing to fulfil my Mission work no matter how obscure or insignificant it should be.”⁹

In a number of letters to Coffman from Chicago she had written of her hopes to help establish an Orphans Home in Kitchener, and some correspondence suggests that this dream was realized in some measure.¹⁰ She also became involved with the temperance movement. These apparently became her outlets for service, along with the writings which began to appear regularly in *The Herald of Truth* at this time.

The letters which have been preserved in the collections of men’s papers provide valuable insights not only into the facts about Sherk’s life but also into her character. She shines through as a decidedly strong-minded person, willing to say exactly what she thought. Indeed, this is how she describes herself in one of her letters to Coffman; “I know I am altogether too decided in my views, and too pointed in my expressions as regards true Christian principals, for Miss Robbins,[a co-worker at the Mission] and I doubt not for a good many others, even some of my own Church members, but it is my nature to be so, in important matters.” In this same letter, however she observes that “I have, I am thankful to say it (though not boastingly) the confidence of a good many of the Bro [sic] & sisters at home.”¹¹

Although much of her extant writings stem from the months of her service in Chicago and the years shortly following, from what can be gathered Sherk’s life was quiet and relatively uneventful. She spent it mostly in the home sphere, probably in taking care of her elderly mother and subsequently keeping house for her brother. What is unusual about her life was her proclivity in writing and the initiative she took in submitting articles to *The Herald of Truth*. This decision would have been made easier by her father’s relationship to the periodical, and perhaps by the fact that Lina Zook, another woman working at the mission, also was a contributor to that periodical.

One can speculate whether Sherk’s writing career began under the name and perhaps with the inspiration of ideas provided by her father. David Sherk’s papers are preserved in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. From an examination of the documents, Reg Good made the suggestion to me that Barbara may have served as a scribe for her father, as documents which he signs bear handwriting which is similar to hers. Furthermore, in one instance he refers to himself as an “unlettered man”, and a document in handwriting which is the same as his signature is written in a very awkward style. His articles and his book, however, are quite eloquently written. It may be that

Barbara Sherk was involved in the writing and not only the transcription of some of his work. In any case, her father's connection to the periodical may have played some part in her decision to seek publication of her views there.

And so I turn to her views again, knowing at least a few fragments about her life. What were the topics that occupied her mind? What were the central theological themes which she pursued? And for me the question arises, what connection did these themes have to her own life as a woman?

Her articles, which roughly span the years from 1895 - 1902, are filled with biblical references and are written in a flowery and emotional style. She addresses the readers in a personal way, exhorting her "Dear friends" to listen to the Bible's message. That message is to turn from a life of sin and follow the example of Christ. These themes are certainly present in many of the other articles in the *The Herald of Truth* and resonate with the teaching of preachers she would have heard, such as her father and J.S. Coffman.

The love of God is a reoccurring theme in her writings; she often refers to God as our Friend and Savior. Judgement is coming for the sinners and this adds urgency to the work of conversion, but her emphasis is more positive, urging her fellow Christians to be God's hands in the world. She knows that she is writing for Christians who have heard the gospel message, and thus her emphasis is that they should be doers and not just hearers of God's word. Service is something which is performed on mission fields but also at home with the smallest of tasks. The phrase "Bloom where you are planted" is one Sherk uses to describe how Christians are to live. This emphasis on service wherever you find yourself is certainly a theme which resonates in Sherk's life. She followed the call to service in Chicago, however she viewed her work at home taking care of her brother as service for God as well.

One article encourages Christians to follow God's call to service and warns that they should not wait for the church to get around to understanding that call. She advises churches not to be suspicious of people who claim to be following God. These remarks likely stem from her personal experience of hearing the call of God to serve in Chicago, yet not receiving financial support from the church to continue that work. While she does not frame this concern in a gendered way, certainly the facts were that women's public participation in ministry was viewed with skepticism at that time.

Sherk's writings rarely address the issue of gender although her writing uses

inclusive language at times, for example when she speak of Christians beings "priests and priestesses". Her writing is very biblically based, and interestingly I found that she often focussed on the stories of biblical women: "We may not all be preachers or teachers or missionaries to foreign countries, or do some some great deeds to win the applause of men; but we can all at least, like this Mary of Bethany with her alabaster box of ointment, shed around us, by our conversation, our influence, and by deeds of kindness, the sweet fragrance of a Savior's love."¹² She also speaks of Mary the mother of Jesus, and of the woman with the flow of blood and she emphasizes several times that the first witnesses to the resurrection were women. This appropriation of women's stories in the bible is certainly significant and not likely something which she could adapt from writings of Mennonite men. Perhaps she was reading the work of feminists of the time who were certainly exploring this angle of biblical literature (Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* was published in 1898), or it may be that she was just naturally attracted to those biblical stories.

