

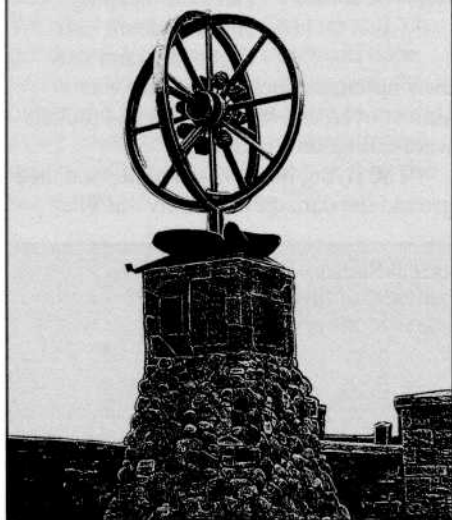
# Ontario Mennonite History

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## Edna Hunsperger Bowman

by Marcus Shantz



*Fifteen month-old twins, playing in a packing crate/crib/playpen, at the London MCC Centre.*

Most mornings after work, Nurse Edna Hunsperger went straight to bed – night duty nursing is a tiring job. The morning of September 1, 1939 was unlike any other. Global events made it strange and unusual. That day, instead of going to bed, she sat up listening to the radio until she heard the announcement, “CANADA IS AT WAR.” Disturbing news.

It wasn't long before some of Edna's friends at the hospital were preparing to go to war. Obviously, soldiers, sailors and pilots are injured during wartime, and the armed forces needed nurses and doctors to attend to the wounded. Young nurses like Edna were encouraged to join the medical corps and go to England. Enlisting was a patriotic thing for a young nurse to do – many of them felt it was their duty to contribute to the war effort by helping sick and wounded soldiers. Edna felt much pressure to enlist. She wanted to help people – that's why she became a nurse – but she didn't want to join the military. As a conscientious objector, she couldn't: “I certainly didn't feel comfortable joining the forces – [I'd] be a part of the war machine... Other nurses were signing up and I was thinking to myself that I would have some mud thrown at me for not doing anything because I knew they would not understand the conscientious objector point of view.”

In the spring of 1940, Edna was encouraged to enlist in a different sort of “force”, the Mennonite Central Committee. “I received a postcard from

Ohio, from C.F. Derstine, saying ‘MCC would like to send two nurses to England, would you consider this assignment’...I had to give it some thought and I decided that I could do it....” It was a dangerous decision. Edna remembered how people reacted: “...They thought it was very dangerous. They read in the paper that these bombs were flying all over and it was very dangerous. It seemed as though all they thought about was the danger... I guess they respected me too, though. Most people thought, ‘well, they need nurses, so somebody has to go.’ ”

### Sailing into War

Edna began preparing for the assignment immediately but she had to wait almost a year before the government gave her permission to leave. When her exit permit finally came through, she packed her things and boarded a train for an MCC meeting in Chicago. There she met the second nurse, Elfrieda Klassen, and MCC Director Orie Miller. Together, they travelled to the MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania. After two weeks of orientation there, they drove to New York, and she and Elfrieda set sail for England.

“We sailed from New York up to Halifax and there we took on some more passengers and then we went in convoy from there to Liverpool. 57 vessels in formation. It was a dangerous situation but at the time we didn't think anything much of it. We knew that we could be torpedoed,

so we slept with our clothes on for two weeks. We were instructed that if anything were to happen we were to get to the lifeboat area. We were a couple of innocent girls... When we got into Liverpool, the harbour was just full of the remains of vessels that had been damaged and it was pretty difficult for them to thread their way through that to get into the harbour. Liverpool had been very heavily bombed."

Edna and Elfrieda were given gas masks as soon as they left the boat. They had been told to take a train from Liverpool to London to meet two other MCC workers – John Coffman and Peter Dyck. They ran into problems: "We arrived in Liverpool at nine o'clock at night and we were supposed to get tickets. Well, they wouldn't give us any!" The ticket sellers wouldn't accept Edna's and Elfrieda's travellers cheques. The two would've been stuck in Liverpool but some of the sailors from their ship loaned them the money they needed. "We came to help and needed to be helped, a humbling experience!"

The two were met in London by two other MCC workers: Peter Dyck and John Coffman. From there, the four drove out into the English countryside, where Edna and Elfrieda were to work. Since British cities were being bombed regularly, children, the sick, and the elderly had been evacuated out of cities into large rural homes where they stayed in groups. "As we drove through the country, I thought, 'My goodness, they have a funny idea of how to paint things,' because the factories were all painted blotchy green and yellow – camouflage ... all road signs had been removed. Peter needed all his sense of direction to get us to Abergele, N. Wales, where Frieda was to begin work in a home for infants."



*The Woodlands - a V.I.P residence commandeered by government for use as a nursing home or evacuee home.*

### The Woodlands

Edna worked temporarily for two months before she was given a long term nursing job at "The Woodlands", an evacuation home for the aged run by the Quakers.

"They took in thirty-six evacuees and they were from the Midlands and Coventry and Birmingham. It was a beautiful old residence and the grounds were just beautiful. There were hedges everywhere and a big rose garden and a big vegetable garden. When you came in the front entrance, it was all oak paneling. These old people, they found it very nice to live in a place like this."

Edna had a hard time understanding the British sometimes; their accents and customs were odd to her. "Some of them were quite elderly folks. We had one lady, ha! A real snob, she was from London, she didn't mix with these Midlanders... We had a lad on staff that was really difficult to understand. I couldn't understand him. He talked too

fast! He had a British Black Country accent. He wanted to be so helpful to me, a Canadian, and he could sense that I didn't understand him, and every once in a while he'd say, 'Youfollowme? Youfollowme? Goodness, I was miles behind!'"

Meanwhile, bombs kept falling on England. "Up there at the Woodlands, it was fifteen miles from Birmingham... In 1942, the incendiary bombing was pretty well over, but when I worked up there, there were still a few incendiary bombs... We had to have fire watch all the time; somebody had to be on duty every night to watch – keep your eyes and ears open and know where buckets of water were in case an incendiary dropped on your roof."

### Safe Children and Flying Bombs

After eighteen months at the Woodlands, Edna moved to the MCC Centre in London; a three story house that served as a MCC's office headquarters, a clothing depot, and a children's home:

"The war had been going on so long that these kids had never seen the moon

and stars – you didn't turn on the lights at night before you drew the blackout curtains... We always had enough to eat; one thing I missed very much was milk. I grew up on a farm, where there was always milk. In wartime, our milk was rationed to five cups per person a week. Well, that was just enough for your porridge and your tea."

At night, the bomb sirens would wail and Edna and the other workers would have to carry the sleeping children down two flights of stairs into

their basement shelter. The war was almost over, and buzz bombs and rockets were falling on London.

"The flying bombs, when they touched ground the damage would fly up. The



*Convalescent children leaving MCC London for the country.*

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*V.E. Day party at the London MCC Centre. Mabel Cressman, another Waterloo County MCC volunteer, is at the head of the table with a peace dove in her lapel.*

rockets were something else again; they went down, and they left a crater that you could put two double-decker buses in. We had one of the rockets drop within a mile of our place and we had quite a bit of glass damage and plaster falling..."

