

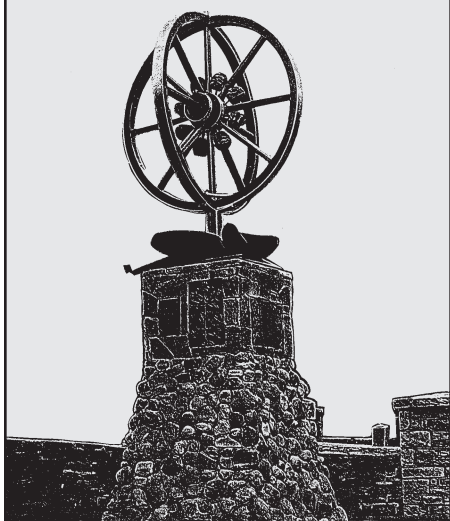
Ontario Mennonite History

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History of the Wideman Mennonite Church: 1816-1928

By Janice Wideman

Janice wrote this essay in 1983 as part of her Mennonite Studies class at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University). She now goes by her married name, Janice Klassen.

The Wideman Mennonite Church, located in Markham, Ont., had its official beginning in 1816. In the early eighteenth century, thousands of Swiss Mennonites had emigrated from south Germany and Switzerland, settling in Pennsylvania.

Henry Wideman, a minister from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, was the first Mennonite arrival in Markham. He and his family travelled to Waterloo in a Conestoga wagon, but continued on to Markham due to a flaw in the Waterloo land titles. In 1803, the Widemans arrived and bought a farm in Markham township. In the years following many other families came, primarily Hoovers, Reesors, Stouffers and Sherks.

Martin Hoover, another minister from Pennsylvania, settled in Markham in 1804, near the site where the Wideman church now stands. His son, Christian, became the owner of the church property.

The incoming Mennonites bought many farms between 1804 and 1860. However by 1867 the migration had almost ceased. In Pennsylvania, the

Swiss Mennonites had organized themselves religiously, using Bibles and literature which they had brought along from Europe. In their persecutions and wanderings they adapted to using house churches, and they had a tradition in Pennsylvania and Ontario to forestall constructing church buildings until their community was established.

Although there is little evidence, it is assumed that the Mennonites met together for worship in family homes during these early years. Henry Wideman provided the first ministerial leadership in this newly forming group and it is after him that the church is named. In 1810 he was killed by a falling tree and was buried at Dickson Hill, about a mile north of his home.

Abraham Grove, a minister who came in 1808, and Martin Hoover, were both ordained in Pennsylvania for the guidance of the Markham Mennonites. They gained the leadership positions after the death of Henry Wideman.

On Dec. 26, 1816, a meeting was held to consider the advisability of building a house of worship and there is evidence that the Wideman family made a cash contribution towards the building of a church in 1817 (*Markham, 1793-1900*, Isabel Champion ed., p. 147). The log church was probably

~ Continued on page 2 ~



*Wideman Meeting House.
(Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo)*



*Meeting House Interior.
(Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo)*

built by 1817 and a frame addition was added sometime later. According to L. J. Burkholder (*Mennonites in Ontario*, 1935, p.116), the addition was moved to Ringwood, where it was still being used as a residence in 1935. This was the first church structure in Markham Township, built on lot 24, Concession 7. It was also used for school purposes at this time.

Non-conformist religious sects such as the Methodists, Quakers and Mennonites were not allowed to build churches for their own exclusive use with title deeds until 1834 (*Religion and Family among the Markham Mennonites*,” Muthiah David Apavoo, 1978, p. 101). On April 4, 1834, the land where the present cemetery exists was initially deeded by Peter and Elizabeth Ramer to the trustees Daniel Hoover and Joseph Birkey (Barkey). Eleven years later, an extra parcel of land was negotiated, with the new deed drawn up by the sons of the first trustees, John Hoover and Joseph Barkey. With this increase in land, the cemetery was expanded and a new brick church building was constructed in 1857.

The years between 1840 and 1870 were a time of consolidation and with it came the revivalist activity of the Methodists. This revivalism reached a high point in Markham by 1850 (Apavoo, p. 101). Sunday School was encouraged for youth and children, along with loud, enthusiastic singing in English. But the need for Sunday School was received negatively within the Wideman church where emphasis was placed on parental guidance and many felt there was no need for teaching outside of the home.