Occasionally she does address her female readers in particular. In one article she states that women are the natural preservers of values because the home-life they lead is shielded from the many dangers to which men are exposed. Rather than remaining sheltered and ignorant, she urges women to "...study the moral, social, and religious questions of your day until you have convictions concerning them."¹³ Another article suggests that women have a particular mission to reach out to their sisters. These comments certainly reflect the reality of Sherk's life as a woman; she was very opinionated and not afraid of taking a stand on issues, and during her time in Chicago her service was likely aimed at reaching women.

There are not many theological references in her writing which could be seen as exclusively Mennonite. She refers to "pure and nonresistant gospel truths" but does not elaborate on what she means by nonresistant. She does refer to a number of points to the issue of plain dress, suggesting that this separates Mennonites from the other "rich" Christians who aren't helping the poor. Sherk appears to have no contention with the issue of plain dress.

In conclusion, I feel that I have met Barbara Sherk, at least in a limited way. I admire this woman who spoke her mind and who showed initiative in writing articles. Through circumstances such as her being the daughter of a prominent minister, and through her meeting and maintaining a

correspondence with some prominent Mennonite men, we know some details about her life and have access to some of her private papers. These circumstances combine to provide a framework, albeit scanty, for understanding her ideas. Further work which would contrast her writing with the writings of other Mennonite women of the time would also help to distinguish what made Sherk unique. I look forward to meeting Sherk's contemporaries!

¹ "Death of (Rev.) Mrs. David Sherk," *Daily Record*, 27 August 1894, p.1.

² Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth Century America* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1988), p.303.

³ Harry F. Weber, *Centennial History of the Mennonites of Illinois 1829-1929* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Publishing House, 1931), p.290.

⁴ E. Reginald Good, Frontier Community to Urban Congregation: *First Mennonite Church, Kitchener 1913-1988* (Kitchener, Ontario: First Mennonite Church, 1988) p.99.

⁵ Barbara Sherk to J.S. Coffman, 17 October 1898, Mennonite Archives of Ontario (MAO), First Mennonite Church Collection, III-12.1.14.16. This file contains material on Sherk collected by Reg Good in the course of researching his history of First Mennonite Church, cited above.

⁶ Sharon L. Klingelsmith, "Mennonite Women in Mission: The Chicago Home Mission," *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* 40 (January, 1979) 1, p.1.

⁷ Barbara Sherk to J.S. Coffman, 18 July 1895, MAO, First Mennonite Church Collection, III-12.1.14.16.

⁸ Barbara Sherk to J.S. Coffman, 24 February 1895, MAO, First Mennonite Church Collection, III-12.1.14.16

⁹ Barbara Sherk to J.S. Coffman, 17 October 1898, MAO, First Mennonite Church Collection, III-12.1.14.16.

¹⁰ Barbara Sherk to A.B. Kolb, 20 November 1899, MAO, First Mennonite Church Collection, III-12.1.14.16.

¹¹ Barbara Sherk to J.S. Coffman, 24 February 1895, MAO, First Mennonite Church Collection, III-12.1.14.16.

¹² Barbara Sherk, "She Hath Done What She Could," *Herald of Truth*, 1899, p.107.

¹³ Barbara Sherk, "Show Your Colors," *Herald of Truth*, 1895, p.3.

Carol Penner is a doctoral student in theology at the Toronto School of Theology.

People and Projects

Pamela Klassen was the 1992 recipient of **The Graduate Gold Medal for Master of Arts at Wilfrid Laurier University** in Waterloo. She received the award at the Fall convocation on 25 October 1992 for her thesis "**Going by the Moon and the Stars: Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women.**" Klassen is now studying at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, where she is writing a dissertation on the experience of ritual in Canadian Mennonite women's lives. She is a participant in the Canada/U.S. Fulbright exchange program.

Hildi Froese Tiessen, Vice-President Academic of Conrad Grebel College, would like to correspond with descendants of **Ephraim Weber**, author and correspondent with Lucy Maud Montgomery. Address information to Froese Tiessen at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, ON, N2L 3G6.

Marlene Epp is researching the migration experience of Mennonite women from Russia post-WWII for her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Toronto. The working title of her dissertation is "**Women Without Men: Mennonite Immigrants to Canada 1945-60.**" If women are open to sharing their stories with Epp, contact her at 115 Pheasant Ave., Cambridge, ON, N3H 2L8.

World War II-era personal letters, diaries and memorabilia are being solicited by the Mennonite Archives of Ontario (Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, ON, N2L 3G6). An effort is being made to gather material relating to Alternative Service Camps and Mennonite Central Committee relief work. Copies of the **Women's Activities Letter** published by Mennonite Central Committee, Canadian Headquarters, would also be appreciated.