By this time, Edna had developed a great fondness for the British, and she admired their spirit during the constant bombings. "I don't think our people could take it the way the English did. We're much too impatient; they're more patient. Those people would drag their bedding to the Underground (subway) stations every night and sleep on it so they'd be safe. The trains would come through and the platform wasn't swept clean or anything and as soon as the train came through there'd be a cloud of dust and these people would wake up in the morning with black all around their mouth and nose from all the dust they'd been inhaling. But they were patient.

"Where the Cockneys lived, in East London, they had such damage. One of the girls and I went down to help clean up one time, so they assigned us a certain home... We went in and tried to clean up and, oh, goodness! You open the cupboard door and here was glass all mixed in with the butter and jam... We cleaned up as much as we could and some local came in and said, 'Don't bother with that, it'll be the same tomorrow morning.'"

#### **Serve where you're needed**

Edna served in England for three years and eight months, until the war ended. She returned home with an English accent. Today she's an old woman. Looking back, she's thankful for her experience, for her chance to serve. She told me her story quietly and steadily; I felt a humble strength in her

words. I asked her if she'd do the same thing again, knowing what she knows now. She said, "It would depend a lot on the total picture of course, but if I could see that it was something where I could make a contribution that is in line with my guiding principles I think I would be willing to. If I've been trained to nurse and there's a need... Today, of course I know that there are great needs in our own country." I asked her what she hoped I could learn from her story and she said, "Well, I would hope that you get your basic principles of life from the Scriptures, that you don't necessarily get carried away with what everybody else is doing, but ask, 'Is this what I, as a Christian, should be doing?'"

Edna's story is pretty straightforward; it doesn't have any big crises of conscience or complicated moral problems attached to it. Peacemaking was and is a simple thing for Edna: – you serve others where you are most needed. For me, her story raises one simple question which I will, no doubt, be trying to answer for the rest of my life: "How can I work for peace?"

*Marcus Shantz graduated in May, 1995 from the University of Waterloo with a Bachelor of Arts. He is currently working with Mennonite World Conference in Strassburg, France.*

*This article is reprinted with permission from an MCC Ontario resource packet on Mennonite peacemaking during WW II, **Looking for Peace: Three Mennonites Remember** (Kitchener, ON: MCC Ontario and Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, 1992).*

# **My Pilgrimage with the Markham-Waterloo Church and Mennonite Central Committee**

by Marvin Frey

## **Introduction**

When a long-time MCC colleague of mine was asked what qualified him to work in Africa, he answered, "I grew up Amish". My answer would be similar. Growing up in a conservative Mennonite community does provide a unique environment in which to understand ethnicity and to experience how the various ethnic communities interact with each other. I clearly remember listening to my parents describe what happened at a "Catholic" funeral for a neighbour – it confirmed in my mind that I was different. I was a Mennonite, of the black car variety.

## **Growing up in St. Jacobs**

Born on May 10, 1949, my earliest memories of growing up come in the mid fifties. We lived in the north end of St. Jacobs. Back then, there were three grocery stores in town – Bauman's, Derbecker's and Cotie's. The variety store was owned by "Candy Amos" on the south side of town. Ice cream cones were 5¢ for a single scoop, 10¢ for a double. There was a farmer's shed and a black smith shop. Watching Jon Martin shoe horses was very exciting. Why did those huge horses put up with such a little man?

The two homes immediately to the south of our home, were occupied by German families. The same for the home immediately to the east. To the north, lived families of non-German descent such as the MacPhersens, Hellers and Ritters. I have often pondered the fact that when I was six years old, the Second World War had only ended ten years earlier, yet here we were living in a neighbourhood that had ex-soldiers that had fought both sides of the war, but try as I might, I cannot recall any hint that we viewed the two communities differently. I suspect we did not completely identify with either of the groups as we were Markham-Waterloo Mennonites that did not participate in war.

I have seven siblings, three brothers and four sisters. My parents are Martin and Selinda Frey. My father is the son of



*Markham-Waterloo church service at Martin's meetinghouse, Waterloo, in 1960.*

Christian and Lydia Frey (Wallenstein). My mother was a daughter of Simeon (Henkle Simeon) and Susanne Martin. A year before I was born, my father, having taken over my grandfather's hatchery, built a new hatchery next to our house.

My first language was Pennsylvania Dutch but since I was the fifth child in the family, I knew English fairly well before going to school. Because the St. Jacobs school had built two additional classrooms before I started school, grades one and two had separate classrooms and the remaining classrooms had two grades each.

Our home was always a gathering point for neighbourhood children since we were not allowed to go "to town" in the evening. This meant the hockey, baseball and football games were played in our yard. One of the regulars, Darryl Sittler, went on to join the Toronto Maple Leafs.

### **The Markham-Waterloo church**

The Markham-Waterloo church had its beginnings in a split with the Old Order church in the late 30's, primarily about the use of cars. The Old Order did not (and does not) allow cars. But the Old Order and the Markham-Waterloo continue to share similar theologies and church practises due to a shared language, shared "meetinghouses" and extended families with members in both church communities. It is not really possible to describe what growing up in this church meant because church cannot easily be separated from the rest of life. I wore "bib

overalls", spoke Pennsylvania Dutch, there was no TV or radio in the home, and the family went to church very regularly. We only missed church because we were sick, and the day a brake line broke on our '47 Chevy.

At about fifteen years of age, the youth of the church make a shift that would be roughly the equivalent of "joining young peoples". I sat in a different section of the church (behind the young boys) and started wearing a hat to church rather than a cap. And we started attending church sponsored social events. The most regular of these was the Sunday evening "singing" but there was also an occasional mid-week social, known as "party" and baseball in the summertime and hockey in the winter. I was a member of the first "Markham" hockey team that played in the Northern Church league. Because I was not a baptised church member, I was allowed to play. Baptised church members were not allowed to play although several did for a few seasons which brought them into conflict with the church leaders.

The strongest aspects of church for me was the socializing within my age group. We were expected to socialize with our age group within the church and being a male, I was given access to a car to make this possible. I can remember spending many Sunday afternoons in Elmira, cruising the main drag or sitting around visiting.

At about the age of eighteen, we were expected to become church members. It

was at that time that I decided to make a church switch and after attending several other churches, my friends and I started attending Hawkesville Mennonite church, just west of St. Jacobs.

### **Factors that steered me towards MCC**

It was at Hawkesville that I decided to formalize my commitment to Christ, through baptism. As I reflect back, while this was a significant event, I see it was more as a beginning of a formal association with a Christian community than a radical shift of priorities. Having grown up in a Christian environment, baptism and joining the church are logical choices within an existing Christian community rather than a radical change from a pre-baptised state.

Higher education was not encouraged in the Markham-Waterloo church and therefore when I completed grade ten, I left school despite getting the highest grade in the class (the technical education stream). I would probably have been allowed to continue if I had insisted but I was only too eager to leave school and fit in with my friends, all of whom were working on farms or driving truck (the latter being the choice occupation).

Therefore, I started working for my uncle "Mose" as an apprentice mechanic, repairing cars. I enjoyed the challenges of learning how to diagnose malfunctioning cars. I remember with pride, discovering how to remove the head rests from the 1969 Ford (the first car to have them), after the Ford Motor Company said they could not be removed. (Head rests were seen as unnecessary to most customers back then.)