In later years, Mennonite leaders suggested modified forms of Sunday School and prayer meetings that incorporated the German language, showing that the Methodists did cause changes within Mennonite thinking and activities. At this

time there was also discussion as to whether or not the German language should continue to be used in worship services, although this issue did not come to a head until 1889.

The Markham Mennonites emphasized community and between 1852 and 1857, three daughter churches began from the Wideman congregation—Altona, Almira and Risser Mennonite churches. A practice of rotating services developed between these four congregations.

In 1872, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ movement drew away some members of the Wideman Mennonite Church. This new group desired evangelistic and prayer meetings for which the church as a whole was not ready. The schism taught the church that they should take more of an active interest in the young. The Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, now called the Missionary church, established a number of congregations in Stouffville and Markham.

In 1889 a major division within the Mennonite church occurred in Ontario, with the Wideman church actively involved. The issues of contention had been building since the time that the Mennonite Brethren in Christ movement had spread its influence. Sunday School became a very contentious issue during this period. The Wideman Church organized and introduced Sunday School for the first time in 1876, however, it was discontinued after 1881. As well, English preaching was occurring more frequently. It is recorded that C. D. Beery

of Michigan preached to a group of five hundred in German and English at Wideman Mennonite Church on Sunday, Dec. 1, 1872 (Burkholder, p. 197).

Sunday Schools, English preaching and evening meetings became the chief topics of contention. Between 1884 and 1889, the Mennonite leaders in Ontario held conferences but could never fully resolve the issues. Burkholder writes, “the spirit of love and forbearance evidently was being replaced by a partisan attitude and a suitable occasion was all that was needed to break off relations” (p. 199). In May, 1889 two conferences were held at the Wideman Mennonite Church. On May 24 the more progressive bishops and ministers met, while the following week the more traditional leaders met, including Christian Schaum, the Wisler bishop from Indiana.

For the Wideman church, this split divided the congregation. Some followed their bishop, Christian Reesor into the Wisler (Old Order Mennonite) movement while others joined the more progressive movement which became the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. Probably the Mennonite Brethren in Christ gained more Mennonites during these years of strife.

Not long after the split, the Wideman Mennonite Church began to use the English language exclusively during worship services. Meanwhile, the Wisler group continued to use the Wideman meetinghouse, but used the traditional language of German for preaching. In the summer of 1892, Sunday School re-opened on a permanent basis. Attendance records show a drop in attendance between 1897 and 1911, but after 1911 Sunday school attendance grew gradually. Some of this growth could be due to the establishment of an Ontario Mennonite Sunday School conference.

The year 1892 also saw the beginning of two other types of assemblies. The public prayer meeting was successfully introduced and accepted. As well, John S. Coffman, from Elkhart, Indiana, preached at the first evangelistic meetings to be held at the Wideman church in

the winter of 1892. As a result of these meetings, there were 22 converts from the Markham area.

A greater emphasis on missions became evident during the closing years of the 1890s. In 1897, a famine in India caused the opening of orphanage supported by Mennonites from North America. The Wideman Mennonite Church supported an orphan boy whom they named Samuel.

At the semi-annual Conference of Markham Mennonites in 1904, it was decided that weekly edification meetings were to be held in the Wideman church. L. J. Burkholder, minister at a neighbouring congregation, consented to take leadership responsibilities. The meetings were held on Wednesday nights with the focus of study on specific Bible characters.

Few records of business and finance could be found before 1907. It is apparent that Wideman Mennonite Church held an account with a Markham Hardware store owned by A. & H. Wideman. Since he was a member at Wideman church, much of the church business regarding the use of a telephone or obtaining supplies was done by him.

A minister's fund was established at Easter, 1914, to pay the expenses of the ministers and bishops who were called away to speak from time to time. The trustees decided that the deacon would be responsible for opening a bank account in Markham for this purpose with the first collection was to be taken on Good Friday. The following year, at Wideman's annual business meeting, the church organized its policy concerning the minister's fund. Collections were to

be taken once every two months during the regular service to keep the Minister's fund at \$75 to \$100.

