

The Mennonites

in Essex and Kent Counties, Ontario

• An Introduction •

Edited by Victor D. Kliever



ESSEX-KENT MENNONITE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



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An Introduction

Edited by Victor D. Kliewer

VOLUME ONE,
ESSEX-KENT MENNONITE HISTORICAL SERIES

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Inside front cover: Combined Junior and Senior Choirs of the Essex County United Mennonite Church, about 1946-47. (Courtesy Irene Woodsit)

Inside back cover: Aerial photograph of the H. J. Heinz Company in Leamington, an important employer for many Mennonites. (Courtesy Ruth Rempel/Dennis Jackson)

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Abbreviations

BMC	Blenheim Mennonite Church
CMC	Conference of Mennonites in Canada
EKMHA	Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association
EMC	Evangelical Mennonite Church (or Conference)
EMMC	Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (or Conference)
FMC	Faith Mennonite Church
GChMC	Gospel Christian Mennonite Church
GCMC	General Conference Mennonite Church
HMC	Harrow Mennonite Church
LEMC	Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church
LEMMC	Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church
LMBC	Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church
LUMC	Leamington United Mennonite Church
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MCCC	Mennonite Central Committee Canada
MCCO	Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
MCEC	Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada
MSCU	Mennonite Savings and Credit Union
NLUMC	North Leamington United Mennonite Church
NRMC	New Reinland Mennonite Church
OCMC	Old Colony Mennonite Church
OMIAC	Ontario Mennonite Immigrant Assistance Committee
RMF	Reinland Mennonite Fellowship
UMEI	United Mennonite Educational Institute
WMF	Windsor Mennonite Fellowship

Preface

What a marvellous experience the production of this book has been! We met for the first time in the afternoon of April 4, 1995 at the Mennonite Heritage Centre on Pickwick Drive in Leamington: representatives from five--and later more--Mennonite congregations in Essex and Kent Counties in southwestern Ontario. Some of us were already acquainted with one another or had worked together at other projects; others of us had never met. Now we had come together because of our common appreciation of our heritage and to consider the possibility of compiling a "Mennonite handbook" of some kind.

At that first meeting we discussed many different suggestions: What should be included in such a book? What format might it have? Should it include maps and photographs? Who would collect the information and do the writing? For that matter, who would do the reading--or the buying? Could this, in fact, even be a viable option?

We have attended many further meetings since that first one. We have had the opportunity of getting to know each other better--and also one another's backgrounds, which are not at all the same even though we all carry the name "Mennonite"! We have been through periods when not much seemed to be happening on the project: other activities interrupted the work, some of our members experienced health problems, and we were saddened by the death of one of our strongest supporters, Peter A. Epp. Nevertheless, our enthusiasm has continued as we have seen the book grow and develop.

Thanks to all the committee members for various activities of collecting, writing, photographing, critiquing, and evaluating: in particular to Astrid Koop, the tireless and precise committee secretary, to Gisela Schartner who collected the anecdotes, and to Irene Woodsit who was responsible for collecting the photographs. Thanks, also, to all those persons who expressed interest and support for this project and contributed articles and photographs!

We have especially appreciated the contribution of Julia Zacharias and Maren Kliwer, two summer staff members at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, who were able to provide much help in collecting and organizing the materials.

Finally, recognition needs to be given to the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association for taking on the responsibility for the publishing and distribution aspects of this project! The dedicated members of this organization have been involved in a variety of inter-Mennonite programs over the years, including the development of the Heritage Centre itself with its displays and collections, many events of public interest, and other publishing efforts.

This book is not the first piece written about the Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties. Some of our congregations have published church photograph albums or histories; various articles have appeared from time to time--for example, in the NLUMC newsletter *Northern Echoes* or the LUMC *Oak Leaves*; and individuals have written family histories. More general references can, of course, be found in larger historical works, some of which are listed at the back of this book. We have tried to build on these works, adding to our story, sharing our vision and our faith--so that our own members and other interested persons may understand better what our history is and who we are.

A brief explanation of the term "Mennonite" will be helpful at the outset. It has sometimes been asked if this is a *religious* or an *ethnic* label; the answer is, simply, "Both!" It is impossible to describe or understand the Mennonites without considering their religious heritage and convictions--including the churches and schools, the migrations and missions and service programs, the older and younger members of various ethnic backgrounds (be these German, English, Laotian, or other)! At the same time, there are many who do not identify with the Mennonite understanding of the Christian faith, even though they may come from Mennonite families, have "Mennonite" names like Friesen, Dick (or Dyck or Dueck), or even speak "Mennonite" Low German and know that there is no baking that compares to "Mennonite" *Rollkuchen* or *Zwieback*--in other words, people who identify themselves as ethnic Mennonites. The distinction between these two understandings is not always clear!

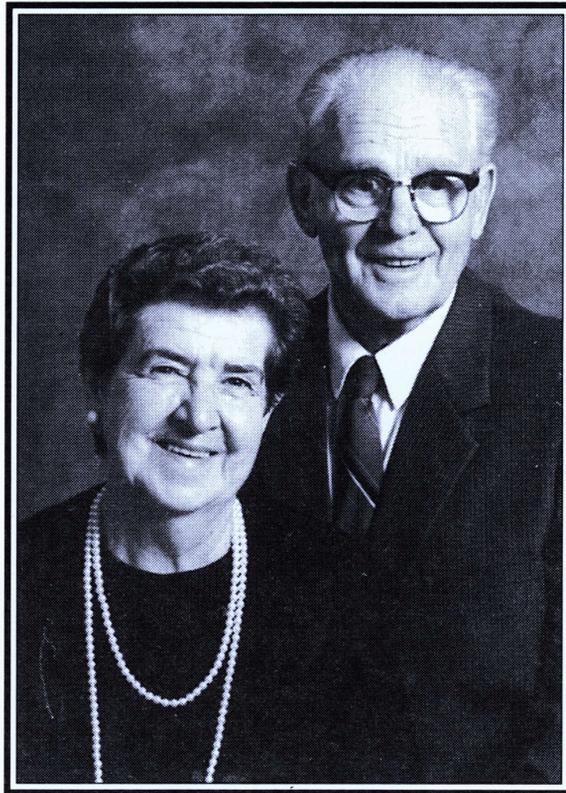
The major focus of this book deals with the Mennonite churches of Essex and Kent Counties, our memberships, our programs, and our joint undertakings. Even as we need to limit this project, we recognize that in southwestern Ontario there are also many people who would identify themselves as "Mennonite" or as having Mennonite background but who are not formally associated with any of the churches included here. It is difficult to find specific information about this topic--some suggest that there are as many or more "non-church" Mennonites as there are church-related ones. It is also difficult to sort out the reasons for this complex phenomenon: some have "drifted away" from the church, others have never joined in the first place, yet others have left intentionally or have been asked to leave. The topic merits further study--as do so many that have just been mentioned in the following pages!

Victor Kliewer
Leamington, Summer 1997

In Memory of

Peter A. Epp
(1915-95)

Builder of Mennonite Heritage and Identity



Peter A. and Helen (Tiessen) Epp in 1991.

Part One

The Mennonites in Canada

Introduction

"Once you were no people, but now you are God's people." - 1 Peter 2:10

The story is told of the tourists who, on their travels across Canada, came to Essex and Kent Counties in southwestern Ontario and were looking for *real* Mennonites. They knew what they were looking for: people driving black horse-drawn buggies with orange safety triangles on the back, the men with beards and wearing black coats and hats, the women with head coverings and long dresses, also dark and with polka dots (or were those the Hutterites?). And, of course, there would be many children on the simple family farms, which could easily be recognized because there were no hydro lines leading up the driveways. The tourists did not see any farms or people to fit these expectations and concluded: There are no Mennonites in Essex or Kent Counties!

The observations were probably correct; the conclusion was not! If one is looking for Amish or Old Order Mennonites or perhaps Hutterites in Kent and Essex, one will be disappointed. There are, however, many *Mennonites*, people with their own history, people who may be less conspicuous but are, nevertheless, a significant part of the overall population.

At present there are some fifteen Mennonite churches in Essex and Kent. However, except for the modest signs that identify most of them, they would not stand out as being "Mennonite." Some are found in the country, others in towns and cities. Their sizes and architectural designs vary, although most are simply and functionally built. One tradition that most have retained is the absence of steeples or bell towers, reflecting both the thrifty nature of the builders and the long history of persecution--the process of becoming, as has often been noted, "*die Stillen im Lande*," the quiet and inconspicuous people in the land.

A gentle, often self-deprecating humour is part of the Mennonite heritage. For example, one riddle (that may well have variations in other settings) asks: "Why should you never tell a Mennonite a joke on Saturday afternoon?" -- Answer: "Because a Mennonite is not supposed to laugh in church on Sunday morning."

However, the journey of the Mennonites has also continued and, indeed, continues to be written! It is a fascinating experience and one with many dimensions. Above all, it is a journey of a deeply religious faith community. This is the basis of their identity--with all their glory and generosity, as well as with their contradictions and conflicts; it is the key to understanding their attitudes and behaviours, their migrations and settlement patterns, their occupations and leisure activities. At the same time, there are also many other significant influences that have had their impact on the Mennonites! They are an immigrant people, many of them first or second generation Canadians,

and continue to be influenced by the countless influences of society that affect all Canadians in the late twentieth century, often more than they realize or would care to admit. And, of course, there are the many unique characteristics of individuals and families and groups.



Emigrant group in Tiegenghagen, Ukraine, 1924. (Courtesy Margaretha Rempel/Ernest Klassen)

In the following chapters, the stories of the Mennonite congregations of Essex and Kent Counties are sketched--and while they have much in common, there is also considerable diversity! It is also good to remember that they are part of the larger community of Mennonite people who are spread out across Canada and, indeed, the rest of the world. We begin by considering this larger context!

1. Origins

"No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." - 1 Cor. 3:11

The history of the Canadian Mennonites begins about two hundred years ago, when the earliest settlers arrived as immigrants from the United States after the American Revolutionary War. Since then further "waves" of Mennonite immigrants have come at various times and under differing circumstances. Besides being an immigrant people, however, the Mennonites in Canada have grown in numbers through evangelistic outreach to their neighbors, through missionary programs among native Canadians and other groups, through intermarriage with people of non-Mennonite background, and --often enough!--through their own large families. As a result, they are presently a complex mixture of people from many different backgrounds, united in part by a common ethnic heritage, in part by a common faith.

The beginnings of the Mennonites can be found in the general Reformation movement of the sixteenth century in Europe. While they were eventually named after an important early pastor and leader, **Menno Simons** (who lived about 1496-1561), the Mennonites were at first known as "**Anabaptists**," that is, "re-baptizers" or "those who baptize again." The name was first used by their opponents in a negative way because of their rejection of infant baptism, (which was then the normative form in the church), and because of their conviction that only those persons who had truly come to an experience of faith should be baptized upon their confession. Many of the early Anabaptist leaders--who were not at all a unified group--agreed with many of the concerns and the directions proposed by major reformers such as Martin Luther in Germany and Huldreich Zwingli in Switzerland; indeed, at first they hoped to work together with them in the renewal movement known as the Reformation. However, because they were seen as too radical, especially in matters of church leadership, authority, and separation of church and state, they began to experience increasing opposition by the leaders of both the Roman Catholic and emerging Protestant churches.

Menno Simons

was born about 1496 in the village of Witmarsum in the Dutch province of Friesland. He became a priest in the Roman Catholic church, but as he saw the Protestant Reformation develop, he increasingly had to question his own beliefs. Finally, in 1536, Menno also decided he had no choice but to join the Anabaptist movement. While he did not start the movement, Menno spent the next 25 years, until his death in 1561, giving it leadership and direction. Eventually the movement was named after him.

At the beginning the Anabaptists were a spontaneous and unorganized movement with different characteristics and various local leaders. Eventually it became possible to identify

them as several "streams," especially the **Swiss-South German movement** and the **Dutch-North German movement**. Although the cultural and political circumstances were not identical, the southern and northern Anabaptists found that they had much in common, in particular, their new-found personal faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to the Bible in all matters of daily life. At several meetings of regional leaders some of their main convictions were agreed upon; among the most important of these early statements of faith is the **Schleitheim Confession** of 1527.

The Schleitheim Confession.

The following is a short summary of the seven main points of the "Schleitheim Confession," which was agreed upon by early Anabaptist leaders at a meeting in the village of Schleitheim, Switzerland in 1527. The Confession has been printed many times over the centuries.

- 1. **Baptism:** Only those people who genuinely repent of their sinful way and want to begin a new life as Christians will be baptized.*
- 2. **Excommunication:** If a member of the church has sinned and does not heed admonition, this person is to be shut out (see Matt. 18).*
- 3. **Communion:** The Lord's Supper is shared in memory of Christ by all believers.*
- 4. **Separation from the world:** All Christians must remain separate from the surrounding sinful world.*
- 5. **Shepherds:** Church leaders must be of good reputation and are elected to teach, guide, and care for the rest of the Christian community.*
- 6. **The sword:** The worldly government uses the sword; Christians reject the use of violence, rather suffering than causing others to suffer.*
- 7. **The Oath:** Christ forbade his disciples the swearing of oaths, telling them to be truthful at all times (Matthew 5).*

(See article "Bruederliche Vereinigung," Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 1.)

The hostility and suffering which the Anabaptists experienced finally led to their emigration from their home countries to more tolerant parts of the world, or to a gradual process of reintegration in their homelands, especially as some of the local pressures began to ease. The Swiss-South German Anabaptists moved mainly to North America, especially to the eastern coast of the present United States and the new state of Pennsylvania. The Dutch-North German Anabaptists--aside from a few early settlers who moved to the area of present day New York--mostly moved eastward into the areas of Prussia-Poland and then on to czarist Russia.