Expectations were rather simple for me and my friends – join the church, get a job, get married, and get on with life. For what ever reason, I was just not ready to settle down to a normal Waterloo county life style, I wanted to experience life beyond St. Jacobs. And the one option available was a voluntary service (VS) assignment. So I ended up applying with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). My skills were my formal qualifications as an auto mechanic and experience as a poultry farmer/chick hatchery operator. After some time, I was asked to go to Kingston, Jamaica to teach auto mechanics at a vocational school. I knew how to fix cars, but could I teach others? I decided to try. In hindsight, I'm not sure if I ever seriously thought about not accepting the invitation. Growing up in an environment of submission to church leaders, it would have been most unusual to say no to the invitation.

## Jamaica 1981 to 1983

I was among the last of the MCC PAX participants as the PAX program was discontinued in the early '70s. A service term for Latin/Central America was 27 months to allow for three months of Spanish language study although language study was not needed for Jamaica. The assignment was based in west Kingston which was seen as the rough side of town. My students were high school drop outs, wanting to learn a practical skill. I generally enjoyed my term. I recall not knowing what a "syllabus" was and faking it until I could figure it out for myself. I was not about to admit my ignorance.

Each year, I took my students to the beach for a year-end wind up. We'd swim (I was told sharks only go after white skin), play dominos and buy fruit at every possible opportunity. These were memorable times.

Another highlight of my time in Jamaica was buying a 1942 Harley Davidson motorcycle for 20 Jamaican dollars (\$30 cnd) and fixing it up with whatever parts I could find (VW battery, Fiat timing chain, Austin pistons and coil, Triumph bearings). A fellow MCCer and I shipped our motorcycles to Miami and drove them to Kansas. Later I brought it to Ontario.

## Swaziland 1975 to 1978

After returning to Ontario in 1973, Ardith Bauman (daughter of David S. and Elizabeth Bauman) and I were married. Soon we started talking about another term of service with MCC as a way for both of us to have a shared experience. Initially, we wanted to go to Central/South America but after some dialogue with MCC we ended up being invited to a Swaziland assignment. This meant going to an atlas to find out where it was. I was to teach auto mechanics in a post secondary school setting and Ardith was to teach in a preschool. We accepted the invitation and went in October 1975. I was concerned that I might not be qualified for the assignment since I only had a grade ten education but was expected to teach theory at the community college level. Additionally the Swaziland College of Technology used a British syllabus and the British are big on theory. But fortunately my practical background equipped me to read and comprehend all the text books the college had in the automotive department. This approach of self study enabled me to teach the theoretical lessons with a solid work experience. My students did very well in their exams that were sent out from

London, England, one student getting 100%.

We left Swaziland in September 1978, after spending some time in Mozambique monitoring food shipments to the refugee camps for Zimbabweans escaping the civil war in their country. During our travel back to Canada, one of our more memorable times was spent climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. We reached the top (20,000 feet in elevation) but not without a struggle. I discovered that Ardith does better in thin air than I do.

## Canada from 1978 to 1981

We returned from Swaziland thinking we had now both experienced a service assignment together and were now ready to settle down to life in Waterloo County again. We bought a house and Eric, our first born joined us in 1979. I also had a promotion at my job. But now MCC was asking us if we would not consider a leadership assignment. We declined for most of a year but finally accepted a joint Country Representative role in Mogadishu, Somalia.

## Somalia 1981 to 1984

In the late '70s and in 1980, Somalia and Ethiopia were at war and as Somalia started losing the war, Somali refugees started flooding into Somalia. With the Indo-Chinese refugee crisis past, world attention shifted to Somalia. MCC was one of many agencies that responded.

Ardith, Eric and I lived in Mogadishu, while the other MCC workers lived in the refugee camps. The work was very challenging, relating to a government that was not about to let foreigners make too many changes. Another part of the challenge was relating to people of another religion since almost all Somali are Muslims. We worshipped with a small group of Believer's (the term Christian is not used in Somalia because in the Somali language it translates as "unbeliever"). There was also something familiar about the Muslim faith, as they have a very strong belief in submission to God and the faith community practised in the Old Order and Markham-Waterloo communities, the communities that helped shape my own faith.

## Lesotho 1984 to 1987

Because of our Southern Africa experience in Swaziland, coupled with the fact that MCC was having a hard time finding country representatives for Lesotho, we were invited to transfer. We accepted and moved in April 1984, the hottest time of the year in Mogadishu to the start of winter in Lesotho. Because of the high elevation in Lesotho, it can get very cold including snow.

In Lesotho, Ardith and I again worked as Co-country representatives for approximately 10 MCC workers, who worked mostly in teaching and community development assignments. Christopher, our second son was born in Lesotho in January 1987, eight months before we returned to Canada. About the same time we were invited to consider a joint assignment in the Winnipeg office of MCC Canada.

## Winnipeg 1988 to present

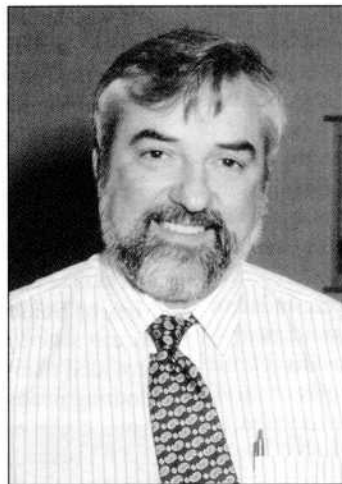
We had been to Winnipeg once before moving here on December 31, 1987. To us, this still seemed like the coldest time we ever experienced in Winnipeg. As a friend has said "the nice thing about Winnipeg weather is that with the short summers, we don't have to dread the coming of winter so long."

Soon after moving to Winnipeg, we started attending the Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite church which is affiliated with the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

One of the first lessons we had to learn was that not all Mennonites in Manitoba are "Russian Mennonites," or at least the labels we used in Waterloo County don't fit. Here they call the Mennonites that came to Canada in the 1870's, Kanadier Mennonites, some of whom stayed in Canada (like the EMC groups) or Mennonites that moved to Mexico in the 1920's. The term Russian (or Russländer) only refers to Mennonites that came to Canada in the 1920's and later. It is the latter group that I remember my

parents talking about, when they were hosted in Waterloo County homes when my parents were children.

For the first three years in Winnipeg, Ardith and I job shared, with Ardith having responsibilities for the Africa program and I worked with the refugee



Marvin Frey - Executive Director,  
Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

program. Then in 1990, I accepted the Overseas Coordinator position which led to my appointment as the Executive Director of MCC Canada beginning in January of this year.

### Summary

How does someone with a grade ten education and the formal qualifications of an auto mechanic end up in a senior administrative position with MCC? I don't have a complete answer but I am quite certain the following contributed:

1) Growing up in the Markham-Waterloo church exposed me to a way of life that does not question the service ethos. When there was a need in the community, we were expected to help, in fact it is hard to even describe it as an expectation. When a barn burned, the neighbours helped, when the corn fields were too wet to be harvested by tractor, the neighbours harvested by hand. It was just something one did, out of community and faith convictions.

2) MCC provided a setting in which I could constantly learn, whether this was learning how to teach auto mechanics or learning about political science or the sociology of communities.

As I look back over my past eighteen years with MCC, I also believe my MCC involvements have given me a greater appreciation for my upbringing in the Markham-Waterloo church and community. When I saw the Basotho concept of "Letsima" (neighbours helping each other), I was reminded of my roots. When I saw the faithful Muslim, praying and giving alms to the beggar in the street, I was reminded of the church of my youth, where helping the neighbour was a way of life. When I saw the distance between the Expatriate and local communities in Swaziland and Somalia, I was reminded of the German and English communities in St. Jacobs. When I saw the Muslim women wearing the "hijab", I was reminded of the *purpose* of conservative dress as practised by Old Order Mennonites.