The first formal assembly of the Young People's Bible Meeting or YPBM was held on July 26, 1910. The Mennonite young people of a later generation enjoyed the social activities sponsored by the Literary Organization. After the organization of the YPBM, a dual-purpose, monthly Sunday evening service was formed to allow interaction among the four congregations in the Markham area. These services were held at the Wideman church because it was at the centre of the community and was the largest of the churches.

Membership of the Wideman church included 52 families as of 1910. On Dec. 28, 1910, the annual business meeting resulted in some significant decisions. Firstly the members decided to ordain one minister to preside over the district. Secondly the construction of a basement in the church was quickly agreed upon. As well, they elected to send one person as a correspondent to the *Gospel Herald*. It was resolved that services would be held every Sunday morning at Wideman Mennonite instead of alternate Sundays only. A Bible conference or a series of meetings was to be held the following winter, if someone could be found to give leadership. As well, all members agreed to the hiring of a caretaker for the church.

These decisions reflect the continuing progressiveness of the Wideman church since its split with the Wislers in 1889.

As a result of the business meeting in 1910, a Bible school was organized for three weeks in December of 1913. S. F. Coffman conducted the meetings with "satisfactory results" (Burkholder, p 166). Many persons in Markham who were not able to attend the school in Kitchener were able to benefit from this school, however, the course was not repeated until 20 years later.

In 1917, Mary Burkhardt, on furlough from India, came to Ontario to encourage Sewing Circle work among the women in the churches and that same year the Wideman Mennonite Sewing Circle began. The women met monthly either at the church or in the home of one of the families. As well as making garments, the women visited the sick, gave help to bereaved families, took food to the hungry and did other tasks as they saw the need arise within the community. The first president off the Sewing Circle was Mrs. C. D. (Martha) Smith.

When talk of the construction of a new church building arose in 1927, the



*Wideman Mennonite Church ~ 1928.
(Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo)*

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Editor: Barb Draper

Editorial Committee: Linda Huebert Hecht, Bethany Leis, Marion Roes, Herb Schultz, Ruth Steinman

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Inquiries, articles, book notices or news items should be directed to the Editor, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario c/o Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6 TEL. 519-885-0220, FAX 519-885-0014

Wisler group disapproved. When the church was torn down to build a new one, they returned to worshipping in homes. They argued that the Wideman church members did not have the right to take down the old church.

The building committee met for the first time on Jan. 27, 1927. Those on the committee were: A. R. Wideman, J. G. Wideman, J. L. Grove, J. B. Reesor and L. W. Hoover. On Feb. 7, the committee gave a statement of its purpose for constructing a new church, probably due to opposition by the Wisler congregation. They said it was not the intention of the building committee to destroy the old church so that it was not used for secular purposes, but to erect a new building in the same spot for "the continued worship of God and upbuilding of his Kingdom." The building was "to be plain but substantial construction, of such a nature as to meet the church's present needs, and we fail to see where there is any crime connected with this work."

On March 14, 1927, the building committee again met and drew up several recommendations. These included: i) that there would be no rear lobbies in the new church; ii) it would be built the same size and style as the Elmira Mennonite Church, built in 1923; iii) it would be built in 1928; and iv) two more people would be added to the building committee.

Another meeting was held by the building committee during the same year in an effort to resolve the conflict still existing with the Wisler group. The building committee, on behalf of the Wideman Mennonite church, gave its willingness to: i) bear all the expenses of the new church; ii) extend to the other body (the Wislers) all privileges of use for regular services and funeral occasions; iii) grant privileges of Sunday School to the other body although it could not conflict with Wideman's services; and iv) accept a freewill offering from the other body towards the new building. They also stated that they were not willing to sell the old site, and therefore would be tearing down the old building.

By 1928, as the Wisler group still felt that the decision to tear down the old church building was wrong, this statement was issued: "Our committee feels that we have done everything in our power to come to an understanding with the Sister Church, and the time has arrived for us to proceed with the new building."

Leonard Hoover had written to S. M. Weber of Elmira and obtained the blueprints from their recently finished church building. A loan was negotiated,



Wideman Mennonite Church ~ Today

contractors were hired and materials were bought from non-Mennonite dealers in Stouffville and Markham. The finished size of the new brick building was 38 by 65 feet.