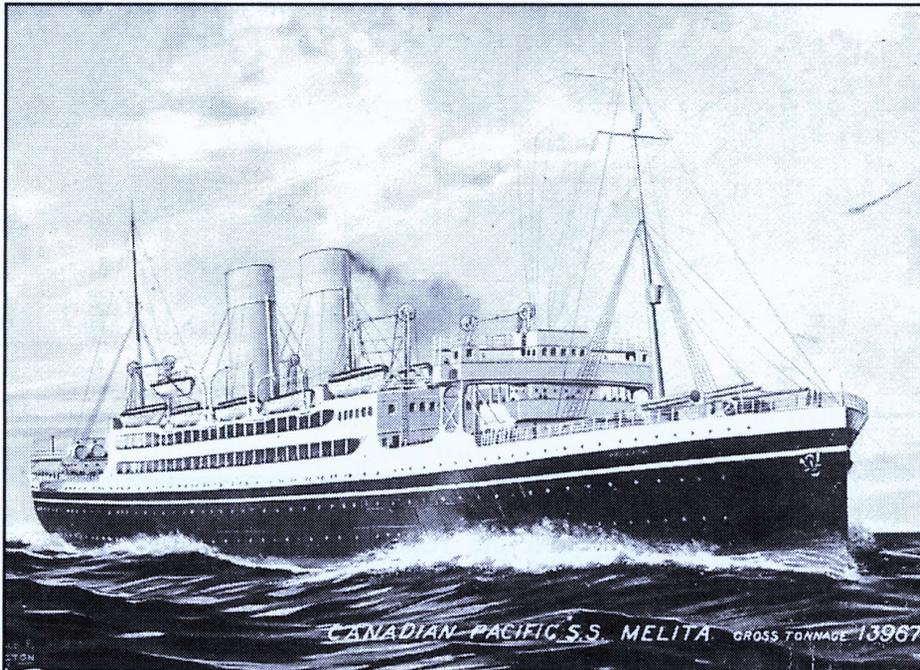
2. Immigrations to Canada

"I am sending you . . . to bring my people . . . out of Egypt." - Ex. 3:10

The Earliest Settlers

The first Canadian Mennonite immigrants were of **Swiss-South German background** and came via the American colonies, arriving in the area that is now Ontario **shortly after 1776**. The American Revolutionary War had caused the peace-loving Mennonite settlers much grief because of their refusal to carry arms and their loyalty to the British government, which they understood to be ordained by God. The resulting hostility caused them to move northward to the Niagara Peninsula and the area around present-day Kitchener. Numbering about 8,000 persons, these settlers came as individual families or small unorganized groups.

After they arrived, these early Mennonite settlers soon organized into congregations and



The Canadian Pacific S.S. Melita, 1925: One of many ships that brought Russian Mennonite immigrants to Canada. (Courtesy Margaretha Rempel)

eventually formed the **Western Ontario Mennonite Conference** and the **Conference of Mennonites in Ontario and Quebec**. They also continued to relate to their relatives and the congregations in the United States which came to be organized into the conference body called the **Mennonite Church** in 1898. Later, in the twentieth century, other American Mennonites who were also associated with the Mennonite Church came to the Canadian West, especially to northern Alberta. While the Mennonite Church is presently the largest organized Mennonite conference body on a world-wide basis, consisting of some 110,000 members, its Canadian membership has been much smaller; there are some seventy-five congregations with about 9,400 members in Canada.

Further Immigrations

The large majority of Canadian Mennonites have their roots in the **Dutch-North German-Russian movement** and have come to be called "Russian Mennonites," even though very few are actually of Russian ethnic background. The first of these came to Canada in a **major immigration about 1873-1884**; at this time some 18,000 Mennonites came to North

Population of Mennonites in Canada

	<u>1901</u>	<u>1941</u>	<u>1981</u>
Ontario	12,257	22,256	46,485
Manitoba	15,289	39,395	63,490
Saskatchewan	3,787	32,553	26,265
Alberta	546	12,119	20,540
British Columbia	11	5,119	30,895
Other	<u>59</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>1,695</u>
Total	31,949	111,554	189,370

(Canada Census, see "Canada" in Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 5)

America, about 8,000 of these coming to Manitoba. This immigration was the result of numerous and complex factors that threatened the entire life of the Mennonites in their former homeland of Russia. One major factor was a new policy by the czarist government which severely limited the religious and economic independence of the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia; a second one was the increasing shortage of available farmland in Russia; a third may

well have been the developing social changes which affected the traditional ways of life. The Canadian government, eager to settle its long and open frontier country, promised greater freedoms and economic possibilities; help for getting started also came from the Mennonites who were already in Canada. The new immigrants settled on two tracts of land known as the "East Reserve" and the "West Reserve," being on the eastern and western sides of the Red River. At first they settled in the village patterns they had known in Russia; however, gradually this changed as farmers moved onto their own parcels of land. After some difficult beginnings, the new settlements began to prosper, and social, educational, and religious organizations developed quickly as well.

A second major immigration from Russia (by then the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the USSR) took place about 1922-30. Political and economic conditions there had made it increasingly difficult for the Mennonite people--like countless others--to survive: anarchy reigned during and after the First World War; later on, government controls and collectivized farming were introduced; and these experiences were accompanied by famine and epidemics during the 1920s and 1930s. Innumerable accounts of individual experiences document the human tragedy involved. One of the results, however, was the emigration of some 21,000 Mennonites to Canada. Most of these settled on prairie farms, especially in Saskatchewan and



Essex area immigrants of the early 1920s: the Willms and Kornelsen families. (Courtesy Mary Klassen)

Alberta; others moved to the fruit regions of Ontario and British Columbia, particularly in the difficult years of the 1930s. By 1930 the Soviet government had ended all possibilities of emigration, bringing this "wave" of settlers to an end.

By and large the Canadian Mennonites remained German speaking during this time--using the Low German dialect in everyday life and High German in the church and school. They also basically remained rurally oriented, even though some of the more progressive ones were beginning to move into the cities for purposes of education or business. At the same time, ironically, a more conservative group was starting to find the political changes and new regulations too threatening to their freedom, and so began another emigration that would once again bring these Mennonites to more isolated areas of the world, such as Mexico and later other

Latin American countries such as Belize and Bolivia.

A third immigration "wave" occurred during 1946-54, following the Second World War, when some further 7,000 Mennonites moved from the USSR and Germany to Canada.

Life in Canada Remembered

In April 1952, my husband Paul and I and our fifteen month old son, Peter, arrived in Canada, eager to start a new life. One thing worried us more than anything else: we did not know any English. How would we communicate?

One day, our second baby, Paul, became ill. He coughed and had a fever. Mr. Alexander Fischer, our sponsor, was kind enough to take us to the Medical Centre, but did not stay to translate. When Dr. Lyon asked, "Does he have a cough?" I did not understand him. He repeated the question and when I still did not understand, he faked a cough. That didn't help either. Instead, it really got me worried. If the doctor had such a cough, he shouldn't be looking after my baby! Dr. Lyon left and when he came back asked, "Hat er Huschte?" (The Swabian word for cough is Huschte.) I finally understood and he could proceed with his examination. Baby Paul had pneumonia, but with God's help and medication he got better fast.

Remembering this and other episodes still causes us to chuckle and helps us to forget some of the difficulties that we had to overcome. Laughter is another of God's gifts to us.

*Hildegard Fiss
Leamington United Mennonite Church*

Many others had also been evacuated from their homelands in the USSR when the German armies began their retreat westward in 1943; however, most of these were forcibly repatriated by the Soviet armies, while others were refused admission by Canadian immigration authorities and resettled in South American countries such as Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil. The majority of the immigrants who came to Canada after the war could not afford to take up farming, moving, instead, to cities like Winnipeg and Saskatoon where employment was available. They soon became independent financially but also developed a different form of community life than that which had been typical in rural Canada and formerly in Russia: there was much more interaction with non-Mennonite people, and general acculturation was no longer viewed with as much suspicion as formerly, if not even found to be desirable. These new immigrants joined Mennonite congregations that had gradually been emerging in the cities, also organizing many new ones of their own. As a result, the Mennonites experienced a considerable shift from a rural orientation to an urban one.

Further immigrations have continued since the Second World War. One significant movement has been **the coming of the South American Mennonites in the 1950s and 60s**. These were almost all people who had wanted to come to Canada from Europe immediately after the War but who were, for various reasons, denied access. With a very difficult pioneering life in the South American countries behind them, they were able to enter Canada when immigration regulations were

changed. Most of these have also settled in cities. They have tended to keep the German

language and culture for the first generation and some even in the second, while at the same time accepting many of the general cultural characteristics and values of the rest of society.

Another recent development is **the return of the conservative Mennonites to Canada**

A Different Life

My background from Mexico is one of simplicity. For example, when we walked into the house, we didn't have to take our shoes off. All we had to do was make sure our shoes or feet were clean. After all, some of the floors were dirt floors covered with sand. When I went to school, my teacher didn't worry about the holes in my shoes or the tears in my coat, because his children weren't any better off than I was. When I went to the store to buy something, I didn't need to worry about keeping the receipt. When something didn't fit or for some reason needed to be brought back, no questions were asked. We were always glad to get mail, and utility bills didn't exist!

In 1970 when I, along with my parents, came to Ontario from Mexico, all of this changed. The first summer was not too bad. We lived in an apartment above a boiler room. For the winter we rented a house. That is where the changes began. The house had coverings on the floors, so we were expected to take our shoes off when we came into the house. We were expected to wear good shoes and coats to school and bring an extra pair of shoes for gym. If they were not the right kind, the kids would laugh and the principal would call the house to try and inform my parents of the importance of proper footwear. When we went to the store, the clerk would remind us not to lose the receipt, in case we needed to exchange something, and sure enough, without the receipt it was just like you had never bought anything.

Another big change was the mail. When one tries to adopt a new, more modern, more luxurious and somewhat strange lifestyle, there are some consequences. Most of our mail was bills of some kind. Electricity, which we were not used to, was something we could not do without here. Back home we used to heat our house, when necessary, with a wood burning stove. Now it was an oil furnace trying to keep the house warm, augmented by electric heaters. We hardly knew how to use the telephone, but we had to have one. We had never paid house rent before. All of this was new and different and everything demanded more money.

Some of the biggest challenges, however, were the language barrier, finding a church to attend and making new friends. Thanks to the many organizations, and the many individuals who tried to understand and helped in many different ways, we managed.

*Henry Friesen
Old Colony Mennonite Church*

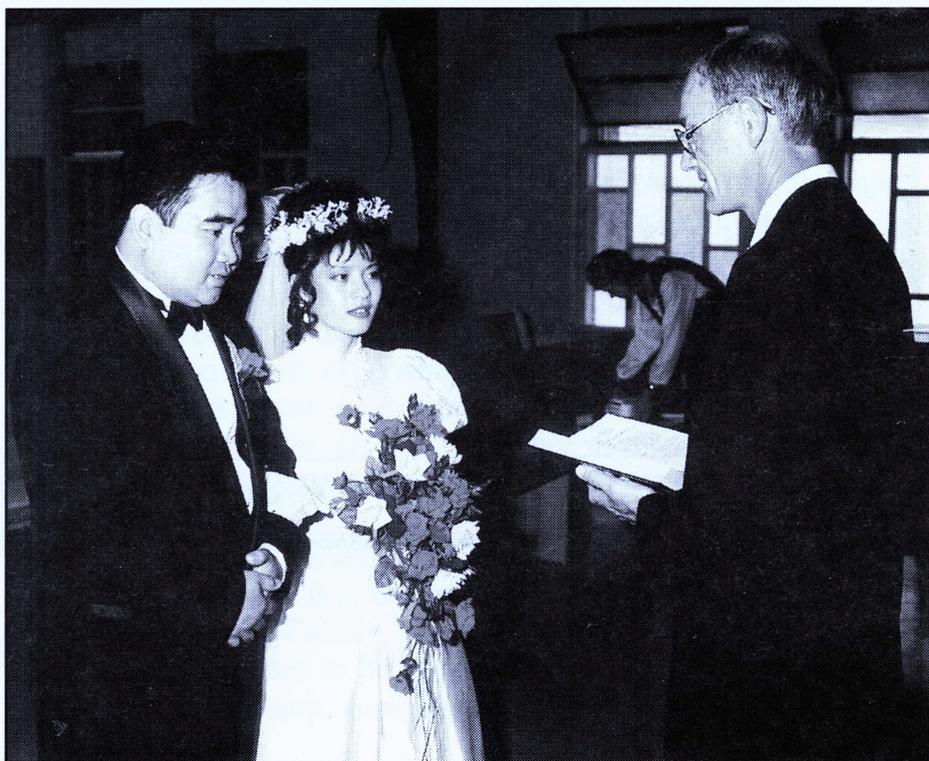
from Mexico and other Latin American countries, a migration that has begun some twenty years ago and is still continuing at present. While specific numbers of this mostly unorganized

movement are hard to determine, it may well be one of the largest migrations in Mennonite history. These returnees to Canada--technically most are not immigrants, as they come with Canadian citizenships--are for the largest part descendants of the conservative Mennonites who left Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the 1920s and who have been finding life in the Latin American countries increasingly difficult, in part due to economic and political factors, in part due to internal changes and tensions within the Mennonite colony and church structures. These settlers have tended to come first as seasonal migrant workers in small groups or as individual families but have increasingly been settling down. They have largely followed the possibilities of employment or looked for areas of existing Mennonite settlement, moving especially to rural areas of Ontario, the prairie provinces, and the Maritimes. Once again, they have largely retained their German ethnic and language association, often also being fluent in Spanish and quickly learning English as well.

The Southeast Asian Refugees

One final immigration, this one with a dramatically different history, should be mentioned. In the 1970s and 80s, during and after the Vietnam War (which ended 1976),

numerous refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea came to Canada under the sponsorship of the Canadian Mennonites under the leadership of the Mennonite Central Committee. While most of these refugees were not associated with the Mennonites before arriving in Canada, a good number of them have become members of Mennonite churches in the years after their arrival. They have often moved to cities and worked hard at learning English and becoming independent.