Elizabeth Bloomfield of Guelph has been engaged by the Waterloo Historical Society to research and write a history of Waterloo Township during 1993 and 1994. As part of the project, they are making an inventory of surviving records and papers of Waterloo Township and its families and organizations. They seek information about any aspect of Waterloo Township between 1800, when the first Pennsylvania Mennonite settlers moved on to the land, and 1972 when the Township was dissolved. Of particular interest to them are the personal recollections and records of people who

lived or worked in the Township in the twentieth century. If you would like to share your personal knowledge of Waterloo Township before 1972, please contact Dr. Bloomfield, 16 Caribou Cr., Guelph, ON, N1E 1C9.

Trÿntje Miller, library clerk at Conrad Grebel College, is researching **Mennonite cookbooks** for the valuable historical and cultural information they contain. She would like to examine manuscript cookbooks from any era, in private or public hands. She can be contacted at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, ON, N2L 3G6.

The Association for Manitoba Archives has co-ordinated the microfilming of some 10,000 **Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization** registration forms. The microfilming was done at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba with funding from the Canadian Council of Archives. There are 20 rolls for the 1920s immigration and 16 rolls for the post-WW II immigration. The microfilm is available for purchase at \$15.20 per reel.

Peter Lorenz Neufeld is writing a book-length manuscript about **Canadian Mennonite WW II veterans**. He would like to correspond with Canadian Mennonite war veterans or others who have information to share about their experiences. He can be reached at 1004-1080 Henderson Highway, Winnipeg, MB R2G 1H3.

Gloria Neufeld Redekop successfully defending her doctoral dissertation, "**Mennonite Women's Societies in Canada: An Historical Case Study,**" in May at the University of Ottawa. She is preparing the work for publication.

The Mennonite Archives of Ontario has obtained a complete set of "**The Voluntary Prayer Link,**" a mimeographed sheet of prayer concerns prepared and distributed monthly by L.J. Burkholder between November 1935 and July 1940. There were 325 persons on the subscription list in 1937.

The 1993 winners of the Ontario Mennonite Historical Society's **J. Winfield Fretz Award** for studies in Ontario Mennonite history at the undergraduate/local history level are Krista Taves (first place), Loralyn Smith (second place) and Karen Baird (honorable mention). **Krista Taves**, University of Waterloo, wrote about "The Reunification of Russian Mennonites

in Post-World War II Canada," using the Leamington, Ontario community as a case study. **Loralyn Smith**, Conrad Grebel College, wrote a biography of Ruth Nighswander Smith, focusing on Smith's experiences as a member of the Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference in the Markham district. **Karen Baird**, Conrad Grebel College, conducted "An Examination of Mennonite Aid to Refugees in the Kitchener-Waterloo Area from 1979-1992." The **J. Winfield Fretz Award** is available at three levels, but there were no application at the graduate and high school levels this year. The annual deadline is May 31. Address submissions to the Editor, **Ontario Mennonite History**, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo ON, N2L 3G6.

John Ruth will be the guest speaker at the Fall meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, in the Great Hall at Conrad Grebel College, on 6 November. He will discuss his research on a forthcoming book about Mennonites in Lancaster County.

The administrative committee of the **Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund** invites applications for study/work projects which further Epp's vision for mission in Canada and the world. The committee annually distributes about \$2500. to support projects dealing with history, peacemaking (particularly in the Middle East), Mennonite ecumenicity and the Christian faith. Preference is given to Mennonite and Brethren in Christ persons studying or working in Canada. Application forms are available from: The Administrative Committee, Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6. All applications should be received by the Administrative Committee by 15 November 1993. The award will be announced in February 1994.

An historical conference, **Tradition and Transition: An Amish Mennonite Heritage of Obedience, 1693-1993**, will be held 14-16 October 1993 at the Mennonite Heritage Center, Illinois Mennonite Historical and Genealogical Society, Post Office Box 819, Metamora, Ill 61548. Lorraine Roth will discuss "**The Amish in Ontario: Many Strands and Common Vision.**"

Jan Wiebe Neufeldt has completed a study of "**Spiritual Abuse: Stories from Women in the Mennonite Church.**" The research was conducted in Ontario under the auspices of Wilfrid Laurier University.

Book Review

by Doris Gascho

Roth, Lorraine. *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women*. Waterloo, ON: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario with Women's Missionary and Service Commission of Eastern Canada, 1992, 275 pp., \$18.00.

The provision of willing service by Mennonite women often meant daunting challenge and personal fulfillment in largely unrecognized and supportive roles. While each story stands on its own, a number of the stories interplay as relatives and women from the same community worked together. Roth has grouped the stories of WMSC leaders, missionaries, ministers and deacon's wives, and Sunday School teachers. She concludes with women's contributions in relief efforts related to World War II and women practicing midwifery, early institutional care of the elderly, teaching, writing, and encouraging. A picture and a brief sketch introduces each story, and each concludes with careful documentation of research.