Thirty-three pews and a pulpit were bought from Globe Furniture Company in Waterloo, Ontario. The building was completed by 1928 and was dedicated on Sept. 2, 1928.

Ministers at Wideman Mennonite Church

Henry Wideman	1803-1810
Martin Hoover	1804-1837
Abraham Grove (Bishop)	1808-1836
Jacob Grove (Bishop, 1837-)	1836-1863
Joseph Barkey	1864-1886
Christian Reesor (Bishop)	1867-1889
Samuel R. Hoover	1888-1916
Isaac A. Wambold	1912-1954



Discovering the Old Corduroy Road

In the summer of 2016, construction on King Street in Waterloo, Ont., revealed an old corduroy road buried beneath the street. Early settlers laid the logs where roads ran through low areas to make travel easier during wet times of the year. This part of the road connected Abraham Erb's mill (now the heart of Waterloo) with what is now downtown Kitchener where the Mennonite families such as the Ebys and Schneiders lived. Another section of corduroy road was uncovered near the Conestoga Mall.

(Photo by Linda Huebert Hecht)

Study of Anabaptists in Switzerland Seeks Funding

Hanspeter Jecker, from the Institute for Anabaptist History and Theology at the Mennonite school Bienenberg in Liestal, Switzerland, has been researching the history of Swiss Anabaptism. He has participated in several grant-sponsored projects that looked at Bernese Anabaptists in Switzerland in the 17th and 18th centuries. A recent proposal for additional research on Anabaptism in the Jura region of Switzerland in the 18th century requires additional funding and Bienenberg is trying to raise \$30,000 from North American sources. The publication of the final results is planned to be both in German and in English (and hopefully also in French).

Bernese Anabaptists in the Prince-Bishopric of Basel in the early 18th century

By Hanspeter Jecker

Near the beginning of the 18th century, persecution caused a dramatic shift in the locus of Anabaptism in Swiss territories. Hundreds of Anabaptists primarily from the canton of Bern left their homeland and found refuge in the Jura highlands of the Prince-Bishopric of Basel to the north. Initially intended as a temporary location, the Jura became a permanent residence for many.

Despite recent attention to the history of Anabaptism, much of what we know has focused primarily on Anabaptism in the canton of Bern. We are hard-pressed to find any recent presentation of the history of Anabaptism in Jura. The proposed research will focus on the period 1700-1750 when massive immigration of Bernese Anabaptists into the Jura occurred.

The first part of the study will be a detailed examination of how this Anabaptist immigration occurred, something that has not yet been carefully researched. By assembling details of the collective biography of individual Anabaptists, we hope to provide a detailed overview of who these newcomers were, what sorts of backgrounds they had, how they came to the Jura and where they settled.

The second part will look at the social and economic historical connections that factored into this migration. We will look at the owners of properties where Anabaptists settled, and which groups and individuals in the Jura were active in advocating for or against this Anabaptist presence.

A third part of the study will examine the religious identity of Anabaptism in Jura. Starting with an inventory of individual and communal forms of Anabaptist faith and practice, we will look at connections between Anabaptist piety and comparable forms in both contemporary Pietism and the practices of Reformed and Catholic neighbours. What impact might the Anabaptist presence in the Jura have had on shaping how their neighbours thought about religion or interacted with the Anabaptists and each other?

We live in a time that is witnessing large numbers of refugees. Learning about similar events and challenges in the past can contribute to our perspective and understanding

of present challenges. The generations-long experiences of repression, exodus, and settlement in new places have had an enduring impact on Anabaptist groups, however, there has been too little research on how these experiences shaped their self-understanding, faith and theology. This is especially true for Anabaptist in the areas of Switzerland, southern Germany, and Alsace.

We will soon mark several significant anniversaries: the 300-year anniversary of the immigration of Swiss Anabaptists from Bern, the Palatinate, and Kraichgau to North America (1717-2017) as well as the 500th anniversaries of the Reformation (2017) and Anabaptism (2025). These are good occasions for us to study and reconsider the impact of earlier Anabaptist experiences.