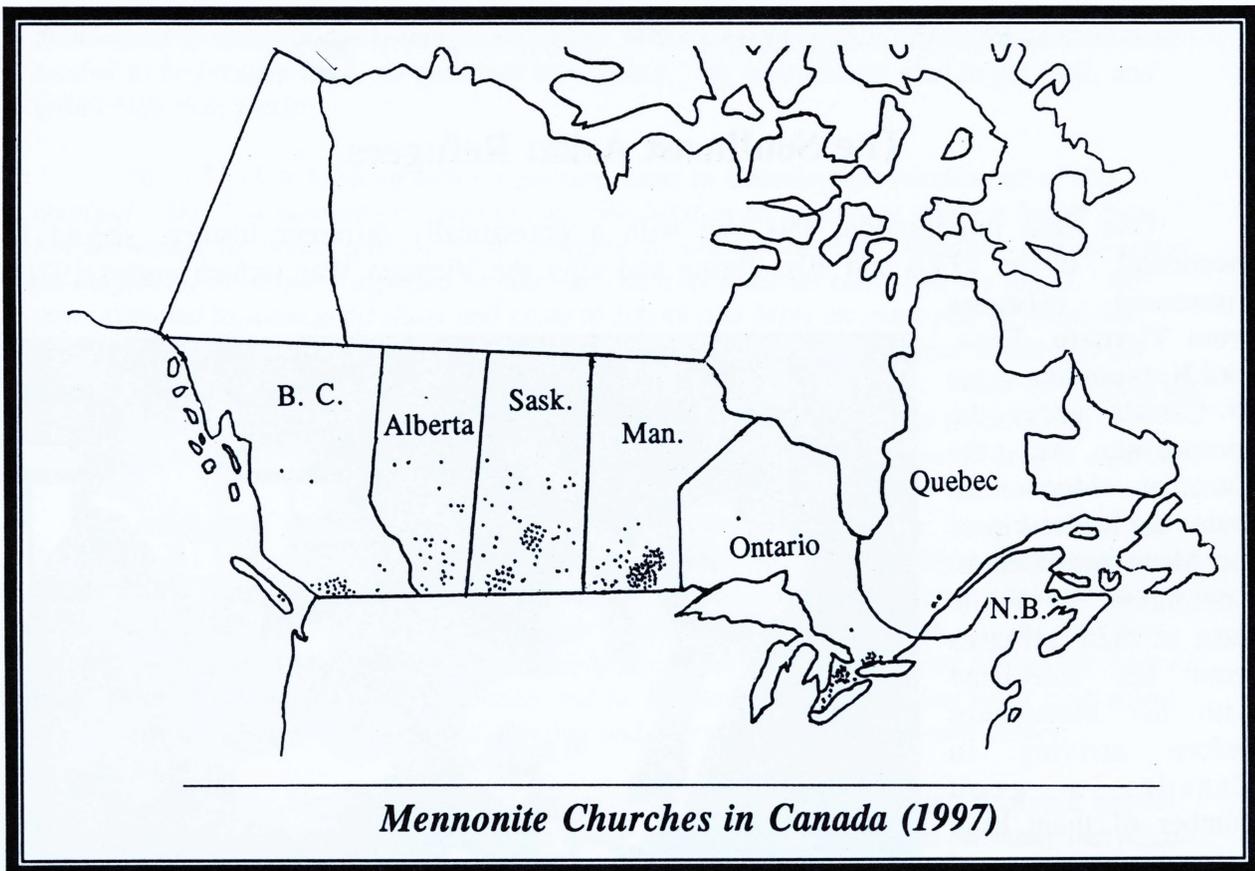


Rev. Edwin Epp officiating at the wedding of a Laotian couple, Li Won Bae and Ketsi Sihamaya, at Faith Mennonite Church, June 1995.

Often they have participated in the programs of existing local Mennonite churches, and in several cases they have organized into separate ethnic fellowship groups related to a Mennonite church body.

The history of the Mennonites in Canada is thus a very diverse one--and many other strands could be mentioned! They are clearly an immigrant people, a people who have been "on the move" (as C. J. Dyck notes in his book *Introduction to Mennonite History*, 3rd ed., p.211). At the same time, they have settled down and established roots in many communities across Canada, identify themselves as Canadians, and interact with their non-Mennonite neighbors in many different ways.

The following map gives a general indication of the location of Mennonite churches.



(Map: Maren Kliewer)

3. Church Conference Structures

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." - Eph. 4:3

As already noted, the earliest Mennonite immigrants coming from the United States soon organized themselves into several larger church bodies, generally called "conferences," and associated with the North America wide **Mennonite Church** (abbreviated **MC** and sometimes also called the "Old Mennonites").

Similarly, the later immigrants also joined existing conferences or organized new ones beyond the local congregation, for community with like-minded people, as well as for joint undertakings in Christian education, evangelism, missionary work, and service. Most of the Russian Mennonite immigrants joined the **General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC)**, which had been organized in the mid-nineteenth century in the United States. By 1996, the Canadian membership of this conference, organized as the **Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC)**, also included churches of the Mennonite Church and consisted of some 31,600 baptized persons (1996-97 Conference Yearbook).

The Integration

of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church on the North American level is presently in process.

When these two largest Mennonite conference bodies meet in a joint session at St. Louis, Missouri in 1999 they will formally become one conference with the name "Mennonite Church." It is an experience of "history in the making"!

Another large conference body of which many Mennonites became members is the **Mennonite Brethren Church (MBC)**. This group had its origins in a mid-nineteenth century revival movement among the Mennonites in Russia under the influence of Lutheran pietists and Baptist preachers. Officially organized in 1860--the same year the GCMC was started--the young movement experienced a good deal of rejection on the part of the older established Mennonite church. After some time, greater acceptance developed, including the development of the Allianz church as an effort to bridge the schism. The general migrations from Russia to Canada included many members of the MB Church. Presently it is the second largest Mennonite conference body in Canada, with a membership stretching from the Maritimes to British Columbia. Programs are similar to

those of the GCMC with emphases on missionary, evangelistic, and educational efforts.

There are also a number of **other conference bodies**. Some of these are conservative in nature, while others have emerged as the result of spiritual renewal movements. Each group

has its own distinctive characteristics or theological emphases, which are significant to the respective members--even while sometimes being difficult for outsiders to recognize or to understand. Thus there are the conservative **Old Order Mennonites** and the **Amish Mennonites**, both of which have come out of the Swiss background and have mostly settled in Ontario. And there is the **Old Colony Mennonite Church**--which is not to be confused with the Old Order Mennonites but took its name from the Mennonite "Old Colony" in Russia. There is also the more evangelically oriented **Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC)** which had its origins in a spiritual renewal among the Mennonites of early 19th century Russia and was originally called the "*Kleine Gemeinde*" (the "Small Church"). And there is the **Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC)**, started in a renewal experience in Manitoba in 1926 and originally known as the "*Rudnerweider Gemeinde*." Other conference bodies have been organized for various reasons, such as geographical proximity, unity of purpose, theological differences, conflicts between leading personalities, or combinations of several of the above.

It is not surprising that non-Mennonite observers have difficulty in understanding this complex Mennonite "denominationalism"; in fact, the Mennonites themselves often do not understand all the factors or know what the different groups represent!

Accurate membership statistics are difficult to determine, in part because the methods of calculating memberships are not always parallel. The **Mennonite World Conference Directory** of 1994, for example, lists 117,932 Mennonites in Canada, divided into fifteen conference bodies. Additional statistics can be found in the yearbooks of the various groups.

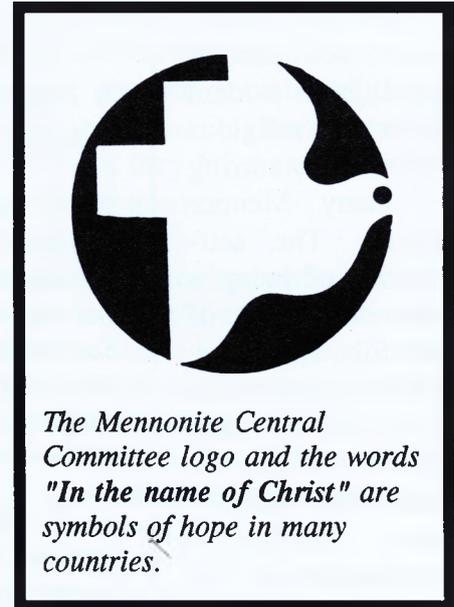
Further Explorations . . .

The stories of many of these conference groups have been told in much greater detail by other writers; some of these works are listed in the back of this book in the section "For Further Reading." For those who are interested, these histories are valuable and fascinating information!

4. Other Organizations

"Tell those who are rich . . . to be generous and willing to share." - 1 Tim. 2:17,18

Aside from the conference structures, the Mennonites of Canada have developed many other organizations for cooperative efforts of various kinds, especially in the areas of Christian service and mutual aid. The most significant of these is doubtlessly the **Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)** (abbreviated **MCCC**), which works closely with provincial counterparts and the international Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). MCCC had its beginnings in the merger of several earlier emergency relief and service agencies, the main one being the Mennonite Board of Relief and Colonization (formed earlier to help the Mennonites move from the USSR to Canada in the 1920s and later). MCCC unites all the major and many smaller groups of Mennonites in their efforts to provide assistance to hungry and destitute people around the world. Through the international MCC, volunteer teachers, medical people, agriculturalists, and many other workers have gone to developing countries. There is also an extensive voluntary service program within North America, focusing especially on people in poverty conditions or with other special needs. One important way of "helping others help themselves" is MCC's "Ten Thousand Villages" (formerly the "Self-Help Crafts") program. In this program, crafts people and other workers in developing countries can sell their goods in North America. Other MCCC efforts focus on justice and peacemaking issues, Canadian aboriginal people's concerns, prison and other rehabilitation ministries, and an "Ottawa Office" that deals especially with government legislation and policy concerns. A recent major effort focused on refugee resettlement which has brought many displaced persons from war-torn southeast Asia and other countries to Canada.



The Mennonite Central Committee logo and the words "In the name of Christ" are symbols of hope in many countries.

Another cooperative venture in which Canadian Mennonites participate is **Mennonite Disaster Service**, which has helped many communities after hurricanes and other disasters. Cooperative financial efforts have been undertaken in the establishment of **credit unions**, the **Mennonite Foundation of Canada**, and **Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)** in which Mennonite business people work at issues of Christian ethics in business, and also support projects in developing countries. Other efforts have gone into establishing historical and educational associations, health care, mutual aid, funeral societies, and many others.

5. Contemporary Trends

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." - Phil. 1:27

Several observations might be made about present trends among the Canadian Mennonites. (Helpful reviews are provided in C. J. Dyck's *Introduction to Mennonite History*, pp. 414-20, and in Kauffman and Driedger's *The Mennonite Mosaic*.) One trend is the clear overall movement of Mennonites from the country to the city. Until not too many years ago, the Mennonites have been a primarily rural people. Increasingly they are becoming urban (and suburban), interacting with many people of different racial and religious backgrounds, becoming involved in all areas of education, medical and social work, business, professional and political life, travel, and recreational activities.

A second trend that is evident is in the religious self-understanding of many Mennonites. The self-identity of being a separate group of faithful believers, different in orientation and lifestyle from the rest of the "world," was formerly representative of most Mennonites and continues to the present among some. This was also related to the use of German as their language of communication. In

more recent years this self-understanding has largely given way to one of being a part of society, accompanied by the change from German to English, and the acceptance of many of the customs and standards of the broader culture.

A Baptism at the Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church . . .

In the 1930s new Christians at the Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church were baptized in Lake Erie, at Seacliff Park in Leamington. Several deacon families would arrive early on a Sunday morning and set up two enclosures: one for women and one for men. Each enclosure consisted of four posts driven into the sand, around which a six-foot high piece of cloth was wrapped to form a secluded changing room. Here the women changed into white gowns and the men into white shirts and dark trousers.

While other church members watched and sang hymns in German, the candidates assembled on the shore and were directed one by one into the water to the officiating minister and his assistant, who were standing at a suitable depth. After verbally responding to a statement of faith, the candidate was immersed in the water and then returned to the shore to be welcomed as a new member of the church.

*Peter Bartel
Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church*

This trend is doubtlessly related to another significant aspect of the Mennonite experience in Canada, namely the long time of peace and increasingly affluent living. Mennonites have often been noted for their willingness to work hard, to spend little, to be thrifty, and to abstain from social pleasures (which often were expensive as well); due in part to these characteristics, as well as the general economic developments of the last decades, many have become increasingly wealthy. This has had related effects of self-sufficiency and even luxurious lifestyles for many whose ancestors would have found them unthinkable a generation ago.

One effect of the affluence and acculturation among the Mennonite people is that many have less significant involvement in the life and work of the church than earlier. It has been suggested that there are as many people of Mennonite background who are unrelated to any Mennonite church as there are church-related ones. Thus there are many "marginal" Mennonites and those who are "Mennonite" by their typical surnames and ethnic background only, without any significant commitment to the Mennonite church.

In contrast to this trend is yet another one, that of renewed spiritual interest and dedication. On the one hand, this has led to a renewal of traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite values, while, on the other hand, many have felt led to identify with other religious renewal movements of North America. These spiritual "renewals" have had varying emphases: while some have focused on internalized, personal piety, others have stressed social and justice concerns, and yet others the charismatic experience. In some cases, Mennonites have been able to incorporate these influences into their existing churches, in others they have caused people to leave their traditional ties entirely and join other denominations or groups.

Other trends could certainly be noted--the current Canadian Mennonite scene is far too complex to be neatly analyzed in a few short pages! However, it is fascinating to observe that the various trends and developments are not restricted to any one Mennonite group or conference body but cut across all traditional boundaries: indeed, the trends among Mennonites probably reflect larger trends of Canadian society much more than is usually perceived!

It is in the context of this larger picture that we now turn to the Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties of southwestern Ontario.

Further Explorations . . .

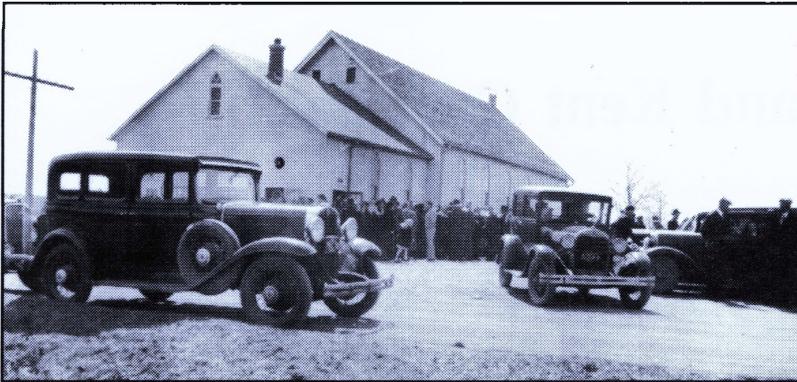
One very interesting study would be to investigate the numbers of Mennonites in Canada (or here, in Essex and Kent Counties) who are not related to any Mennonite church--together with the reasons for their decisions to leave the church.

Part Two

**The Mennonite Churches in
Essex and Kent Counties**

Introduction

In the following chapters, the stories of the Mennonite congregations in Essex and Kent Counties are told. They are many stories--even though together they form the pieces of one larger narrative. Each one is really only an introductory overview, and the fuller history and current emphases of each congregation bear further careful research and telling. Some work in these areas has already been done or is in process; several histories are available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Leamington.