My first glance at the front and back covers, with the collage of faces took me one step back into my growing-up years, for I recognized a number of these women as part of my own story. I read expressions I had not heard for many years, "fresh air

children," "the Toronto Mission," "sewing for relief," "golden text," the Sunday School "sand table" (not where a child played, but for illustrating the teacher's story!).

The accumulated impact of the stories are of women who chose fulfillment whether through hard physical labour (doing barn work and canning hundreds of jars of preserves, as well as raising a family), in stretching meagre resources to unusual lengths (making worn dresses into jumpers, or ripping apart coats, turning them inside out and making them into wearable coats), offering hospitality often on a Sunday to 10-15 extra guests (sometimes warning family "to take only one piece of sausage"); or managing their children, farm, household, garden, and absentee preacher-husband's pastoral-care, teaching hundreds of children in Summer Bible School, children's clubs, and Sunday School.

The portraits are of women who developed leadership skills through WMSC, through gradually moving through the ranks of an institution, rarely to the top position, since that was usually offered to a man. The relationship of the Toronto mission and Toronto Bible College becomes apparent: young women leaving

the farm are permitted to go to live in the city (serving as apprentices at the mission) while studying at Toronto Bible College to become missionaries in India, South America, or Africa.

Roth has captured well the spirit of the times in the tensions between dress codes (bonnet, covering and cape dress) and the resulting church split from First Mennonite of the Stirling congregation; the women of the two congregations continuing to work together until the leaders (men) discourage that. One feels the yearning of women wishing to continue their education but staying at home caring for an aging parent; women whose "altar and pulpit is their sewing machine." One finds glimpses of transients being fed and housed, orphans raised by single women, couples raising children on the same allowance as single mission workers, practices such as "charming," herbal medicines, alongside of "dorta" and "stremma" pie. Refugees are housed, clothed and fed, and children given the values of their parents. I recommend Roth's book for its honest picture of Mennonite women and their time.

Doris Gascho is pastor at Shantz Mennonite Church, Baden.

Book Notes

The Drudge Family Publication Committee compiled *Drudge Family History: Uriah Drudge Family Genealogy, Other Drudge Family Lines, from John Drudge, 1774 Emigrant to Canada to the Present* ([Markham, ON: Drudge Family History, 1992), 64 pp. Available from J.M. Nighswander, R.R.#3 Stouffville, ON L4A 7X4.

Ben W. and Susie Sawatsky, authors of a joint autobiography *Our Journey By Faith* (Winnipeg, MB: privately printed, 1992), 255 pp. describe their ministry in the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) church. Ben's father, Abram, was founding bishop of the *Rudnerweider Gemeinde*, predecessor of the EMMC. Ben was founding principle of the Aylmer Bible School in Aylmer, ON.

Hermann Guth, compiler of *Amische Mennoniten in Deutschland: Ihre Gemeinden, ihre Höfe, ihre Familien* (Saarbrücken, Germany: 1992), 202 pp. plus

appendices, provides an overview of Amish Mennonite history and genealogy in Germany, 1693-1993. Available from Gary Waltner, Mennonitische Buchversand, D-6719 Weierhof, Post Marnheim, Germany.

Nick G. Forte, compiler of *A Guide to the Collections of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1992), 695 pp. lists the photographic, manuscript, and related collections of the MHSO, most of which are housed in the Archives of Ontario. There are 214 entries under Mennonites, as an ethnic group, and scattered Mennonite entries under Germans. Most of the entries are oral history interviews. The entry "Conrad Grebel Project Waterloo, Ont." consists of 29 reels of microfilm. There is a separate finding aid for this entry.

Velina Bauman and Melinda Martin, compilers of *Family Tree of Uriah Buehler, Leah Brubacher, Mary (Kilmer) Brubacher*

and a sketch of Abraham Buehler and Julian Beaty (n.p.: privately printed, 1992), 43 pp. trace the descendents of Uriah Buehler. It should be used in conjunction with William A. Schmidt's *Julian Beaty and Abraham Z. Buehler: A Record of their Descendents* (Waterloo: privately printed, 1988).

D. Douglas and Anne Eby Millar, editors of *Of Such is the Kingdom: A Pictorial History of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church* (Kitchener: the editors, 1993), 177 pp. tell the story of the Stirling Avenue congregation with carefully selected photographs, arranged thematically and captioned appropriately. Indexed. Available from the church or the Conrad Grebel College Archives.

Mennonite Women 1994 Calendar. (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1993), n.p. includes historic photographs and an introductory essay by Phyllis Pellman Good.