A question hardly touched by earlier research is how the Bernese Anabaptists who had suffered the confiscation of their own property and goods in their native land, soon became beneficiaries of a North American system that had robbed indigenous peoples of their property. Considering their own painful history, one might imagine that these Anabaptists might have reacted with sensitivity to similar injustice, but the sources seem to be largely silent. There are indications that some Bernese Anabaptists who fled to the southern Jura began operating dairy farms whose prior operators, Catholic peasants, had recently been forced out. To what extent did the suffering of injustices cause Anabaptists to be more alert to injustices suffered by others? If so, how did they express their awareness of preceding injustices? If not, why not?

The proposed study also promises new insights in the field of family history and genealogy. Frequently the missing pieces in the puzzle of a given family's lineage occur in the two or three generations that Anabaptist refugees spent in the Jura. Records, such as those in the archives at Porrentruy of the former Bishopric of Basel, have hardly been touched and seem likely to reveal significant new details. These new details may make it possible to make specific connections between individuals documented prior to their expulsion from Canton Bern and descendants who later left the Jura for North America.

For more information,
contact Hanspeter Jecker at
hanspeter.jecker@bienenberg.ch.



New Hamburg Mennonite Relief Sale turns 50

By Barb Draper

Each year, on the last Saturday of May, Mennonites have been coming together to raise money for Mennonite Central Committee with a relief sale. It has been held on the fairgrounds in New Hamburg, Ont. each year, although the facilities have changed over time. For several years, all booths were inside the arena where everyone could hear the quilt auction.

One of the food booths that has been there each year is the tea ball booth, run by Floradale Mennonite Church. The very first year in 1967 they made 200 tea balls using regular household fryers. By the second year they were using commercial-sized fryers. Laura Bauman remembers selling the tea balls for \$1.25 a dozen.

The project nearly died out after 2008 as it was getting difficult to get volunteers to organize this labour-intensive project. Several couples volunteered to run it for several years under the condition that they could increase the price. In 2016 the volunteers from Floradale made about 1,300 dozen and raised \$13,000 at a price of \$10 a dozen.



Myra Brubacher and Lydia Brubacher make tea balls for the relief sale in the Brubacher kitchen in Elmira in 1968.

(Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo, David Hunsberger collection)



The original relief sale Committee: (standing) J. Winfield Fretz, Elven Shantz, Karl Enns, Irvine Cober; (seated) Ed Wiens, Margaret Brubacher, Ward Shantz, Pauline Bauman, Oscar Snyder.

(Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo)

BOOK REVIEW

Pennsylvania Dutch a distinct language

Reviewed by Barb Draper

Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language.
Mark L. Loudon.

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016, 475 pages.

Pennsylvania Dutch has been viewed as a corrupted German dialect with a mishmash of English words, but Loudon argues that it is a distinct language with a proud heritage. It is remarkable that it continues to be spoken, living for hundreds of years within an English-language society.

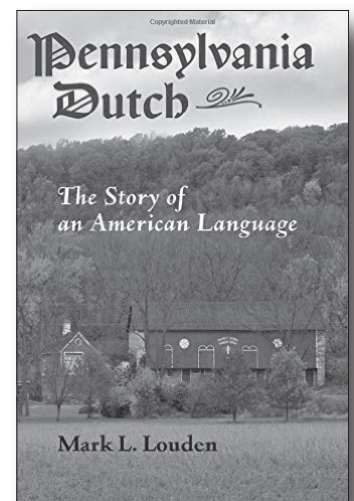
There has been lots of speculation about the origins of Pennsylvania Dutch, but Loudon declares it comes from the German Palatinate, along the Rhine River. German immigrants, including Mennonites, brought this dialect to Pennsylvania in the 1700s. It was widely used in eastern Pennsylvania not only by Mennonites and Amish, but also by Lutherans and those in the German Reformed tradition.

Loudon says that the Mennonites and Amish have used it only as a spoken language. The non-Mennonite Pennsylvania Dutch speakers had much more written material. They developed folklore societies where they enjoyed poetry readings,

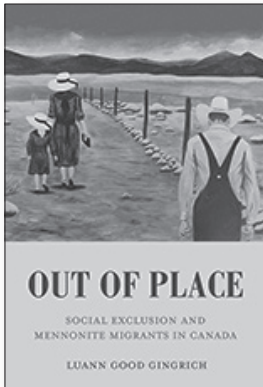
songs and skits in Pennsylvania Dutch. A number of these poems and writings are included in the book.