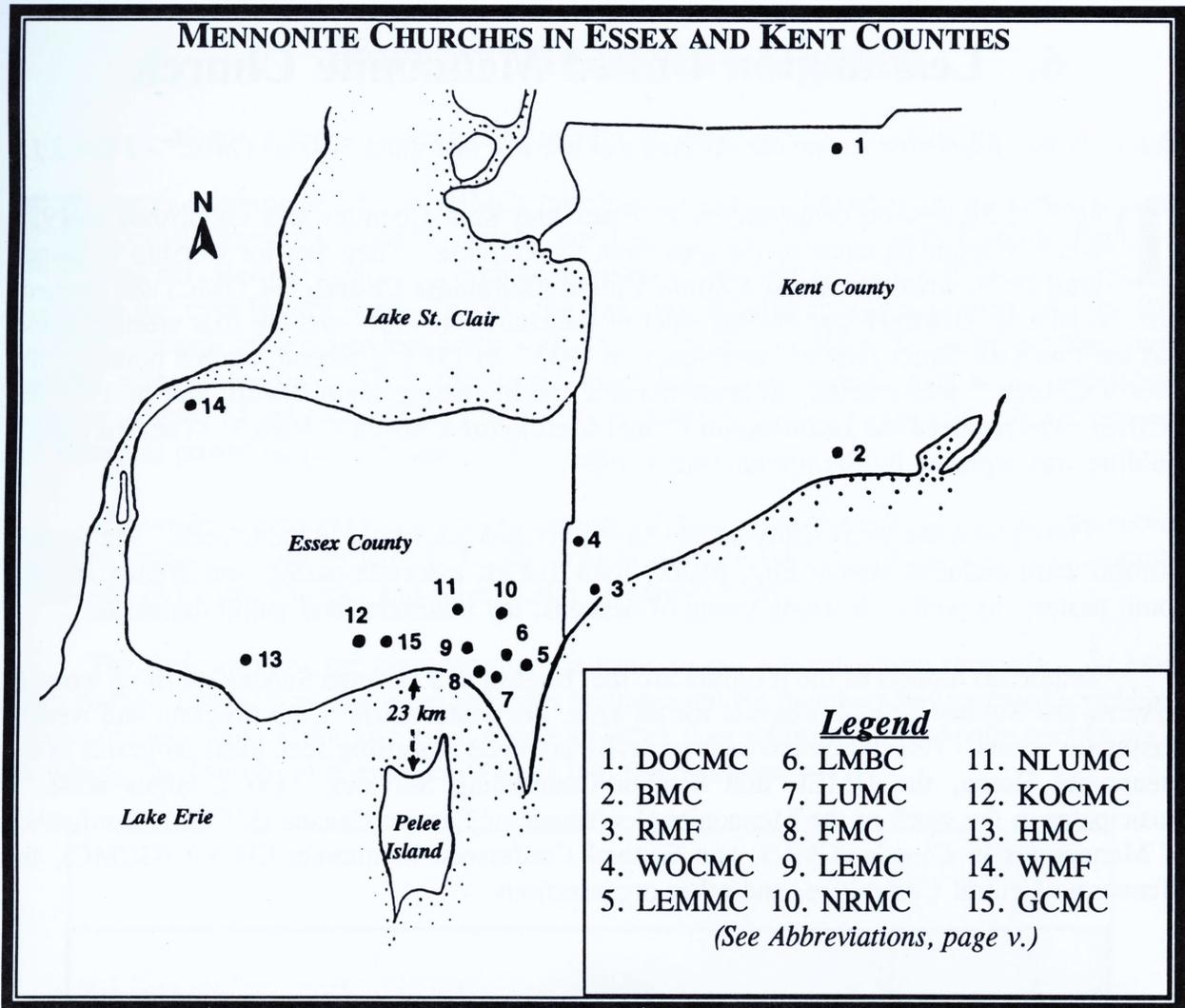


First United Mennonite Church building on Oak Street, Leamington in the 1940s. (Courtesy Helen Epp)



Groundbreaking for the new Harrow Mennonite Church, 1995. (Courtesy Sue Goerzen)

MENNONITE CHURCHES IN ESSEX AND KENT COUNTIES



(Adapted by Maren Kliever from *Biographies of Our Late Leaders . . .*)

6. Leamington United Mennonite Church

Motto: "Other foundation can no one lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ." - 1 Cor.3:11

The first Mennonite congregation in Essex and Kent Counties was established in 1925 when immigrants came to the area from the Ukraine. They met for worship in homes until 1929, when the **Essex County United Mennonite Church (ECUMC)** was formed. Rev. Nicolai N. Driedger was elected elder of the church in 1930, and the first meeting house was built on Oak Street East in Leamington in 1933. In 1953 a second church building, the "North Church," was erected to accommodate the increasing membership, and in 1958 the ECUMC was renamed the **Leamington United Mennonite Church (LUMC)**. The first church building was replaced by the present one in 1984.

Throughout the years many people have provided leadership in the church. The present pastoral team includes Menno Epp, pastor, John Toews, associate pastor, and Wendy Janzen, youth pastor, as well as a strong group of deacons, lay ministers, and pulpit assistants.

Important aspects of the program are the English and German Sunday morning worship services and Sunday School program for all ages, the winter Girls' Club program and weekly classes for adults. The church has been centrally involved in starting such local programs as the Mennonite Home, the UMEI, and Shalom Counselling Services. On a larger scale, it participates in the work of the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada (MCEC), Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC), and General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC), the Mennonite Central Committee, and other organizations.



The Leamington United Mennonite Church, 1997. (Courtesy George Schartner)

7. Harrow Mennonite Church

Motto: A people called by God to a life of grace, worship, and ministry.

Harrow Mennonite Church (HMC) members, originally linked with the Essex County United Mennonite Church, initially met for worship at the home of Gerhard Papke, a teacher. Herman Lepp, Sr., became minister of the congregation in 1944, and provided leadership for over twenty years. In 1951 the first church building was dedicated, and in 1953 the HMC became an independent body with 45 members. In 1996 the aging building was replaced with a new one. Over the years there have been several pastors in leadership, including Audrey Mierau, one of the first female Mennonite pastors in Ontario. At the present Jim Brown is providing pastoral leadership.

The church continues its strong support of Conference work and area Mennonite programs such as United Mennonite Educational Institute (UMEI), the Leamington Mennonite Home, the Et Cetera Shoppe, and Silver Lake Mennonite Camp.

The dedication of the core members is basic to the present active program. At least seven countries of birth and as many religious heritages among members have created a rich and varied congregation. More and more people of other than traditional Mennonite backgrounds are joining the church, as it extends its roots into the community.



The new Harrow Mennonite Church in 1996.

8. Faith Mennonite Church

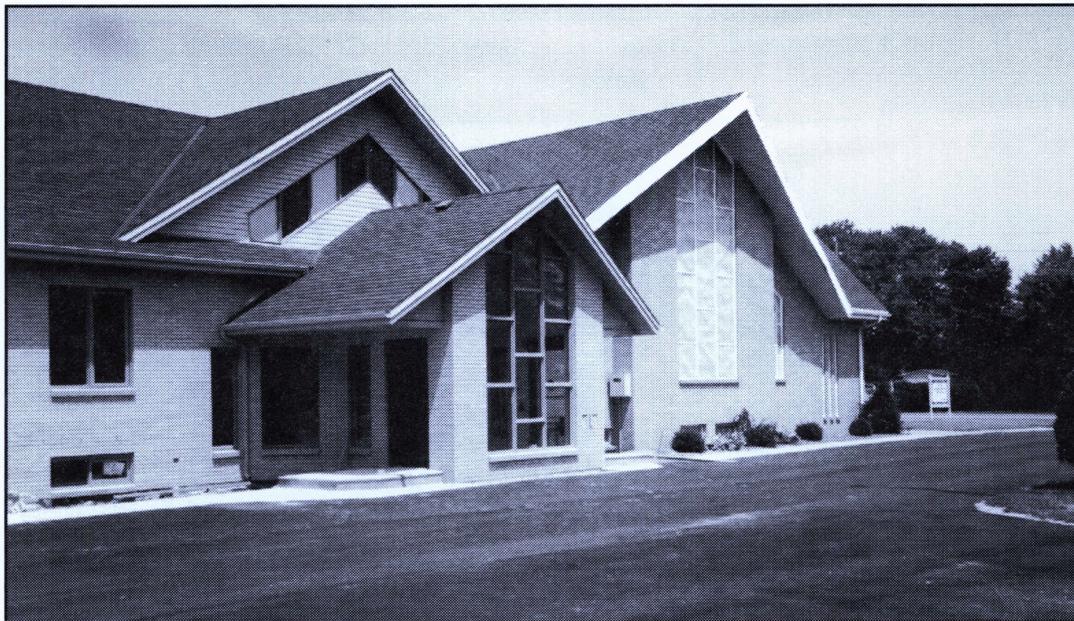
Motto: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." - 1 Cor.3:11

The Faith Mennonite Church (FMC) was formed in 1961 when about fifty people interested in an English language congregation left LUMC under the leadership of George Janzen. In 1964 a church was built on Sherk Street, primarily with voluntary labour.

At the present time membership has grown to about 250 persons and represents an ethnically and culturally diverse group. With recent membership growth, primarily through young families of Old Colony Mennonite background, came the need for a substantial addition to the church; this was completed in 1996.

Many pastors have served in leadership at the Faith Mennonite Church. As of fall 1997 the pastor is Glenn Brubacher.

This congregation, as many other Mennonite congregations, cooperates in operating the Et Cetera Shoppe, the Leamington Mennonite Home, the Inter-Mennonite Mission Committee, Shalom Counselling Services, and other local organizations.



The Faith Mennonite Church, 1996.

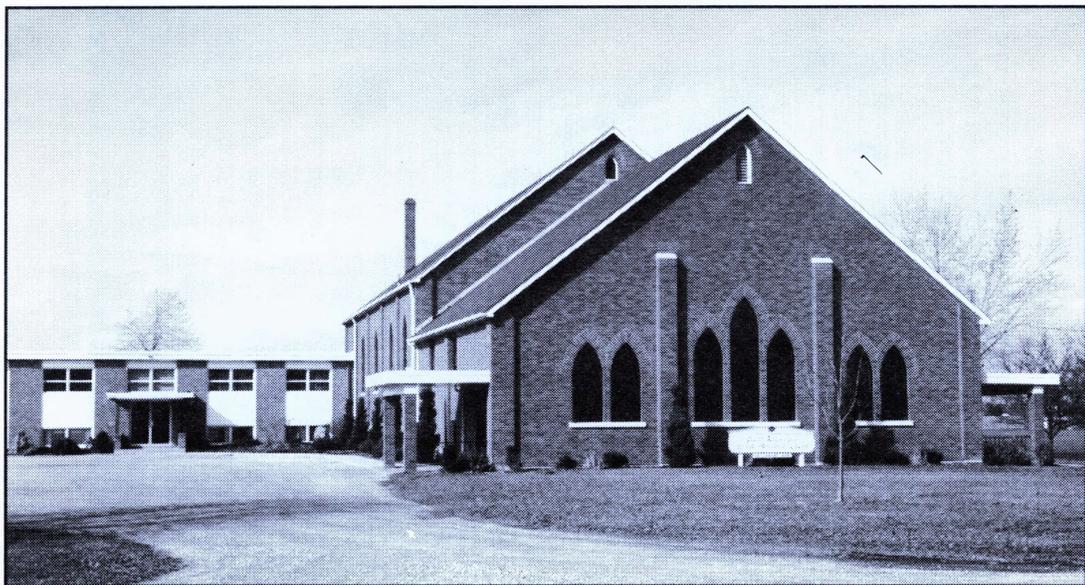
9. North Leamington United Mennonite Church

Motto: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." - Mat. 24:35

The North Leamington United Mennonite Church (NLUMC) was built in 1953, to accommodate the increasing number of members in the ECUMC. A Sunday School wing was added to the church in 1961 and a large addition to the front of the building in 1983.

Until 1980 the church remained united with the LUMC and its leadership team. During the first years, Rev. J. C. Neufeld was elder of the combined congregation. Cornelius Driedger became the first leading minister of the NLUMC in 1980. Since 1989 Victor Kliewer has been the pastor, along with youth pastors Mick and Marnë Mierau Friesen. They are supported by a strong group of lay ministers and deacons in carrying out a many-sided program in the church. Sunday School instruction, separate Laotian services, music, mission outreach, conference participation, as well as support for the Leamington Mennonite Home, the UMEI, and the Et Cetera Shoppe are some examples.

A significant factor in the youth and young adults program is the annual departure of many college and university students. Most of these do not return to Leamington after their studies are completed because of limited employment opportunities. In recent years, however, an active young adults program has developed during the summer months.



The North Leamington United Mennonite Church.

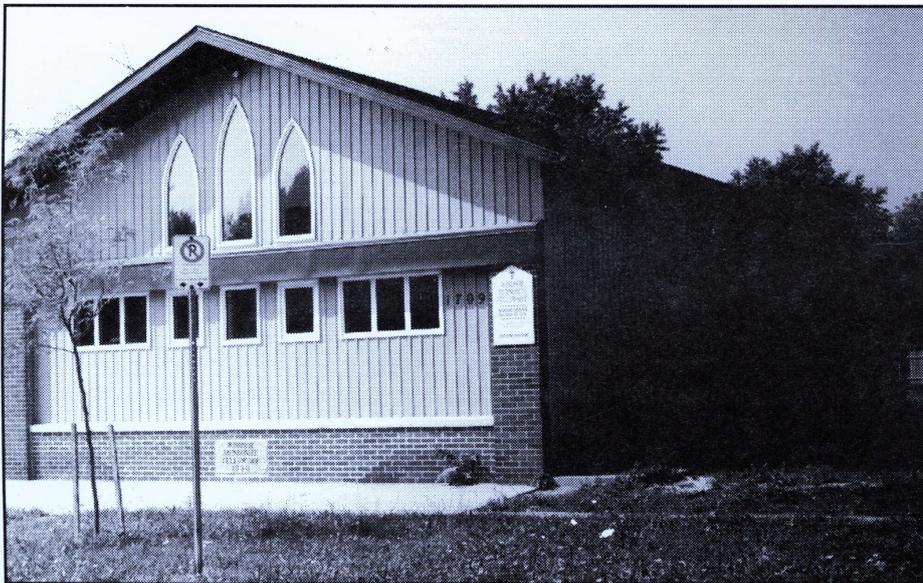
10. Windsor Mennonite Fellowship

Motto: A community of God's people called to worship, fellowship, and serve.

Attempts were made during the 1920s, the 1950s, and again in the 1970s to establish a Mennonite congregation in Windsor. Although these flourished briefly, it was not until 1981 that the church planting efforts met with lasting success. At that time, the Conference of Mennonites in Ontario appointed Henry Paetkau, the pastor of the HMC at the time, to lead Bible studies for the Windsor Mennonites. Their first formal worship service took place in 1983, and worship services continued weekly thereafter.

Various rented facilities served the group's needs until 1990, when a permanent home was found. With the help of grants, loans, and much voluntary labour, a former laundrette was converted into an attractive place of worship--the present **Windsor Mennonite Fellowship**. Since 1993 Erwin Wiens has served as pastor of the congregation.

The group, because of its urban setting, has seen continual change in membership, with people moving to and from the area. The congregation continues to work at developing a vision for a Mennonite church presence in Windsor. Some of the programs that have been a part of church life are summer Daily Vacation Bible School with invitations to area children, women's Bible study, men's breakfasts, and the sale of MCC Self-Help crafts.