I am grateful to God, my parents, and the Mennonites of Waterloo County for giving me a rich and unique setting to give shape to my world and faith perspectives. I could not have asked for more.

*Marvin Frey is Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee Canada.*

## The Mennonite Cutting Room at Kitchener: Women Active in Mennonite Central Committee Relief Programs

by Alice Koch and Lorna Bergey

The MCC Women's Activities Letter of January 1945 reported "that in 1944 Canada made two Overseas Relief shipments of new clothing to England valued at \$13,695.35. Naturally, women have carried a major part of the load connected with the Foreign Relief Clothing Program. Women can say with clothing what cannot be said with flowers, a letter, or a wire, or even with money".

Women in Ontario Mennonite congregations have a long history of willingness to sew garments for those in need. In 1895, when most articles of clothing worn by members of a family were sewn by women in a household, it is reported that groups of women met to sew garments for distribution by deacons. An entry in the 1896 diary of Barbara Bowman Shuh indicated 10 women from the Berlin (Kitchener) Mennonite congregation went to a local home to sew dresses and shirts for the children. It was common practice to arrange sewing bees to provide assistance for a mother in the congregation or community with a large family of small children to clothe.

When the Mennonite Church embarked on Mission Service in the city of Toronto in 1907, in Ontario Rural Mission Service in 1915 and in Foreign Mission Service in Argentina, South America in 1917, Ontario Mennonite women had their horizons of opportunity "to do good" extended. They accepted the challenge by organizing Sewing Circles. Sewing was done for needy families living in the vicinity of various missions and for workers at City, Rural and Foreign Mission Stations. The Amish sisters provided many of the clothing needs of the Amos Swartzentruber and Nelson Litwiller families, first missionaries from the Amish Mennonites in Ontario sent by the Mennonite Board of Missions to Argentina in 1924 and 1925 respectively.

Until World War II, sewing projects undertaken by Sewing Circles were

organized for specific needs of short duration. In the early days of World War II, Sewing Circles faced unprecedented needs for clothing and bedding. Women willingly responded to the needs but required guidance as suitable styles and materials varied in the different countries where MCC was serving. Some of the styles were not acceptable as donated.

In an effort to solve this problem the Executive of the Sewing Circles of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario purchased a cutting machine costing \$200 in 1942. Fabrics were purchased in large quantities at favourable prices and garments were cut in large numbers. This saved time and money for the local circles.

The committee negotiated the services of Barbara Eby (now Mrs. Howard Weber of Guernsey, Saskatchewan) who was working at the Amos Gingrich home north of Waterloo. Barbara operated the cutting machine every Thursday from this location, receiving two cents per cut garment as her remuneration. The services of the Cutting Room were now available to Ontario Mennonite Women's Sewing Circles.

In 1943, the second year of operation, Ida (Mrs. Menno) Snyder offered the use of a room in her farm home near Kitchener and agreed to serve as Cutting Machine Operator. She was reimbursed at the rate of 4 cents per garment, collectable when garments were purchased by a local Sewing Circle. The bundles of cut garment orders were delivered to the basement of the Golden Rule Book Store in Kitchener where the orders were picked up by

members of Sewing Circle committees. Ida's deep commitment to the work was further exemplified when she invested personal funds in materials for short periods of time in order to take advantage of sales offers, thus tiding the cutting room service over a crucial period of its history.

Until 1945 the cutting room was operated from a



*Alice Snyder examines first MCC Christmas bundles sent from Ontario Cutting Room in 1953.*

private residence. The need for a central location became evident as overseas relief service increased and more circles were using the cutting room services. Also more yardage material was required and there were no available funds. The Ontario Non-Resistant Relief Organization (NRRO) was consulted. They felt the women's relief efforts should be expanded to relieve war suffering and offered a non-interest loan to purchase material and assumed payment of the rent for a location in the city.

The Cutting Room was set up with the MCC Clothing Depot on the second floor of Kitchener Dairies on King Street East until a more accessible building at the rear of the adjacent Golden Rule Book Store was available to rent. Ill health forced Ida to retire in 1945 and her daughter Alice Snyder served as Cutting Room operator at the Clothing Depot location for three years prior to leaving in 1948 on a two year MCC assignment in South Germany.

Location of the Cutting Room in the same building as the Clothing Depot allowed Olive (Mrs. Wesley) Brubacher on an MCC assignment at the Clothing Depot in 1948 to serve as part time operator in the Cutting Room until Twilah Snider became the new full time operator from 1948 - 1951. Total sales increased significantly after locating in the city.

By 1951 the Ontario Sewing Circle Executive pondered the future operation of the Cutting Room as they worked closely with MCC, stocking the items needed for current MCC projects. Lydia Lehman, veteran missionary, was doing outstanding work as Clothing Depot Supervisor at MCC Akron following World War II. She suggested at a meeting in Ontario, "that Mennonite Women's Sewing Circles should move from sporadic attempts to meet crisis situations at home and abroad to a continuous program of sewing clothing and bedding supplies. These supplies could be stored at the MCC Clothing Depot in anticipation of an emergency".

The success of the Cutting Room operation was contingent on buying materials at wholesale prices, retailing close to cost and receiving loyal patronage from local sewing circles. A member of the Ontario executive, Ida (Mrs. Emmanuel) Bauman, served on the Cutting Room Committee. She was asked

to consult with a local dry-goods merchant regarding purchasing materials through his dealers. He offered to sell to the Cutting Room at their cost price plus 1 cent per yard for trucking. Quilt and comforter materials – flannelette yardage and wool and cotton batts were stocked. Cut garments were displayed at Workshop meetings, and informational notes of available stock were inserted in Church and Mission News and the MCC Women's Activities Letter sent to all churches.

Fern Knechtel was engaged as Cutting Room Operator and served full time until 1953. Alice Snyder who was then serving in the MCC office located at that time on the second floor of the Golden Rule Bookstore, became part time Operator of the Cutting Room. She purchased boys' shirts and girls' dresses for the Christmas bundle project. This was a first for all Cutting Rooms and provided uniform Christmas Bundles. As

many as 3,000 bundles, regular and tropical, were assembled at the height of the project. In 1976 only 300 bundles were made and the project was discontinued.

Each Christmas bundle contained a top and a jumper or dress and sweater for girls, shirt, pants and sweater for boys plus a simple toy - a ball, skipping rope, marbles or jack-knife. All the items were wrapped in a towel, with a label indicating age and sex. One dollar for each bundle was sent to provide a New Testament in the language of the recipient.

The Cutting Room was moved from second to first floor of Golden Rule Bookstore in 1954. All purchases were now made in Toronto and sales were increasing. There was a net profit of \$2194.44 all of which was reinvested in stock. NRRO was consulted regarding Cutting Room repaying the no-interest loan and assuming payment of rent. The Sewing Circle Executive was advised to continue operating the Cutting Room as close to cost as possible carrying only operating expense. NRRO continued to pay the

rent and to carry the \$3300 no-interest loan.