With the rise of tourism in Pennsylvania Amish country came the stereotype that speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch could not speak proper English and used phrases such as "Throw the cow over the fence some hay." Loudon explains how this false stereotype emerged but says that while the Mennonites and Amish have borrowed English words, they never confuse the sentence structures of the two languages.

This academic book provides excellent information about the Pennsylvania Dutch language.



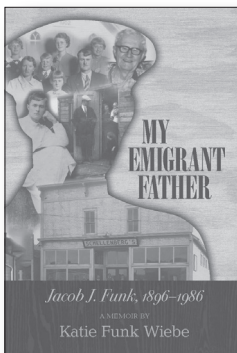
NEW BOOKS



Out of Place: Social Exclusion and Mennonite Migrants in Canada.
Luann Good Gingrich. University of Toronto Press, 336 pages.

Luann Good Gingrich has been studying Low German-speaking Mennonites for many years. She is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at York University. This book explores what has been happening to the

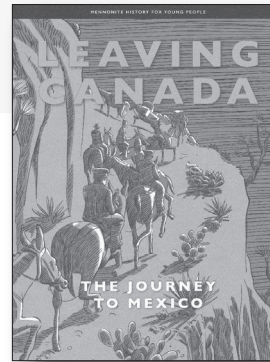
60,000 Mennonites who have migrated to Canada from Latin America and how differing worldviews have made integration into the broader Canadian society so difficult. She explains why the Canadian human services industry has found it so challenging work with this group.



My Emigrant Father: Jacob J. Funk, 1896-1986.

Katie Funk Wiebe.
Kindred Productions, 2015.

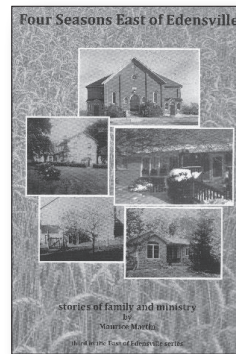
Katie Funk Wiebe tells the story of her father in the context of the larger Mennonite story. It includes recipes with Low German titles at the end of each chapter and Katie describes how she still uses them.



Leaving Canada: The Journey to Mexico.
Rosabel Fast.
The Plett Foundation, 2016, 82 pages.

This book is the first of the “Mennonite History for Young People” series. It is aimed at a younger audience (grade 6 reading level) with the goal of sharing the history of the

Mennonites who migrated to Canada in 1870s. This first volume tells the story of the Mennonite migration from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico in the 1920s. Future volumes will explore the migrations from Russia to Canada and then on to places such as Belize, Bolivia, Argentina, Kansas, Southern Ontario and Alberta over the past 75 years.



Four Seasons East of Edensville: Stories of Family and Ministry.
Maurice Martin.
Riverside Perspectives, 2016, 175 pages.

This is the third book in the East of Edensville series, following *One Mile East of Edensville* (2013) and *I'm So Glad for Sunday* (2104).

This book describes Marvin's life from 18 to 70, including his life as a Mennonite pastor. Maurice writes in a creative non-fiction style where the characters are disguised with the use of pseudonyms. The Foreword is written by Muriel Bechtel.

Archives on Instagram

Do you wonder what librarians and archivists do all day? At the Milton Good Library and Mennonite Archives of Ontario, we're giving the public a look behind these scenes on Instagram. If you are on Instagram, find us at @grebel.library.archives. We are also viewable to the general public at <https://www.instagram.com/grebel.library.archives/>.

Here is a sample posting we did for the International Day of Peace (September 21). Siblings Dave, Martha and Norma pose in front of their father's exhibit in the Archives gallery. The exhibit, *Conchies Speak*, tells the story of Ontario Mennonite conscientious objectors of the Second World War. Dave is holding a binder of letters and photographs that his parents, Leonard and Nora Bechtel, exchanged while Leonard was in Alternative Service in British Columbia from 1942-1943. Norma is holding her father's firefighter identification tag.