The church of the Windsor Mennonite Fellowship.

11. Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church

Motto: Holding forth the Word of Life.

In 1932, when the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Ontario was established, about sixteen people, who had been worshipping together with United Mennonites, joined to form the **Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church (LMBC)**. They had come through the political turmoil and emigration from Russia and were ready to pioneer a new church.

The first church building on Elliot Street was dedicated on Christmas Eve, 1939. Isaac Tiessen was elected the first leader. He served until 1947 and continued to assist until 1958. The present church is located on Highway 3, just east of Leamington. An education wing and gymnasium were added to the building in 1980, and in 1997 with the membership close to two hundred, another major addition was completed. As of 1997, Henry Regier is providing pastoral leadership, together with Brad Wilson, the youth pastor.



The Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church. (Courtesy George Schartner)

Many members have been actively involved in mission work both abroad and at home. Some members of the group led a Sunday School in Windsor for some years, actively participated in worship services in seniors' homes, worked with children's clubs, and sponsored Laotian refugees. There is also ongoing support for the Et Cetera Shoppe and other MCC projects.

12. Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church

Motto: "But we preach Christ crucified." - 1 Cor. 1:23a

In 1967, due to interest shown in revival meetings among immigrants from Mexico, Dave Friesen from Aylmer began conducting similar services in homes on Sunday afternoons. About a year later, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) asked the Jake Hoepfners to provide leadership in Leamington on a full-time basis.

It soon became evident that homes were too small to host the group. The UMEI and the Hillman United Church provided facilities until the church building of the **Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (LEMMC)** was completed in the fall of 1972. In the spring of 1984, a major building program was launched, which more than doubled its capacity.

Presently Dave and Gladys Penner have pastoral responsibilities at the LEMMC, assisted by one lay minister and five deacon couples. In 1994, the group hired its first full-time youth pastor. Over the years the church has implemented a Christian education board and a mission board. John and Maria Klassen were sent to Bolivia in 1987 and the following year Bill and Tina Wiebe left for Durango, Mexico as missionaries. Membership has grown from eight members in 1970 to nearly 200 in 1997.



The Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church, 1996. (Courtesy D. and L. Dyck)

13. Blenheim Mennonite Church

*Motto: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God."
- John 1:12*

The **Blenheim Mennonite Church (BMC)** was started in 1989 by the EMMC Ontario Churches. It was the only church which worshipped in Low German in an area with approximately 3,000 Low German speaking Mennonites. A first building was purchased in 1991; in 1993 the former "Glad Tidings Church" in Blenheim was purchased to accommodate increasing membership.

George and Suzanna Rempel served as its first leaders. Since 1992 Isaac and Lynne Harms have taken over the pastoral ministry.

Difficulties that the church faces include helping its members deal with language barriers, and search for housing and employment. One of the strengths of the congregation is the closeness of the group. Low German has a binding effect in a country that uses mainly English. Presently 60-90 people attend on Sunday mornings, representing eighteen to twenty households. There are six Sunday School classes, evening services every third Sunday, and Wednesday evening singing followed by Bible study for adults and children.



Construction at the Blenheim Mennonite Church, 1994. (Courtesy Isaac Harms)

14. Old Colony Mennonite Church in Wheatley, Kingsville, and Dresden

Motto: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." - 1 Cor. 3:11

The Old Colony Mennonite Church (OCMC) was established in Essex and Kent in 1965 to preserve the values and traditions brought along by the Mennonites from Mexico who settled in this area. At that point the OCMC had one place of worship in the area - the building about five kilometres north of Wheatley, built in 1971-72.



Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church, 1997. (Courtesy George Schartner)

The congregation grew at a tremendous rate, and it was necessary to find additional space to accommodate everyone. Since many members were coming from far away, the church decided to purchase another building. In 1988 a building was bought from the Seventh Day Adventist congregation near Kingsville, and the **Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church** was begun. Eight years later, that congregation was looking at building a larger sanctuary on neighbouring land.

In 1989 another church was established near Dresden - the **Dresden Old Colony Mennonite Church**. The congregation rented a building for church services for the first year, and in 1990 purchased an old church building just East of Kent County Road 15, North of Highway 21, in the Wallaceburg area.

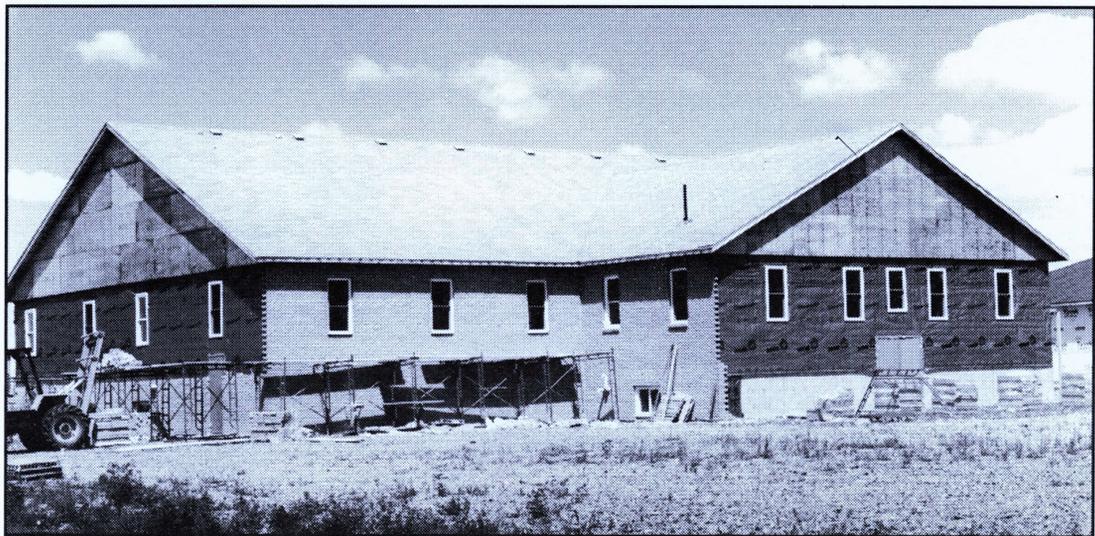
Along with the two new and rapidly growing congregations, the Wheatley congregation also continued to grow. Only four years after the division the group was faced with tight space. The congregation decided to build an addition, making this its largest building.

Over the years, leadership has changed hands, but the basic structure of the church has remained the same. The church is served by one bishop and several ministers and deacons.



The Dresden Old Colony Mennonite Church.

The OCMC has members who are involved in many local service projects. The congregation has supported MCC by working with the Ontario Mennonite Immigrant Assistance Committee (OMIAC) and at the Et Cetera Shoppe. Other cooperative participation is seen in the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union, South Essex Community Council, and Leamington Mennonite Home.



*Construction of the new Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church, 1997.
(Courtesy G. Schartner)*

15. Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church

Motto: "Let us love one another, for love comes from God." - 1 John 4:7a

The Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church originated in Russia as the *Kleine Gemeinde* ("the small congregation") and kept this name in the Ukraine and Canada. In 1952, it became the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC). In 1989 the EMC Board of Missions looked at the possibility of planting a church in Leamington; its primary target group was the Low German speaking Mennonites who had come from Mexico, Belize, and South America.

In May, 1990 Sunday worship services and Sunday School were started by Ben and Edna Klassen from Aylmer, Ontario, followed by Peter and Elna Reimer from Stratton, Ontario as the first resident couple. As of 1996 about 225 people participate in an average Sunday morning service. The actual membership is much smaller but growing quickly. Low German, with some English, is used in the services. The group has organized and held several special events such as Family Life seminars and evangelistic services.

Initially the congregation worshipped in the UMEI for several years, and recently a new church building has been constructed on Concession 3 of Mersea Township.



The Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church in 1997. (Courtesy George Schartner)

16. New Reinland Mennonite Church

Motto: "But we preach Christ crucified." - 1 Cor.23a

The New Reinland Mennonite Church (NRMC) is one of many new Mennonite congregations that have sprung up in Southern Ontario during the last twenty-five years. The congregation was made up originally of Mennonites who had left Mexico because life was too hard economically for them.

Bishop Cornelius and Anna Quiring and Benjamin and Helena Wall have given leadership in the local New Reinland Mennonite Church since the congregation was established in 1984. Twelve years later, in 1996, the leadership was handed over to William and Sara Thiessen.

The church building, originally an elementary school, is located on Concession 6, East of Highway 77. Three later additions have already been made to accommodate the growing congregation.

Regular church activities include a women's sewing group and a time of singing on Saturday evenings for anyone who is interested. One annual event in which there is active participation is the Mennonite Community Sale.

Difficulties have arisen in the congregation because many children no longer understand the Low German language. Some English is presently being used in the worship services.



The New Reinland Mennonite Church.

17. The Reinland Mennonite Fellowship

Motto: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing." - Eph. 1:3a

The first worship service of the **Reinland Mennonite Fellowship (RMF)** was conducted on September 13, 1994 in the UMEI. Shortly afterwards, a building in Coatsworth was purchased, where approximately twenty families gathered. The children attend Sunday School while the parents have a worship service. A Thursday evening Bible study is offered for all ages. Ben Wiebe, David Dyck, Peter Dyck, Jake Giesbrecht, and John Wiebe are ministers who alternate in bringing the Low German message. The older members of the congregation have moved here from Mexico. The younger people, however, have been born in Canada. The group is one of several Reinland Mennonite Fellowship congregations in Ontario.



The Reinland Mennonite Fellowship.

18. Gospel Christian Mennonite Church

Motto: "Let the blessing of the Lord God be upon us and establish the work of our hands for us."

- Psalm 90:17a

The Gospel Christian Mennonite Church (GChMC) began in 1995 and has just begun to establish itself. The church started by renting space in the Wheatley United Church, however, more recently they have purchased the former Salem Public School north of Kingsville for a meeting house.

The congregation meets on Sunday mornings for worship and has evening meetings weekly. About three evening meetings each month are planned for the youth and one joint meeting is planned monthly for children, youth, and parents.

The language use in the Sunday School follows the pattern of many of the groups in language transition. Parents are eager for their children to learn German, and therefore want it used in Sunday School. On the other hand, many children need English in order to understand, so Sunday School teachers also use some English in the classes.

The strength of the congregation lies in the hope and goodwill of the individual members and families, and especially the move into their own building has generated much enthusiasm.



The Gospel Christian Mennonite Church, 1997. (Courtesy George Schartner)

Part Three
Values and Lifestyles

Introduction

Aside from the unique development of each congregation in Essex and Kent Counties, the Mennonites have much in common and, in fact, work together at a wide range of activities and programs. In this section some of the main general values and characteristics of the Mennonites will be outlined.

Central to the identity of the Mennonites are their religious convictions, and these will be discussed in Chapter 19. Education and music are described in Chapter 20 and 21; both have been and continue to be very significant for the Mennonites, in Essex and Kent as elsewhere. In Chapter 22 some of the ways in which the Mennonites have been making their living and how they have been spending their leisure time are surveyed.

These various aspects of Mennonite values and lifestyles--and others could readily be added!--combine to make fascinating and educational reading material. At the same time, it is clear that these chapters are only introductory and suggest many further topics!

Baptism: a central Mennonite symbol!



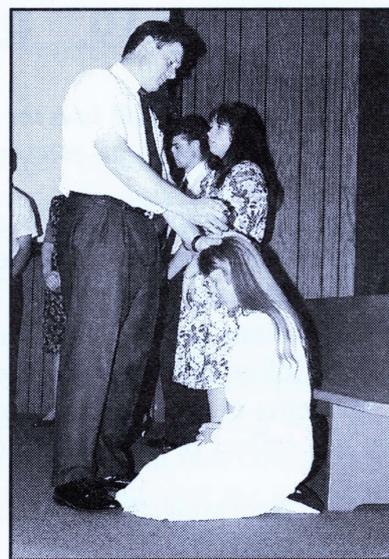
Mennonite Brethren baptism in Lake Erie, 1944. (Courtesy Henry Schmidt)



United Mennonite Church (Oak Street) baptism, 1950s. (Courtesy Irene Woodsit)



*Baptismal group at Faith Mennonite Church, 1980.
(Courtesy Irene Woodsit)*



*Baptism of Betty Klassen at the
Blenheim Mennonite Church.
(Courtesy of Isaac Harms)*



Baptismal group, North Leamington United Mennonite Church, 1997. (Courtesy V. Kliever)

19. Religious Beliefs and Values

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . and your neighbour as yourself." - Mat. 22:37, 39

The attempt to state in a brief outline form the beliefs and values of a group of people is a risky matter. On the one hand, there is the danger of oversimplifying what is a much more complex system of beliefs--and, as already has been suggested, the Mennonites are by no means a completely united "group" in this sense! On the other hand, there is also the danger of oversimplifying the reality of life which does not always fully agree with theoretical statements of faith; so it would readily be possible to find examples of real-life behavior that do not reflect or even contradict the formal confessional statements of the Mennonites.

Accepting these limitations, it will still be helpful to sketch out some basic Mennonite convictions!

Basic Convictions

By far the majority of Mennonites have always accepted the basic teachings of the larger Christian church, in particular, the tradition of the Protestant Reformation. This would include such doctrines as belief in God the Creator; the goodness of the original creation; the inherent human tendency toward sinfulness as explained in the biblical account of the "fall" of humankind; the redemptive work of Jesus Christ; the presence of the Holy Spirit as Guide and Comforter in everyday life. It is noteworthy that early confessions of faith, such as the *Schleitheim Confession* (summarized on page 5), mostly do not mention any of these basic theological doctrines in any detail, if at all. On the other hand, later *Catechisms*, used for basic member instruction, were usually quite systematic and all-inclusive in their treatment of the doctrines.

The Lord's Prayer . . .

is occasionally recited by the congregation as part of the regular worship service in several Mennonite churches. Because of the familiarity of the text, the older English is usually kept, although it is never used otherwise.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom and the
power
and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen. (Mat. 6:9-13)**

It is against this general background that the following basic convictions may be noted.

Christ our Saviour and model. At the centre of Mennonite teachings is the need to believe in Jesus Christ as the model for life, and as the One who died and rose from the dead in order that people could live in union with God. They believe that the church should keep Christ's life and ministry alive in the world, just as though Christ were still living on earth. For this reason they refer to the church as the "body of Christ."

The Bible is central. The church tries to live in obedience to the Word of God--the Bible. Mennonites stress the importance of the Christian community in interpreting the Bible together but also the significance of God's Holy Spirit in helping the community of believers to understand the Word. The Spirit uses the written Word to give new life to the church and to help people grow in faith.