Lauretta (Mrs. Eldon) Witmer, who had assisted as a volunteer at the Cutting Room, came to fill the position of full time Operator from 1958 to 1963. A new straight blade Cutting Machine was purchased in 1971 at a total cost of \$733. Sewing circles of many Historic Peace Churches throughout Ontario and the Canadian West were also being served with cut garments and Christmas Bundles. As a result of the vigorous promotion of Cutting Room services during the presidency of Margaret Brubacher, the yearly Provincial Sales Tax Refund based on the large turnover of material used for charity provided a sizeable balance. In 1958 it was used to repay \$2000 on the NRRO loan and payment of rent was assumed by the Cutting Room.

Due to increased gross sales in the next few years a tidy profit accumulated. It did not make good business sense to the ladies in charge of the Cutting Room to continue carrying the outstanding NRRO loan on the books while showing a substantial profit. In 1960 the balance of the NRRO loan was paid.

When MCC was planning new headquarters at Kent Avenue in 1963, the Cutting Room Committee was asked to submit their needs and space was allotted for them. They loaned MCC \$2000 interest free – \$1000 of which was for furnishings and equipment for the Cutting Room. Leona (Mrs. Leighton) Schmitt accepted the position as Cutting Room Supervisor in 1963 and served until 1970. In the spring of 1964 everyone concerned was happy to move into the new building at 50 Kent which offered adequate warm and dry facilities. Although there have been changes in its size and location in the MCC building at Kent, the Cutting Room remains part of the action there.

In 1972 the Back-to-School Bundle project was initiated for boys and girls 3-14 years of age. This project was introduced to replace the declining Christmas Bundle Project. A bundle

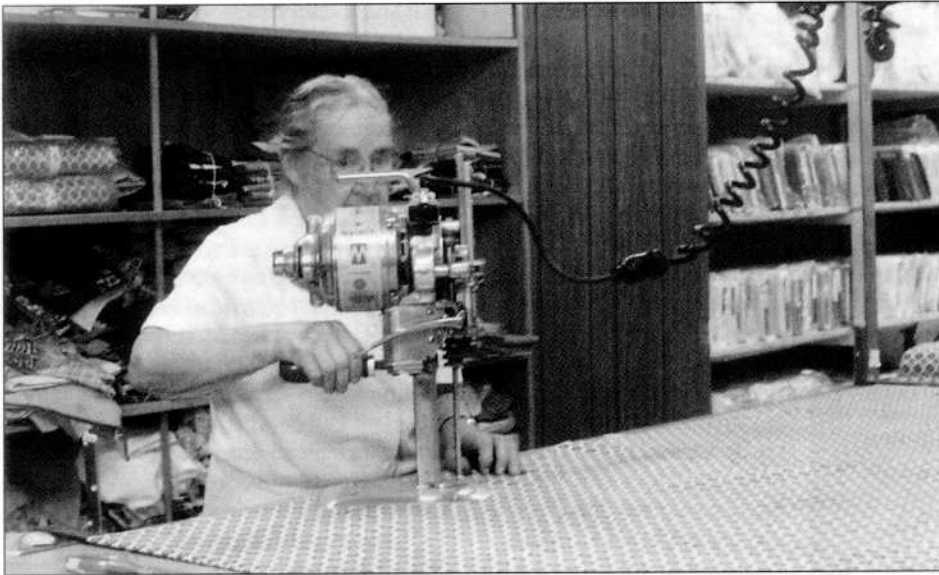
containing pants and a top was wrapped in a towel with a toy for distribution to children in late August. From 200 to 600 bundles were assembled for distribution in the Warden Woods and St. Clair-O'Connor communities in Toronto and to the



Lauretta Witmer  
Cutting Room Operator 1958-63  
Cutting Room Supervisor 1970-76



Gladys Cressman (Grove), on left, assistant to Cutting Room Supervisor Leona Schmitt, on right, in 1964.



Alice Koch, Cutting Room Supervisor since 1976, with cutting machine.

Montreal House of Friendship until it too was discontinued.

Other projects have been promoted and cancelled as relief needs changed. These include leprosy bundles for men and women leprosy patients, layettes for distribution by the VS unit at Calling Lake, Alberta and for the Kitchener House of Friendship, buying of underwear and cutting sleepwear for the Stirling Store, and purchasing household supplies for VS units in Ontario.

Special short term projects have become a feature of Cutting Room activities. In 1970 several thousand Vietnamese outfits were cut for World Vision as well as additional ones for local groups to sew. In 1970 men's pyjamas and women's skirts and blouses were cut for World vision and for leprosy patients in India in 1974. When approximately 2100 new gym suits for girls were donated to MCC, considerable time and effort was spent remodelling the garments into "school uniforms for girls".

The Cutting Room staff and volunteers assisted with the School Kits for Kampachea and for Laos in 1981-83. They also co-ordinated the "Health Bucket for Kampachea" project in Ontario 1992-93. Each bucket contained health and school supplies for a classroom of thirty children. All items were packed into a large bucket. Ongoing projects include layettes, school kits, health kits, sewing kits, fabric and soap for overseas relief.

School kits are given to children who because of poverty would be unable to attend school. One MCC volunteer who had served in a Third World country, reported that receiving a school kit may make the difference for a child living as a street beggar or leading a productive life.

School kits contain notebooks, pencils, a metric ruler, eraser and wax or pencil crayons. All are placed in a sturdy cloth bag. In extreme cases one pupil does not receive a complete kit. Pencils may be cut in half so two children instead of one can write.

Health kits are used to teach dental care in schools and refugee camps. Each kit contains a tube of toothpaste, tooth brush, nail clipper, bar of soap and a hand towel. Sewing kits are often sent to refugee camps. Besides a pair of good quality scissors, sewing notions – thread, thimbles, needles etc. are included. These kits are often sent to refugee camps accompanying a bale or barrel of fabric.

Since most material aid is sent to tropical countries, yarn for socks, caps and mitts or woolen blankets are no longer stocked. Instead, a wide selection of broadcloth and a limited quantity of good quality prints are offered to ladies' church groups. They produce quality quilts to be sold at the Annual Mennonite Relief Sale held on the last Saturday of May.

Over the last few years MCC has been receiving donations of fabric from small pieces to significant yardage. This may be attributed to the emphasis on recycling and reducing garbage and to the fact that many older persons are moving into smaller quarters. Volunteers have assisted in cutting children's clothing from those materials not large enough for shipment to overseas sewing centres.

Other volunteers assist in making bedding for the victims of the many world wide disasters. Comforters are also supplied to individuals and groups to knot and finish for overseas relief. All the bags for the kits are made by volunteers in their homes or in connection with their

women's meetings. Assistance in providing kits, knotting comforters and various volunteer projects is given by groups other than Mennonites. This is appreciated.

Since its beginning in 1942, there have been changes at the Cutting Room – changes in location, staff, volunteers, kinds of material kept in stock, and projects emphasized. But the challenge Paul gave to the Christians in Galatia "to do good to all people as opportunity offers" remains foremost.

**CUTTING ROOM SUPERVISORS:**

<b>1963-1970</b>	Leona (Mrs. Leighton) Schmitt
<b>1970-1976</b>	Lauretta Witmer
<b>1976-present</b>	Alice Koch

**OPERATORS of ONTARIO  
MENNONITE  
WOMEN'S CUTTING ROOM:**

<b>1942</b>	Barbara Eby (now Mrs. Howard Weber) Guernsey, Sask.
<b>1943-1945</b>	Ida (Mrs. Menno) Snyder
<b>1945-1948</b>	Alice Snyder
<b>1948</b>	Olive (Mrs. Wesley) Brubacher - part time
<b>1948-1951</b>	Twilah Snider
<b>1951-1953</b>	Fern Knechtel
<b>1953-1958</b>	Alice Snyder part time while secretary at MCC Office
<b>1958-1963</b>	Lauretta Witmer (Mrs. Eldon)

Alice Koch is a past president of Ontario Women's Missionary and Service Commission (1970-74). She served as President of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario from 1981-1992. Alice is church historian for Nith Valley Mennonite Church, near New Hamburg.