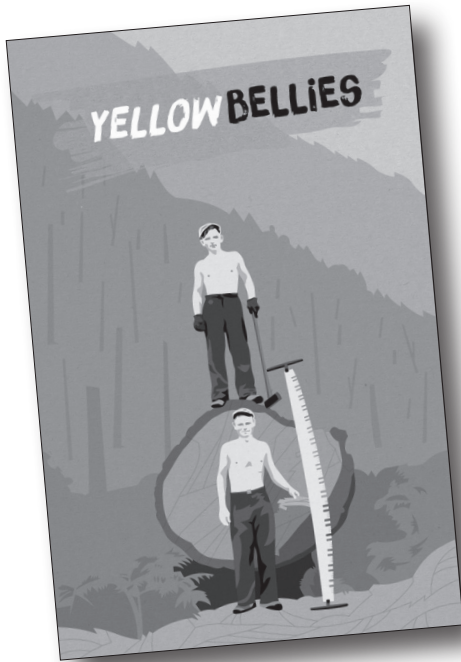
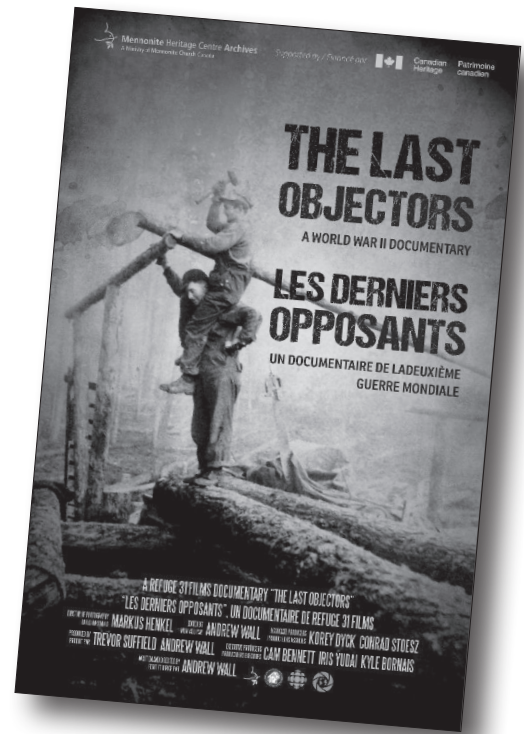


*Bechtel siblings display their father's exhibit from the "Conchies Speak" display.
(Photo by Laureen Harder-Gissing)*

Remembering Conscientious Objectors

Seventy-five years ago, many Mennonite young men were experiencing Alternative Service as conscientious objectors rather than serving in the Canadian military during the Second World War. A new documentary and play help to tell these stories and encourage us to think about how we would respond if our country asked us to serve in the military.

The Last Objectors was shown at the spring meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. This 44-minute documentary depicts the story of Mennonite conscientious objectors (COs) to the violence of World War II. It includes interviews with seventeen COs who talk about their experiences of life in the Canadian Alternative Service between 1942 and 1946. Although it had few COs from Ontario, it is an important story and is very informative and thought-provoking. The Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives and Gallery is looking for further opportunities to screen the film.



Theatre of the Beat performed the premiere of *Yellow Bellies: An Alternative History of WWII*, at the Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival held at Conrad Grebel University College, June 9-11, 2016. This historical drama highlights the experiences and public response to Mennonite Conscientious Objectors during the Second World War through first-person narratives, letters and the media of the day. The play was written by Johnny Wideman and Rebecca Steiner.

Theatre of the Beat is a travelling theatre company, based in Stouffville, Ont., that creates thought-provoking dealing with socially relevant topics. Through the Fretz publication fund, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario was one of the sponsors of this project. Theatre of the Beat hopes to do more performances of this drama in Ontario in the spring of 2017.

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

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

The fund is available to any individual or charitable, church or community-based organization that requires financial support for the publication of research as a book, film or other form of media. Projects should illuminate the experience of Mennonites in Ontario.

Normally up to \$2,000 is available per project. Applications are accepted twice yearly, May 1 and December 1. More information: mhso.org/content/fretz-publication-fund