New life in Christ. Mennonites believe that because of the nature of human beings, they all sin; they commit wrongs, do not do the things they should, and are out of touch with God. In history, God sent Jesus Christ to the world so that all those who believe in him could receive forgiveness for all their sins, as well as the gift of a more whole life today and the promise of living forever with God.



Deacon installation at the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1981. (Courtesy David Derksen)

Belonging to each other. In Christ all are members of one body. Mennonites believe that the Christian community is essential, that Christians need each other for encouragement and growth, for confronting one another in a supportive way, and for help in time of crisis.

Reaching out to the world. Jesus Christ said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). He sends the church to bring "good news" to all persons throughout the world. Mennonites emphasize that followers of Jesus should help wherever they have an opportunity, whether there be a spiritual or physical need.

Distinctives

The following beliefs are by no means exclusively Mennonite, but Mennonites may be found to place more emphasis on them than some other denominations.

Voluntary membership and commitment to Christ. Mennonites believe a church is strong when its members experience God's love and are committed to its purposes. For that reason, "believer's baptism" is practiced, publicly symbolizing the decision of an adult to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. New-born children are dedicated to God by the parents in some Mennonites churches, but this is never meant to be the equivalent of infant baptism in other sacramental traditions.

Helping each other. As members of the body of Christ, Mennonites emphasize the value of Christian community. In this context Mennonites try to care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of one another. Mutual aid may take many forms, including giving time, money, and goods in times of crisis. This may happen quite informally but has also led to the development of various organizations for support of others in need (see Part Four).

Living as Peacemakers. Mennonites try to take seriously Jesus's teachings and live accordingly. This includes speaking and living the truth with integrity and refusing to swear any oaths (Mat. 5:33-37). It also includes following the command to love one's enemy (Mat. 5:38-48) and refusing to use violence in everyday life or to participate in military service. It also means living morally pure lives, serving the poor and needy, and working for justice and mercy.



Leamington "boys" in Alternative Service at Montreal River Camp in 1943. Back: Henry Koop, John P. Driedger, Cornie Driedger, John H. Dick, Henry Wiebe, Jake Mathies, Henry Dueckman. Front: Henry Schmidt, Richard Taves, Nick Schmidt, Nick Driedger. (Courtesy John H. Dick)

Further Explorations . . .

*Persons who are interested in further study of Mennonite statements of faith, will enjoy the book **One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God. Mennonite Confessions of Faith** by Howard John Loewen (see section "Further Readings").*

Relationships with Other Christians

The relationship of the Mennonite churches with non-Mennonite neighbours is a long and checkered one. The Mennonites, as described earlier, had their origins in the conflicts of the 16th century Reformation in Europe, where the early Anabaptists were persecuted by Catholics and Protestants alike. This beginning of the church, which was filled with so much suffering and martyrdom, affected the further self-understanding of the emerging Mennonite church for centuries to come.

As time went by and the religious, social, and political tensions began to ease, some Mennonites chose to integrate with their surrounding society, becoming known as the "quiet ones," who "minded their own business" and lived at peace with their neighbours. Others moved away to the frontiers of society (in Eastern Europe or in North America) where they could farm their own lands and live in peace, largely independent of other neighbours, government authorities, and other church groups. In this connection there also developed a strong tradition of "separateness," reinforced by the biblical teaching "to remain separate from the world" (1 John 2:15, etc.), as well as by linguistic and cultural distinctiveness.

The Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties have varying histories, but upon first arriving here most have lived through a period of "separation" from the surrounding society and churches. This would have been the result of their own desire to keep separate; it would also

The LMA Brochure

is published about once a year by the inter-denominational Leamington Ministerial Association and welcomes visitors to the different churches in the area. The brochure lists a total of nineteen churches, including six of the various Mennonite traditions. It is an indication of the good spirit of cooperation that exists among the different churches at the present time!

reflect a sense of distance among many of the non-Mennonites who were not always certain what to make of these new people or actually viewed them with suspicion. The people of the United Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren traditions experienced this in their early settlement years before World War 2, which was likely a major watershed for them in their relations to other groups; since then, there have been many more joint programs and other forms of interaction than before. Some of the more recently arrived Mennonites are going through rather similar experiences, only several decades later. Of course, there are many additional factors that

affect the developments and need to be kept in mind in assessing this issue!

At the present time, trying to fulfill Christ's prayer for unity among all Christians (John 17:11), most Mennonite churches actively seek to work together with other Christian churches. For example, Leamington area Mennonite pastors have long participated in the Leamington Ministerial Association; and Mennonite churches in Essex and Kent co-operate with local churches of other denominations in ecumenical worship services and the Leamington Ministerial Food Bank.

Church Holidays

Church holidays are important times of celebration and remembrance of the history and identity of a faith community. The chart gives an overview of Mennonite holidays.

	LU M C	H M C	F M C	NL U M C	W M F	L M BC	LE M M C	B M C	OC M C	LE M C	NR M C	R M F	G C M C
Advent Sundays	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	*	⊗	.	.
Christmas Eve	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	*	*	⊗	.	.	.
Christmas Day	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Boxing Day	*	.	⊗	.	*	*	*	⊗	⊗	*	⊗	⊗	⊗
New Year's Eve	⊗	.	*	*	*	⊗	⊗	*	*
New Year's Day	*	⊗	⊗	⊗	.	.	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Epiphany	*	.	*	*	.	.	*	⊗	⊗	*	⊗	⊗	⊗
Six Lent Sundays	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	*	*	*	.	⊗	.	.
Palm Sunday	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	*	⊗	⊗	.	.
Good Friday	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Easter	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Easter Monday	.	.	⊗	.	.	.	*	*	⊗	*	⊗	⊗	⊗
Mother's Day	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	*	⊗	⊗	⊗	*	⊗	.	.	.
Ascension Day	*	.	⊗	*	.	.	*	⊗	⊗	*	⊗	⊗	⊗
Pentecost	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	*	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Pentecost Monday	*	⊗	.	⊗	⊗	⊗
Thanksgiving	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Bible Sunday	*	.	⊗	.	.	*	*	*
Peace Sunday	⊗	.	⊗	*	⊗	*	*	*
Memorial Sunday	⊗	.	⊗	⊗	.	.	*

CHART SYMBOLS: ⊗ VERY IMPORTANT * CELEBRATED . NOT IMPORTANT

One Story from Mennonite History . . .

There are many stories of individual experiences which make the Mennonite statements of faith come to life. Following is just one such illustration--related to the topic of participation in war.

Isaac Lehn, 1924 - 1945

Isaac Lehn was born on May 22, 1924 in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Some years later, in 1937, the Lehn family moved to Leamington. On May 24, 1942 Isaac was baptized by Rev. N. N. Driedger in the Leamington United Mennonite Church, then known as the Essex County United Mennonite Church.



Isaac J. Lehn, 1924-45

When Canada entered the Second World War, Isaac, like many other young men, was conscripted into military service. He did not want to take up arms but was not able to get farm leave like some others, so he enlisted in the Medical Corps of the Canadian Armed Forces on December 29, 1942. He decided to do his part by helping the wounded.



Burial site of Isaac Lehn, Nijmegen, Holland. (Courtesy R. and A. Lehn)

Isaac was assigned to the Lincoln Welland Regiment and in July of 1943 was shipped overseas, first to England, then to France, Belgium, and Holland.

He wrote many letters and was very appreciative of the letters and parcels that he received from loved ones at home. Isaac Lehn died on January 26, 1945 and is buried in a military cemetery at Nijmegen, Holland.

(Submitted by Isaac Lehn's brother and sister-in-law, Rudy and Anita Lehn)

20. Education

"Fix these words . . . in your hearts and minds . . . Teach them to your children." - Deut. 11:18-19

General Convictions

Over the centuries, Mennonites have tried to teach their children to be faithful and productive members of the church and of the community. Mennonite education, at its core, has been an effort to teach and model the way of Jesus.

As the various Mennonite groups encountered the public education system in Canada, their responses could be divided into three general categories: unquestioning acceptance, stubborn resistance, and allowance of new and useful adjustments which were not threatening to their faith and their own educational principles.

The majority of the early Mennonite settlers in Essex and Kent Counties who eventually became the "**United Mennonites**" came here virtually penniless. Their first years were spent in establishing homes and facilities for joint worship. However, they came with an appreciation for education, aware of the fact that their ancestors had built many schools--including schools of higher learning--in Russia. They were thankful for these schools, since it was the students of these schools who provided leadership in the new homeland. Now, in the new country they called home, some parts of the public education system were seen as potentially harmful. The sports

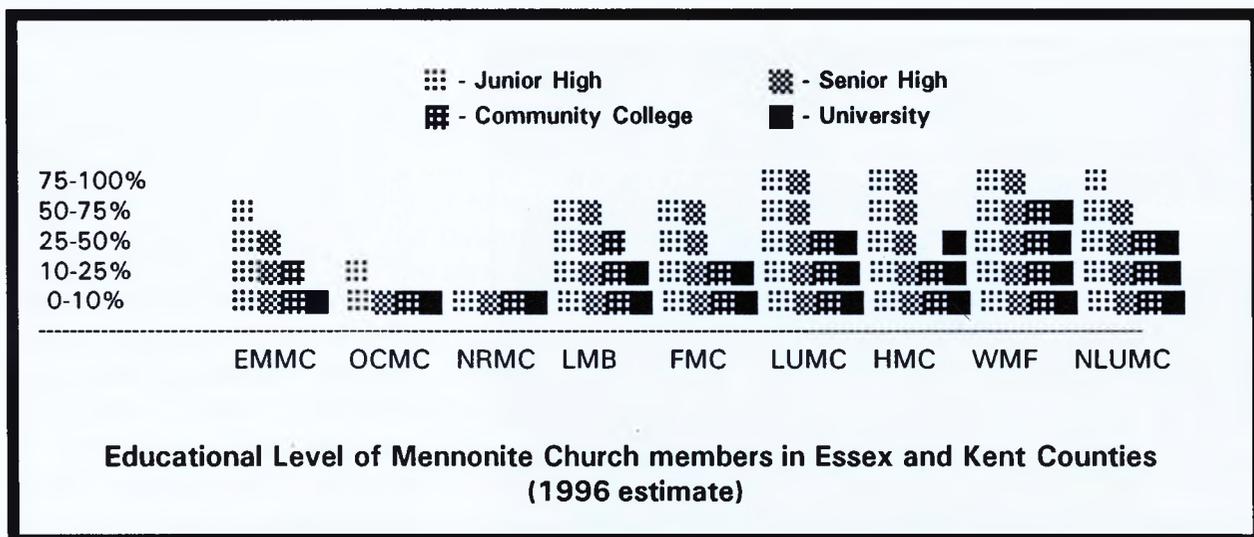


"Tante" Sara Wiens's Sunday School class at the Essex County United Mennonite Church, about 1938. First row: Anita (Epp) Froese, Irene (Willms) Woodsit, Lena (Dick) Fischer, Agnes (Froese) Tiessen, Agatha (Dick) Tiessen. Second row: Talitha (Tiessen) Shamas, Selma (Barg) Becuim, Helga (Neufeld) Driedger, Irene (Mathies) Willms, Helen (Dick) Epp. Third row: John Bergen, Frank Wiens, Peter Dick, Henry Janzen, John Ediger, Ernie Regehr, Henry Neufeld, ?, Ernie Driedger, George Hamm, John Dick, Henry Woelk.

program, for example, drew children away from home where they were needed for farmyard chores and in the fields; and school marches seemed much like military drills. They were grateful for the public school system, but they were also aware that it did not provide religious instruction, a factor that concerned many. They still believed that the best education was found in the home--given by the parents through their example in the kitchen, barn and fields. At the same time, some parents were so concerned about giving their children a religious education in a Mennonite setting that they sent them to Mennonite schools as far away as Rosthern, Saskatchewan; Gretna, Manitoba; and Fort Erie, Ontario.

Following discussions among United Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties in 1945-46, it was decided that a high school be built, which would give high priority to Christian faith instruction in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. That began the story of the UMEI. At about the same time, a number of students from **Mennonite Brethren** families were being sent to the newly established Eden Christian College at Niagara-on-the-Lake. This has continued through the years.

Many high school graduates of both the United Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren congregations have been and are attending such schools as Mennonite-operated **Conrad Grebel College** on the University of Waterloo campus, and **Concord College** (formerly the Mennonite Brethren Bible College) and **Canadian Mennonite Bible College** in Winnipeg. Others have attended the Mennonite seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana and Fresno, California. As it was in the dawning days of Mennonite settlement in Essex and Kent Counties, so today the great majority of the leaders in these congregations have come through one or more of these institutions.



The Old Colony Mennonites represent another tradition in education. Theirs is the position that has traditionally resisted any accommodation to the public school system; this development will be discussed in more detail later.

Presently there is a considerable range of opinions among the Mennonites in Essex and

Kent Counties with respect to education. In general, it would probably be correct to say that during the past 20-30 years there has been a gradual increase in the acceptance of higher levels of education in all congregations, including universities and colleges. This has been particularly true in the churches of the United Mennonite tradition--LUMC, HMC, WMF, FMC, and NLUMC (see chart above). The shift has been noticed particularly as families have been moving away from farms into towns and the children were no longer needed to help with chores, but also as jobs have been becoming more specialized and often require a higher education.

Sunday Schools and Christian Education Programs

Sunday School is one major aspect of the Mennonite church's education program which has been important to all area Mennonite churches. At the LUMC, for example, (originally the Essex County Mennonite Church) Sunday School classes began right from the beginning in 1925. Most Sunday School programs have included classroom time, divided by age groups, where the focus has been on teaching the biblical stories; usually there has also been a joint devotional time, which probably would include a Scripture reading or story, an opportunity to give money for a charitable cause, and a time of singing with various instruments, depending on what was available. Often the singing focused on preparation for a program which could then be shared with the rest of the congregation at such special church events as Christmas or Mother's Day.



Alfred Willms's grade 8 Sunday School class at the Leamington United Mennonite Church in 1960-61. Front row: Irene (Cornies) Driedger, Dorothy (Hildebrand) Derth, Carolyn Derksen, Janet (Dick) Robinson, Erika (Penner) Tiessen. Back row: David Cornies, Bill Konrad, Paul Krueger, Walter Tiessen, Henry Dyck, Larry Tiessen, John Penner, Gerry Ediger.

All churches, except the Faith Mennonite Church and the Windsor Mennonite Fellowship originally began their Sunday School programs in the German language. Many have switched to English, as fewer and fewer children speak German. Some, such as the Gospel Christian Mennonite Church, have continued teaching in German to the present. The Sunday School curriculums that are used vary from one congregation to another. For example, the "*Jubilee*" curriculum for children, which is known for its "hands-on" learning strategy, is being used by many

of the United Mennonite churches at the present.