Lorna L. Bergey served on the executive committee of the Ontario Women's Missionary & Service Auxiliary 1954-61 which included a term as president. She is a charter member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario and has served as secretary since 1968. Presently she serves as historian of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener.



## People and Projects

**Lorna Bergey**, Secretary of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, received Wilmot Township Local Architectural Conservatory Advisory Committee's first Heritage Award in 1995 for her outstanding contribution to the preservation of local history.

The Regional Municipality of Waterloo recently approved the deaccessioning of the **Peter Erb House** located at Doon Heritage Crossroads in Kitchener. The house was built about 1820 for Peter Erb and his wife, Susannah, near the village of Bridgeport, which is now part of Kitchener. The Erb House is being offered as a gift to any non-profit museum or heritage agency.

Rockway Mennonite Collegiate will celebrate its 50th Anniversary on the weekend of September 29 to October 1. A commemorative history, *Lead Us On*, by Samuel J. Steiner will be released during the Celebration Service on Sunday, October 1, at 2:30.

A special exhibit on **Swiss Folk Art in America** at the National Museum in Switzerland, from November 28 1994 to February 19 1995, included examples made by and for Mennonites. An embroidered handkerchief, "from cosin [sic] Nancy Bast to Barbara Ebersol 1901" originated in Perth County, Ontario. The exhibit catalogue, available in French and German, includes an article by David Luthy of Aylmer, Ontario, on the Amish artist Barbara Ebersol (1846-1922).

The **Warden Woods Church and Community Centre**, Scarborough, will celebrate its 25th anniversary with an Open House on October 14, 3-8 PM, and a worship service on October 15, 11-12 AM. The worship service will be followed by a light lunch and a time of saying goodbye to long-time church member and Centre staff Helen Breneman, as she moves to Kitchener. A 200+ page history book, *Living Words*, will be available at that time.

**Pamela E. Klassen** has published an article "Submerged in Love: An Interpretation of the Diary of Lydia Reimer, 1922-24" in *Studies in Religion* 23(1994)4, 429-39. A photocopy of the original diary is in the Lydia Reimer Fond, Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

A new World Wide Web site on the cyberspace Internet, called the **Pennsylvania Dutch Country Information Centre**, can be accessed at the following E-mail address: <http://www.welcome.com>. Chris Harrower, the programmer for the site run by Action Video Productions in Lancaster, plans to post questions and answers on the Web site.

A note relating to **the 1888/1889 division** among Mennonites in Ontario was recently re-discovered among John F. Funk's papers in the Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana. It states that "David Martin seems to be trying to make a division in the Church. He is not quick in intellect and misunderstands things... At a Conference at Berlin Ontario many years ago [it was] moved by Bishop Weber and seconded by Amos Cressman that J.Z. Kolb be Chairman to order or keep order in the meeting. This was opposed by Martin and Gayman; declared by the latter that it is not in accordance with the rules of Conference, but the matter was overruled by Stauffer and Gingerich. Bishop Weber than read the rules of a special Conference held at Berlin in 1873, which calls for a Chairman as proposed. Yeas. Martin M. Bauman, S. Bowman and Cressman, Kolb, Wismer, Hoover & M. Rittenhouse. Nays. L. Hoover, Abm. Rittenhouse, A. Moyer, E. Snyder & Kulp."

**The Detweiler Meeting House Corporation**, incorporated to preserve the 1855 Detweiler Meeting House, west of Roseville, would like to hear from persons that are willing to commit resources for this purpose. Call Norman Shantz at 578-4258, or Lorna Bergey at 741-9951.

**St. Catharines United Mennonite Church** celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Special events are planned for the weekend of October 20-22.

The Board of Directors of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario has agreed to sponsor the research, writing and publication of a book by **Lorraine Roth** on early Amish-Mennonite settlement in Wilmot Township. The book will be approximately 200 pages long and include a narrative, maps, charts, photographs and bibliography. Anticipated publication date is Fall 1997.

The June 1995 issue of Ontario History features two articles on Mennonite themes: "Mississauga-Mennonite Relations in the Upper Grand River Valley" by Reg Good; and "A Lamb Born of God: L.J. Burkholder and the Ontario Mennonite Church, 1894-1940" by Len Friesen.

The 1995 winners of the Ontario Mennonite Historical Society's **J. Winfield Fretz Award** for studies in Ontario Mennonite history are Rebecca Steinmann (first place, High School Level), Naomi Chosen (first place, Undergraduate/Local History Level), Laurie Jantzi (second place, Undergraduate/Local History Level) and Peter Genzinger, (first place, Graduate Level). **Rebecca Steinmann** described "The Injustice of Early Land Transactions Between the British Crown and the Mississaugas of Southern Ontario." **Naomi Chosen** analyzed "Joseph Brant and the Grand River Land Controversy." **Laurie Jantzi** studied "Mennonite Women in the Waterloo County Sewing Circles." **Peter Genzinger** wrote about "Mennonite Representations of Nature in the Nineteenth Century." The annual deadline for submissions to the **J. Winfield Fretz Award** committee is May 31. Address submissions to the Editor, Ontario Mennonite History, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, ON, N2L 3G6.

The **Mennonite Historians Workshop** and the fall meeting of the **Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario** will be held on Saturday, November 4, 1995 at the Centre Auditorium, Fairview Mennonite Home. The historians workshop will begin at 9:30. **Anne Miller**, Stirling Ave. Mennonite Church Historian, will deliver the keynote address: "Preserving a Congregation's History." The historical society meeting will begin at 1:30 and feature the 75th Anniversary of Mennonite Central Committee. Guest speakers include **Edna Bowman, Marg Rempel, Alice Snyder, Dorothy Sauder, and Dave and Mary Lou Klassen**. Noon lunch is by reservation only. A collection will be taken to defray meeting expenses.

## Book Notes

Gordon Hunsberger, in *In the Blink of an Eye: The Changing Twentieth Century* (St. Jacobs, ON: Gordon Hunsberger, 1993), 128 pp. describes the social and technological changes he has observed and experienced. Hunsberger was raised in Bridgeport, ON. He and his wife, Tillie, spent five years doing volunteer service work in Haiti for Mennonite Central Committee. The book is available from the author at 18 Eby St., St. Jacobs, ON N0B 2N0.

Ryan Taylor, in *Important Genealogical Collections in Ontario Libraries and Archives: A Directory* (Toronto: The Ontario Genealogical Society, 1994), 75 pp. provides a thumbnail sketch of all major genealogical centres in Ontario. Available from the Ontario Genealogical Society, 40 Orchard View Boulevard, Toronto, ON M4R 1B9.

Robert P. Ritter, in *The Ancestors & Descendants Including Some of the Relations of Deacon Ulrich Steiner and Elizabeth Basinger of Wilmot Township, Waterloo County 1720-1995* (Wingham, ON: Robert P. Ritter, 1995), 212 pp. narrates the history of the Steiner family in Ontario. Includes genealogical tables, photos and index. Available from the publisher at 7 Remington Dr., Wingham, ON N0G 2W0.

Urie Bender, in *The Lyle S. Hallman Story* (Kitchener, ON: privately printed, 1994), 188 pp. tells about a distinguished Kitchener entrepreneur, philanthropist and community builder. The book is intended for private distribution only.

Gredel Janz, Rudy Klassen, Gerhard Wall and Bill Durksen, in *God's Faithfulness: A Story of Scott Street M.B. Church* (St. Catharines): Scott Street Mennonite Brethren Church, 1993), 23 pp. narrate the fifty-year history of the Scott Street Mennonite Brethren Church in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Elizabeth A. Zern Smith, in *The Genealogy of the Detweiler, Detweiler Family* (Bountiful, Utah: Family History Publishers, 1993), 774 pp. traces the descendants of Hans and Susanna Detweiler.

E. Morris Sider, in *A Stewardship of Heritage: History-Keeping in the Congregation* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1989), 32 pp. advises Brethren in Christ congregations on the preservation and writing of congregational history.

Douglas J. Zehr, in *Catching a Vision: The First Ten Years of Brussels Mennonite Fellowship* (Brussels, ON: Brussels Mennonite Fellowship, 1990), 28 pp. summarizes the first decade of history in the Brussels congregation.

Elizabeth Macnaughton, in *Transition and Tradition: A Guide to Clothing Styles in Waterloo County, 1907-1914* (Kitchener: Historic Sites Department, Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 1994), 119 pp. describes and illustrates the range of clothing worn by working people of all ages who lived in rural Waterloo County in the years between 1907 and 1914. The Gordon C. Eby Photo Collection, made available through Anne Eby Millar and the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, provided many of the Mennonite illustrations.

Elizabeth Macnaughton, in *The Old Order Mennonite Community in the Early Twentieth Century* (Kitchener: Historic Sites Department, Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 1988), 217 pp. provides a social profile of Old Order Mennonites in Ontario at the turn of the twentieth century.

Lorne Shantz, in *Memories of Yesteryears* (privately printed, 1987), 74 pp. narrates his life history in Waterloo County. Chapter titles include "Christmas Time," "World War I," "Beef Ring and Butchering," "Courtship and Marriage" and "Farming."

Lucille Ellison and Darlene Culp, in *Listowel Mennonite Church, 1963-1988* (Listowel: Listowel Mennonite Church, 1988), 92 pp. provide an overview of the twenty-five year history of Listowel Mennonite Church. Profiles of all the pastors are included. The Appendices include list of church officers, records of marriages and deaths, and membership statistics.

Kevin Block, in *Without Shedding of Blood* (Winnipeg: Windflower Communications, 1994), 185 pp. narrates a fictional account of the personal struggles of Samuel Beamer, a Pennsylvania Mennonite on the Niagara frontier, against the backdrop of the War of 1812.

Elizabeth Bloomfield, in *Waterloo Township Through Two Centuries* (Kitchener, ON: Waterloo Historical Society, 1995), 500+ pp. studies the eras through which a New World region was transformed through two centuries. Profusely illustrated with 50 colour photographs and maps and 230 black & white photographs and maps. Price is \$75 plus \$10 postage & packing. Send order to Waterloo Historical Society (Township History) % Grace Schmidt Room, 85 Queen Street North, Kitchener, ON, N2H 2V4.

Louise Stoltzfus, in *Two Amish Folk Artists: The Story of Henry Lapp and Barbara Ebersol* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1995), 119 pp. describes the life and work of Amish folk artists Henry Lapp (1862-1904) and Barbara Ebersol (1846-1922). Illustrated with more than 100 colour plates of their delightful work.

Elizabeth Gillan Mair and Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, in *Changing Roles of Women Within the Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) edit a collection of essays on women in the church by a variety of authors. Chapter three, by Marlene Epp, is entitled "Nonconformity and Nonresistance: What Did it Mean to Mennonite Women?"

Chureb Kowtecky, in *Brave Love: A Biography of Edna Pridham* (Kitchener, ON: privately printed, 1993), 160 pp. chronicles the life of a Mennonite Church missionary to Nigeria, Edna Pridham, after whom the library building at Emmanuel Bible College is named.

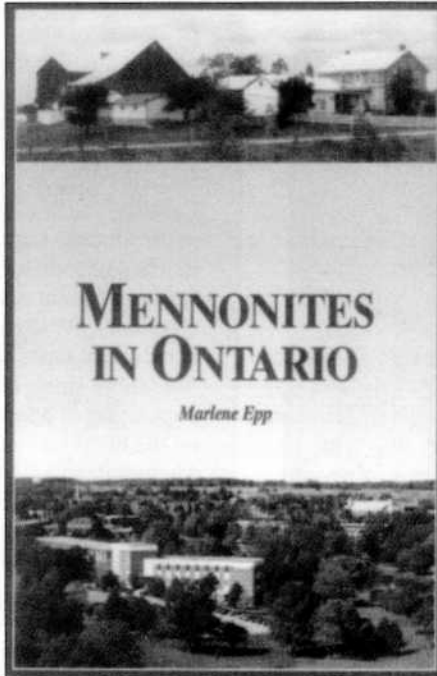
## Book Review

by Paul Tiessen

*Mennonites in Ontario: An Introduction* by Marlene Epp. Waterloo: The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1994, 43 pp.

In recent decades, Mennonites in Ontario have stimulated extensive interpretation of just who they might be; and conditions in the world around them have propitiously reinforced the practice of interpretation. In some instances, in some of their more visible customs and habits, Mennonites – sometimes quite against their own will – have found themselves having created a kind of theatrical space within which their presence can be seen as having turned into a kind of performance inviting interpretation. Their work through Mennonite Disaster Service sometimes invites lively audience response, for example, whether immediate or mediated by press or television. Much more common is the barn-raising; it can be thought of as a kind of theatre-in-the-round, whether for tourists or neighbour, for newspaper photographer or documentary film-maker. It has become, too, a kind of morality play, a lucid and succinct demonstration of good deeds, an exhibiting of neighbourly charity, a simple but profound dramatization of faith in action. The annual quilt auctions and the cattle auctions are public performances which draw wide enthusiasm and support; they offer a model of local initiative helping a world-wide community.

Representation and interpretation extend beyond these examples. Thus, Mennonite religious identity, as well as Mennonite ethnic identity, not to mention Mennonite history, or Mennonite theology, or contemporary Mennonite life, can be highly contested “realities” in various situations, as can the means by which they are represented. For whom and about what can Mennonite Central Committee speak to national government? What does a



billboard along the busy Highway 401 between Waterloo County and the Toronto Airport mean by “Mennonite” furniture? What connections are there between the book, *Mennonites in Ontario*, published by the Mennonite Bicentennial Commission in 1986, and the present book, also called *Mennonites in Ontario*, written by Marlene Epp? The earlier (1986) volume was offered in the style of a photographic coffee-table book. Theatrical enough in its own right, it doubly foregrounded the image of theatre with perhaps unintentional ironic effect when it concluded with a two-page, full-colour photograph of a formal theatrical production on a proscenium stage at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ontario. By some kind of coincidence, Marlene Epp’s 1994 book, or booklet, too concludes with attention to artistic space: a full-page (outside back cover) colour photograph of artist Barbara Fauth’s sculpture erected at Vineland, Ontario where the first Mennonite meetinghouse in Canada was built 200 years before. Inside Epp’s book, too, are photographs, which suggest – although usually in fairly subdued terms – that Mennonites are probably of necessity given to what I am calling “theatrical” expression, or at least to forms of rather distinctive visual self-representation: plain churches for some, a publicly-acclaimed children’s choir for others; horse-and-buggy travel for some, a public peace-pole planting for others; “Apples for Sale - No Sunday Sales” yard-signs for some, Self Help Craft shops in fashionable commercial districts for others; white bonnets worn by traditional Mennonite women among some, Hmong women in their traditional dress among others. The dance of images, the orchestration of visual effects teems with increasingly

complex possibilities. The Mennonites are accustomed to presenting themselves as “text” to be read by their own people, and those outside themselves, the “other.”