Some congregations have **Adult Sunday School** classes as well, giving the adult members of the congregation, as well as visitors, the opportunity to reflect on the sermon or to study and discuss biblical texts, or other books or video series. One long-standing curriculum in the United Mennonite churches is the *Adult Bible Study Guide* (published by the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church). Alternatively, the Faith Mennonite Church, for example, studied a video series, *Whole and Forgiven: A Bible Study Experience with Walter Wink*

in 1997. Besides the Sunday morning classes, many Mennonite churches have a long tradition of mid-week adult Bible studies. One of the ministers or another qualified member of the congregation may be involved in teaching a lesson from a Bible curriculum or may lead in discussion of topics related to Christian living. These classes may last from 1-2 hours and often include a time of sharing of class members' experiences or concerns, singing together, and a time of prayer.

Inter-Mennonite Adult Education Courses . . .

have been offered for several sessions since 1994. In this program four or five churches have pooled their resources and planned short courses on such topics as the *Book of Revelation*, *Dealing with Shame and Grace*, and *Issues Facing the Church Today*. Some of the classes have been fairly small, but others have had fifty or more participants. One memorable session was led by Jim Brown, pastor of HMC, and Peter Dyck, minister of the OCMC: it focused on the topic of funeral styles and traditions, and a homemade coffin became the centre of discussion!

Sunday School at the Mennonite Brethren Church

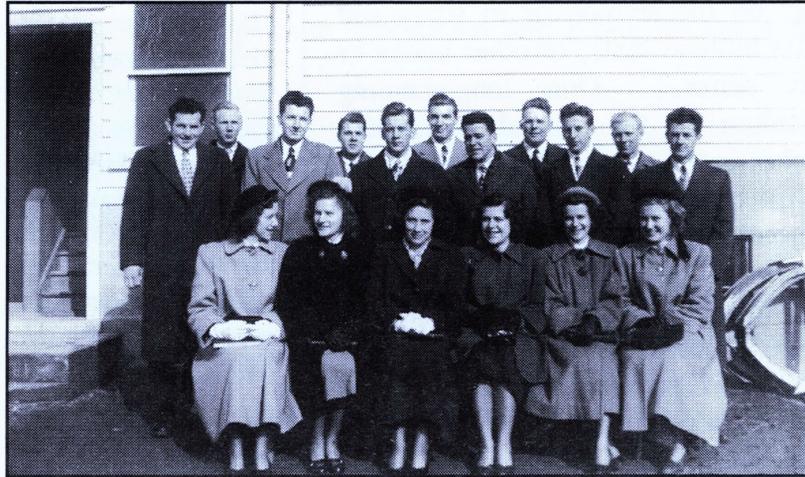
is one of the most important institutions for religious instruction. Along with individual classes, there is also a time of singing for the children. On Christmas Eve and Mother's Day the Sunday School presents programs for the rest of the congregation. A church picnic is held every June to mark the close of the Sunday School for the summer. This involves an outdoor service, picnic lunch, and games for all ages.

Another long-standing program of Christian education in some of the area Mennonite churches is the **Daily Vacation Bible School**. This program is held during the summer holidays, usually for one week, and draws in a large number of children from the church as well as the larger surrounding community. It is a time of nurturing of the children's faith, while those who do not have any Christian background may be invited to follow the way of Jesus to the extent they are able to understand. At North Leamington

United Mennonite Church, for example, there were some 110 elementary school age children at the DVBS program from July 7-11, 1997; about half of these were from the church, the rest from the general community. It was a time to hear the stories of Bible characters, sing, play outside, do crafts, and--of course!--eat snacks.

Youth Programs

Almost all of the Mennonite churches in Essex and Kent have special youth programs and activities, some for many years. The programs have different emphases, but have included Bible studies, Christian educational evenings, group outings and social events. And, of course, sports programs may not be overlooked! Longtime favorites have been baseball, volleyball, and hockey, but members of the older generation also remember the roller skating times in the "old auditorium" of the UMEI with great appreciation.



Youth executive of the Leamington United Mennonite Church, about 1950. Standing: Herman Dick, Art Rempel, Jake Driedger, John Driedger, Dave Janzen, Alfred Willms, Harry Tiessen, Peter Epp, George Janzen, Rudy Rempel, Henry N. Driedger. Seated: Helen (Dick) Epp, Irene (Mathies) Willms, Edith (Derksen) Wiens, Selma (Tiessen) Enns, Elizabeth (Janzen) Dick, Margaret (Willms) Driedger.

Leadership for the youth programs is often provided by interested adult members of the congregation, together with youth representatives. Full- or part-time youth

pastors are part of the pastoral team at several of the larger churches, such as the EMMC, LUMC, LMBC, and NLUMC. In other of the smaller churches the pastor may be directly involved with the youth program; for example, at the NRMC pastor Willie Thiessen and his wife Sara meet with the youth on Tuesday evenings for a time of Bible study and a lesson on "character building."



Senior girls' volleyball team at UMEI with their coach Bill Toews, 1995-96 school year.

Church Membership Instruction

A central program of education in all Mennonite churches is the instruction of new church members, traditionally called a "Catechism course." The format of this program varies, but the basic purpose is the same for all: to offer an overview of the beliefs and practices of the church to those people who want to be baptized upon their faith and become church members. The well-known textbook for many years has been the *Catechism*, the book with two hundred short questions and answers on the Christian faith which many members have memorized (often in the German language) or at least got to know well. Other texts that have been used more recently include *This We Believe* and *Guide to Faith*; both are systematic outlines of the basics of the Christian faith, with particular emphasis on the Mennonite perspective.



Baptism and church membership group at Windsor Mennonite Fellowship in 1994, with Pastor Erwin Wiens on the far right.



Baptism and church membership class at the Leamington EMMC in 1996; Pastor David Penner on right side.

United Mennonite Educational Institute

UMEI is a Christian High School located just west of Highway 77 on Concession 6 of Mersea Township, about three miles (5 kms) north of Leamington. It offers courses in Grades 9-12, as well as selected Ontario Academic Credit courses. The student body in recent years has ranged between eighty and one hundred members.

UMEI was created in 1945 when members of the United Mennonite Churches of Ontario in Niagara, Waterloo and Leamington decided to establish a high school for their young people. The Second World War and the militaristic pressures that came to bear on the churches' young people in the public schools convinced church leaders that a private high school, which emphasized the Anabaptist-Mennonite teachings, was a necessity.



The United Mennonite Educational Institute in 1997.

The school was built through donations and voluntary labour. Eventually it became largely the responsibility of the United Mennonite Churches of Leamington and continues to be supported by them to the present. The school, however, has also kept its ties to the larger Mennonite constituency, through the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada.

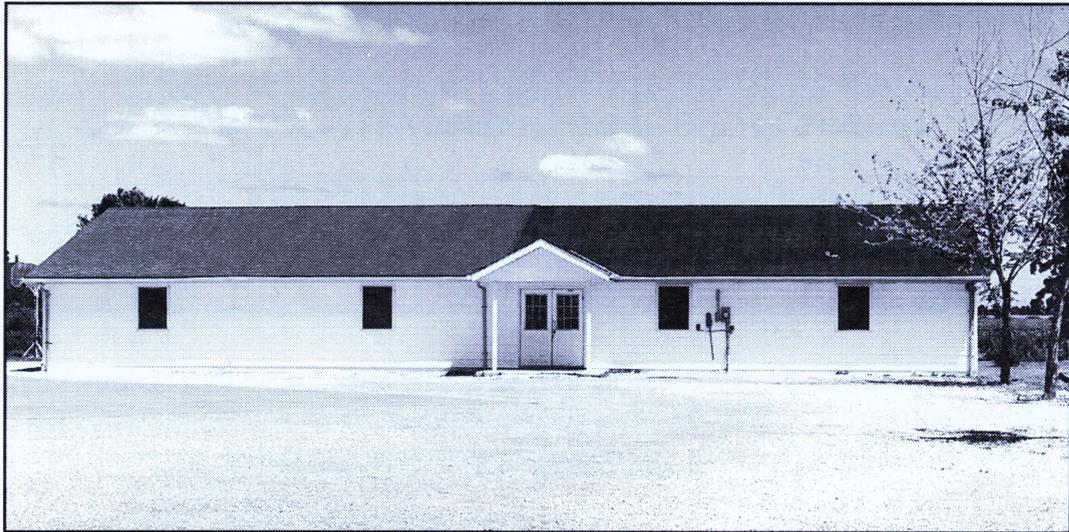
Today students of Mennonite and many other backgrounds appreciate the school's program of strong academic instruction, as well as in courses in church history, Christian faith, and music. UMEI has existed now for fifty years as a private, non-government-funded school. Despite rising costs, including tuition fees, the school continues to serve the community as a Christian educational alternative.

Education in the Old Colony Mennonite Church

In the early 1900s the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan legislated increasingly strict guidelines to unify their provincial education systems. However, the Mennonites who had immigrated there earlier, had come with the clear understanding that the education of their children would be entirely in their own hands. Now the OCMC, who saw one of their central convictions being threatened, was the group that most sharply opposed the new laws. They did this in the spirit of their overall faith convictions, offering passive yet passionate resistance, boycotting public schools, and refusing to assist the authorities in other ways. They were fined repeatedly and even taken to court several times for violating the School Attendance Act.

Finally, the Old Colony Mennonites saw no other alternative but to move out of the country: in 1922 an unprecedented mass emigration began to Mexico, which offered, among other things, complete freedom of education in exchange for their work in land development. Later emigrations followed as well.

In Mexico, Mennonite leaders intentionally limited the level of education, for example, by using only internal teaching resources. Gradually, however, their children began to attend the schools which the Russian Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s had already established there. When a secondary level was added to these schools in 1967, tension increased in the Old Colony Mennonite Church, as the "Ohms," the church leaders, remained firmly opposed to any education beyond elementary school. (See also *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, pp. 258-259.)



*The Old Colony Mennonite School, north of Wheatley, in 1997.
(Courtesy George Schartner)*

Subsequently, Old Colony Mennonites came to Ontario because of many different hardships in Mexico, but they brought many of these deep convictions along. Hence, they developed their own school system, starting no less than five private schools by 1994. In Essex County, the Kingsville Old Colony Christian Academy was opened in September 1990 in the Kingsville Old Colony church. The school's curriculum, which is recognized by the Ontario

A Day at the Old Colony Academy . . .

Starting a day of school is basically the same every day. We, the teachers, arrive sooner than the students, so we have some quiet time to get ready. After we all arrive we go into our staff room and start the day with devotions together. Then we go our separate ways and finish preparing our classrooms, making sure we have the schedule put up and answer keys set out.

Soon the students start arriving. At ten to nine we blow the whistle, which calls all the children in. It's a bit rowdy in the morning, but eventually we get them all settled down. We start our day as a whole school with a song and a prayer. After that we close our doors to begin our classes. In class we start off with devotions. Normally one student will read the required Scripture passage, as well as the moral. We discuss it for a few minutes and then carry on. Homework assignments are handed in, and attendance is taken. The students begin working independently with their books for the next hour, so I can work classroom-style with another grade.

Recess is at ten o'clock. One of the teachers goes out on duty with the kids. After the fifteen minutes are up, we blow the whistle again. Another hour and forty minutes go by with classroom-style work before lunch. Then we all pray together. By then the lunches are warmed up. We eat and at twenty after twelve the students go outside. One teacher will again go out on duty. The afternoon hours are similar, with classroom-style work and recess.

At the end of the day we close together with a song and a prayer. Then the students are dismissed. We, as teachers, stay until all have left and we have cleaned up for another day. Then we also take our leave.

*Tina Schmitt
Old Colony Mennonite Church*

Department of Education, was produced by an Old Mennonite--not an Old Colony Mennonite!--group in Harrisonburg, Virginia. In this system, children go to school 186 days per year and are free to work on the farms during the remaining half year (See Karin Kliwer's history of the OCMC, p. 12).

Aside from this school program, the OCMC has placed great value on their German Sunday School classes, which began in the early 1970s. These are one of the main means of preserving the German language, since all other education is in English. In the early years the curriculum materials were the same as the schools used in Mexico. Young children started with

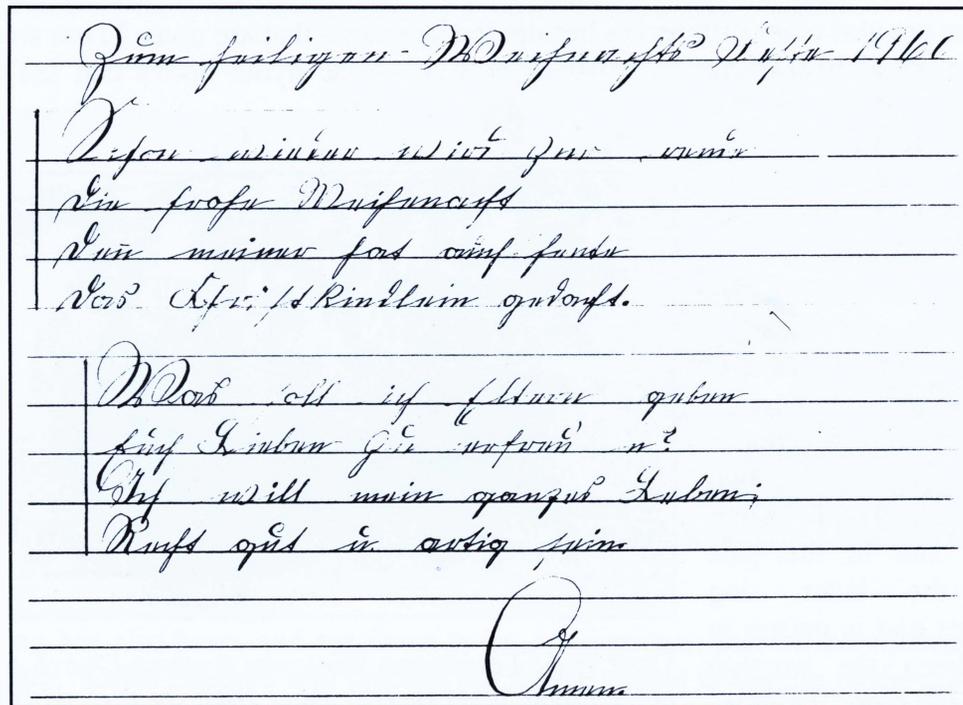
the "*Fibel*"--a phonics and alphabet starter text; the "*Katechismus*"--the traditional catechism--was used for the students who were a little older; finally, the oldest children used a reader called "*Biblische Geschichten*"--stories from the Bible.