Historically, theirs has often been a theatre of resistance, and sometimes they have been pressured into describing themselves. At other times, under siege or duress, they have been pressed into giving an account of themselves, into defending their difference from the main stream. At other times they have sought on their own initiative to explain themselves, to invite others to consider the alternatives to life which they emphasize. Their very existence – with its peculiarities – has always invited questions, even surveillance; and so explanation, even defence, has its long and sober history among Mennonites.

Of course, the many meanings of “Mennonite” are ever shifting; these will continue to shift as new eras massaged by new forms of mass media and other technologies of representation assert themselves and then dissolve. Even the professional theatre collective in Kitchener, Theatre and Company, declaring in 1992, during their production of Patrick Friesen’s *The Shunning*, an answer to “what is a Mennonite,” in effect gave different answers night after night as the audience changed. And Mennonite texts proliferate: in Toronto in 1995 McClelland and Stewart publishes Mennonite (and other) poems by David Waltner-Toews of the University of Guelph; in Kitchener in 1995 the popular Joseph Schneider Haus (Kitchener’s “oldest Mennonite homestead”) Museum sponsors a presentation of the epistolary performance of Ephraim Weber, who attended high school in Kitchener with Mackenzie King in the 1890s.

Marlene Epp’s 1994 book itself demonstrates how interwoven bits of the drama of Mennonites can be presented, and it is itself a kind of script, or dramatization. Her book takes care of the problem of variety, for it covers a lot of ground in a very few pages. And for something that to so many of her potential readers must surely seem a thing of the dusty past and belonging now largely to a kind of museum world, however vibrant that world has become, Epp’s “Mennonite” world in Ontario – especially in the work of the church – is astonishingly alive and vigorously active

and pretty confident about the future. And for something that to so many seems tied to a few well-known and even popularized clichés of Mennonite, or their artifacts, it's astonishing that such diversity and variation in people and event, places and history, continue to gather around the label "Mennonite."

Epp has tried to offer a concise and fair view of the range of people and their varied lives within specific groups. She has also tried to offer something not only agreed upon by many of the groups represented, but also agreeable to those looking in. She has offered a world that looks not only congenial to its adherents, but that has points where a non-Mennonite outsider might readily want to enter in. Mennonites are OK and Mennonites think you're OK, she cheerily seems to be saying to one-and-all in 1990s multi-cultural Ontario. Mennonites are orderly and friendly and industrious and open-to-change "folks." She offers a version of Mennonite self-description helpful to outsiders who might have some initial general impression of Mennonites, and who might want to follow up a little on any mild interest stirring within them.

Specifically, Marlene Epp's *Mennonites in Ontario: An Introduction*, "succeeds *The Mennonites in Ontario*, by J. Winfield Fretz, published by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario in 1967 and reprinted in 1974 and 1982." Epp's slight modification of the title, her omitting Fretz's "The," hints perhaps at a less authoritarian voice in

this new edition. It maybe admits, too, that these people – Mennonites – no longer lend themselves to the more specific list of definitions available to Fretz in the 1960s.

Nevertheless, Epp probably rightly assumes, or constructs, a reader who will have some fairly specific definition of "Mennonite" to hand. So her opening paragraphs – identifying one of the most popular impressions of Mennonites, that they can be understood entirely by knowing the Old Order – vigorously try to unsettle such preconceptions often held by "visitors" around Ontario. There she cites the Mennonite who may be an M.P., or

hold a Ph.D., or drives a Mercedes Benz (and delivers food hampers to the poor at Christmas), or lives below the poverty line "in order to avoid contributing taxes toward military expenditures." Perhaps she lists these surprising images a little too much in isolation; they beg for context, whether geographic, historic, socio-political, religious, or numeric.

Epp faces the struggle we would all face if bravely attempting a task like the writing of this book. She wants to say on the opening page that "the majority of Mennonites... blend into the society in which they live," and on the next page (without protest) that Mennonites "have been described as a quilt with many pieces, ...each group having its own unique outward practices..." (6). A little later on the same page (6), she suggests "the ethnic label is becoming less prominent, as Mennonites increasingly assimilate into Canadian society and as individuals with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds join Mennonite congregations"; yet on page 20 she re-introduces the Ontario Mennonite as belonging to an ethnic group. Of course, she appropriately enough



Marlene Epp - Author of *Mennonites in Ontario - An Introduction*.

constantly questions her own dichotomies, and makes an extraordinary effort to place "Laotian banquet meals" in Mennonite churches, and "MacDonald's hamburgers" on Mennonite dinner tables (21). At one point, she claims Mennonites are now "simply" one part of the cultural mix of an area, Waterloo Region, where their proportion of the population has slid to 5%.

The nice sprinkling of more than forty pictures, each with a caption, extends throughout this book of just over forty pages. That the only picture prominently featuring a bible is called "Laotian man

reading the bible" again reminds us of Epp's juggling of images as she searches for her audience. Perhaps the apparent contradictions and surprises in the text and pictures are signs of a strength within most Mennonite communities – signs of a flexibility of spirit, a capacity to look many ways at once.

After the introductory chapter – "Who is an Ontario Mennonite?" – Epp offers a chapter on primary strands of world history, "Origins in the Sixteenth Century," and one on Mennonites "Living in the Ontario Landscape." Though she touches here on a geographic movement between Mennonites in Ontario and, especially, Western Canada, I think the book might have been strengthened by a little more stress on the much higher population of Mennonites in the West, and on the historical/cultural links of those to Mennonites in Ontario. Similarly, though she links Mennonite immigrant groups (in the section on South-Central Ontario) to immigrant groups from Germany, Holland, Portugal, and Eastern Europe, and also to people of the Six Nations, I wish that here and elsewhere in the book she would have explored them in relation to the dominant Scottish-Canadian and English-Canadian host cultures a little more. Her fleeting reference to "a 'foreign' English culture" invites further exploration.

In the later chapters of this short book Epp pithily explores, successively, (a) the changes that occur as Mennonite individuals and groups carry on in a changing Ontario milieu, (b) the resilience and vigour of the Old Order, (c) the dynamism of Mennonite peace and service activism, (d) and the Mennonite world as a microcosm for a wider world understood in terms of both community and pluralism.

Epp is a knowledgeable and genial host who has succeeded in making some kind of sense in describing Mennonites in Ontario. Frequently in the past Mennonites were defined in terms of their physical movement from place to place, movement often compared to the wanderings and pilgrimages of Old Testament Children of Israel. For Epp, the biblical metaphor has been overtaken by the multi-cultural or mosaic metaphor, which finds in Mennonite and general culture alike the benefits of pluralism.

*Paul Tiessen chairs the department of English at Wilfrid Laurier University.*