Sunday School teacher seminars, conducted by church ministers and deacons, are held four times a year for all Old Colony teachers in Ontario. In these seminars, problems and changes are addressed, and teachers receive help for their tasks. One major project that was underway in 1996 was the development of a new Sunday School curriculum, as the church sought to address the changing needs, especially related to the increasing use of the English language.

The Tradition of the "*Wunsch*"

Among the Old Colony Mennonites, as also formerly among other Mennonite groups, there has been the tradition of the *Wunsch*. The *Wunsch*--literally, a "wish"--was normally a short piece of poetry that school children learned by memory or wrote out very carefully in order to present to their parents or others at special occasions. A typical *Wunsch* would relate to Christmas or New Year's Day.

The following sample of a *Wunsch* was written and placed inside a special cover by Henry Friesen of the Old Colony Mennonite Church in 1960. It is in the old "Gothic" writing, and blue and red ink are used in the original.



The image shows a handwritten note in Gothic script on lined paper. The text is written in blue and red ink. The first line is a date: "Zum feiligen Wunschnacht 1960". The following lines are the verses of the wish, written in blue ink: "Zu dem minnen wirt der minnen", "Ein frohe Wunschnacht", "Zu dem minnen fast der minnen", and "Nacht. Auf dem Rindstein gedacht." The second part of the wish is written in red ink: "Der Gott soll ich fassen geben", "Auf dem Rindstein die wirt den", "Der will minnen ganzes Leben", and "Kraft gut in der Hand sein". The note ends with a signature in red ink that appears to be "Amm".

21. Music and Singing

"O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth." - Ps. 96:1

Music and singing have long been important elements in the worship of the Mennonites--those in Essex and Kent Counties, as well as many others around the world. Congregational singing invites participation in the worship and draws many diverse people together, even as it creates the mood of praise for the worship service.

Congregational Singing

The Mennonites of Essex and Kent have the tradition in common that congregational has been a part of all for a long time. Their singing and hymnody has its origins in the context of the German language--a tradition that some continue to the present time, while others have largely shifted into English due to the influence of the surrounding culture.

There are also other differences besides the languages that are used. These would include the use of musical instruments in worship, as well as the hymn books that are used. For example, the churches in the Mennonite Brethren or the United Mennonite tradition all use pianos, organs, and, more recently, other instruments in their worship; the Old Colony Mennonites do not use any instruments, and the Gospel Christian Mennonite Church does so only occasionally. And while the former two have a long history of singing with notes and in four-part harmony, the latter sing without notes and in unison in order to keep the worship simple. In the older tradition, one that may be traced as far



Choir of the Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church on the steps of the Elliott Street church, about 1941; the director is Gerhard Willms. (Courtesy David Derksen)

back as 1700 and the Mennonites in Holland, a *Vorsänger*, a song leader, would announce and lead congregational songs with a powerful voice; this tradition continues in the Old Colony churches, while in others it is usually the worship leader who announces the songs.

Many different songbooks have been used in the churches. In keeping with the older German tradition, the Old Colony Church, for example, uses the *Gesangbuch* (Songbook) and the *Choralbuch* (first published in 1837), while the Leamington

The Windsor Mennonite Fellowship has two blind persons in the congregation. One of these, a college music major, is particularly gifted in music. She uses her gifts with the cello and flute to enhance the worship services. Quickly she is able to pick up new music and only needs the braille lyrics to take part in the congregational singing!

United Mennonite Church and the North Leamington Church use the *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten* (published in 1965). As the shift to the English language has taken place, English hymnals have replaced the German ones. The Mennonite Brethren have published their own hymnals in

both German and English. The EMMC uses the German *Gesangbuch* of the Mennonite Brethren Church, as well as two different English hymnals. And the churches of the United Mennonite tradition have used the *Mennonite Hymnary* (first printed 1940, reprinted thirteen times to 1963), *Mennonite Hymnal* (1969), and more recently the *Hymnal. A Worship Book* (1992). In the awareness of the global Mennonite church, recent hymnals also include a few songs in languages other than English or German, such as French, Spanish. Besides the songs, they also contain worship aids such as Scripture texts, prayers, and other responsive readings.



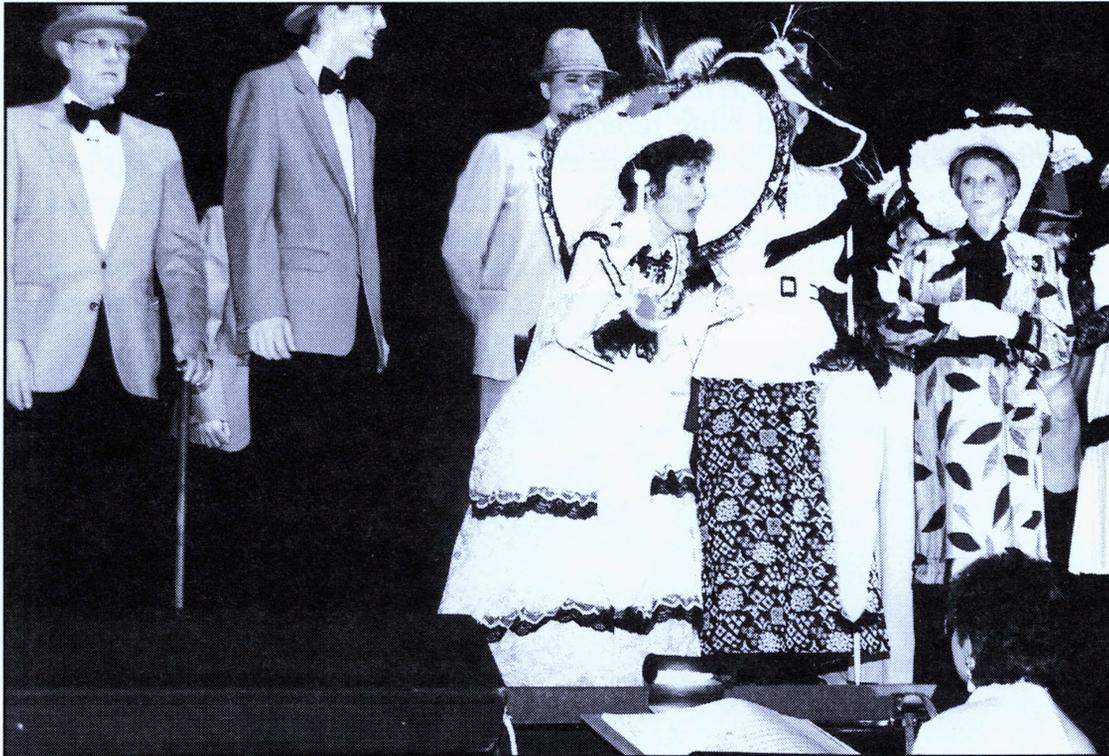
Faith Mennonite Church Choir, 1995, conducted by Sonja Kuli.

Singing has also been, and continues to be, an important part of the children's Sunday school program. Often children will practice for special events in the life of the congregation, such as Christmas or Mother's Day. Recently the children at LUMC and NLUMC have also staged religious musical productions such as "Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat" and "It's

Cool in the Furnace," both based on themes from the Old Testament.

Choral Singing

Choirs and choral singing have long been an important part of the worship services of the United Mennonite, Mennonite Brethren, and EMMC churches. Until the recent past, for example, the Leamington United Mennonite Church had three separate choirs: junior, intermediate, and senior. At present, participation in regular choirs has been decreasing, so that only the LUMC and Faith Mennonite Church have regular year-round choirs; other churches form choirs for special occasions, such as Thanksgiving or Easter, and plan smaller musical groups for other worship services. Unique have been the **handbell choirs** which Louise Mulcaster has organized at NLUMC for adults and children for a number of years. Another special choir is the **Heritage Choir**, which is made up of some sixty senior citizens, most of



Marilyn Winter and cast in the musical "My Fair Lady", 1995.

whom are members of the LUMC, NLUMC, and the LMBC. Aside from participating in Sunday morning worship services, these choirs also perform at special events and plan their own programs for the public. And on a lighter note, the UMEI alumni and friends under the direction of Helen Brown have performed operettas and musicals for many years.

The "Sängerfest"

The "Sängerfest," the "festival of singers," has been an old tradition in many Mennonite communities, including Essex and Kent. It has been particularly important for people in rural communities, who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to sing and perform large choral works. All interested singers were invited to come together, even those with limited musical abilities. (It was also an important social event, since it was a chance to leave the everyday life on the farm for a few days!) Several days would be spent rehearsing the music, which local conductors had already been preparing in advance, and the event would conclude with a large public performance of great choral music, usually led by a guest conductor.



Members of the Heritage Choir at Colasanti's Tropical Gardens; conductor Helen Wiens is on the far left.

In recent years, the *Sängerfest* has diminished in significance and been somewhat changed in format. In Essex-Kent, the Mennonite Historical Association has continued to promote such events on a local inter-Mennonite basis; the last program was held at the UMEI auditorium in April 1996, with choir participants from most of the Mennonite churches in the area and many hundreds of listeners. While it is increasingly difficult to find singers willing to commit the time to prepare the programs, many people continue to enjoy the programs when they are performed.

Further Explorations . . .

An interesting Mennonite musical tradition has to do with the use of Ziffern--a system of musical notation using numbers that was brought to Canada from Russia. Many songs were handwritten in this way and then copied. This system was easier to learn than notes and could be used at varying pitches. Ziffern continue to be used in some churches to the present.

22. Occupations and Lifestyles

"The Lord will watch over your coming and going, from this time forth and forevermore." - Ps. 121:8

How Mennonites Make Their Living

Upon the arrival of the first Russian Mennonites in the 1920s, their search for employment began. The early settlers in the Essex and Kent Counties took whatever work was available, mostly in **agriculture**: some worked as labourers, while others became sharecroppers--that is, tenant farmers--on farms in the area. This farming included horticulture, fruit, vegetables, grain, dairy, and tobacco. Although it was different from the experiences in the "old country," the Ukraine, it soon provided enough income for some of the newcomers, such as the Funk, Thiessen, Neufeld, and other families, to purchase their own farms.

A unique situation developed on Pelee Island, located some 23 km south of the mainland in Lake Erie. A wealthy American, G. Cruickshank, owned a number of farms on the island and had heard that Mennonites were supposed to be excellent farmers. He invited them to come to the island and sharecrop his farms, and in 1925 a group of settlers accepted this invitation. This gave these families their start in Canada; they stayed on Pelee Island for a number of years, but eventually all moved to the mainland, either to purchase their own farms or to find other employment.



*Mennonites cultivating on a farm on Fraser Road, about 1948.
(Courtesy Alfred Willms)*

Surviving the 1930s on a Ruthven Farm

In the 1930s life was not easy on the farm. One survival tactic was acquiring several piglets in early spring, then feeding and fattening them throughout the summer, and slaughtering them in late fall. The number of products that could be extracted from these animals was quite amazing!

And so, one Saturday morning in early spring, Dad announced that it was time to fetch the two piglets he had reserved at Cornelius Enns's farm near Cottam and that I should keep him company on the trip. Before setting out we converted our car into a pick-up truck by taking out the back seat. Then we added two jute bags and some twine.

At the farm, Dad followed the custom of visiting with the Ennses before doing business. Then we proceeded to the barn for the pig hunt. In no time Mr. Enns had clutched two pigs and put them, squirming and squealing, into our bags. Dad tied the bags, and we set out for home, the two men in the front and the two pigs behind.

We hadn't gone far when I looked back and saw, to my astonishment, that the pigs had loosened the twine and were worming their way out of the bags. Dad chose to ignore the impending escape, and by the time we got home, the two pigs were basking in their freedom.

Now we were in a real dilemma--how to get the pigs into the nearby barn. Mr. Enns would have clutched them by the hind legs and carried them over. To Dad, however, this was repugnant, because in the Old Country he had been trained in a bank, not in a barn. For our solution we chose the most circuitous way possible. We drove the car into the barn and closed the barn door behind us. Then we opened the car doors and prodded the pigs out. It took us quite a while to shoo them into the pen!

*Jake N. Driedger
Leamington United Mennonite Church*

In Essex and Kent a sizeable number of Mennonites have always farmed, but, as elsewhere in Canada, the number appears to be decreasing. In NLUMC, for example, which probably has a higher percentage of farmers among its members than most other Mennonite churches, an informal survey was done in the late 1970s and again in the late 1980s; in the first survey about two-thirds of members listed themselves as farmers, in the second--due to vocational changes and retirements--this had decreased to about one-third. A wide variety of crops are grown, notably fruit and vegetables. (The H. J. Heinz Company and other food processing plants are important factors in the local economy.) In former years the mixed family farm was typical, but this has almost entirely disappeared at the present time.

Another significant shift in agriculture has been related to the increase in mechanized

farming and the decreasing need for manual labourers. This has especially affected those people who have come into the area for seasonal employment, for example, in the tomato harvest.

In time, the **greenhouse industry**, a more intense method of cultivation, has attracted considerable interest. Gradually the early Mennonite farmers began to build their own



Ken and Jake Hamm harvesting tomatoes on their farm, August 1996.

greenhouses, and soon large ranges were erected, some with several acres under glass. These have continued to be expanded to the present time. Many of the Mennonite greenhouse growers have specialized in cucumbers, but other crops are also grown.



Peter and Gloria Thiessen's greenhouses and apple orchard, 1985. (Courtesy P. Thiessen)

Statistics Canada figures indicate that only five percent of the Canadian population is currently involved in agriculture. This is also reflected in the Mennonite community, although in Essex and Kent the percentage might be somewhat higher. As elsewhere, agriculture is changing from the model of the family farm to bigger and more intensively run business operations.

Industries such as Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler in Windsor, H. J. Heinz in Leamington, and smaller industries such as Bartel Machine and Welding, Langeman



Orchard View Golf Course owners and operators - the Tiessen and Friesen families, 1996.

Manufacturing in Leamington, and Neudorf Stamping Corporation in Kingsville, have offered numerous employment opportunities.

As the Mennonite community has thrived and become established, interest in higher education has also increased, and in time graduates from universities and other institutions of higher learning have entered the **professional fields**, such as education, medicine, and business.

When the immigrants after the Second World War arrived in the mid-1940s, they added their efforts to the already established Mennonite community. More recently Mennonites from Mexico have also been coming to Ontario in ever-increasing numbers, joining the work force in agriculture and also establishing some small industries and businesses of their own.

An informal survey was conducted in 1996, to find how the Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties make their living. While the responses would need more careful testing, there were some noteworthy trends. For example, only a small percentage of Mennonites own their own farms; a fairly high percentage work as labourers, and many are involved in businesses, either as owners or employees. The number of professionals ranges from the lowest in the EMMC and OCMC (estimated at under 10% of the members) to the highest in WMF in the city of Windsor (over 50%). Pensioners make up sizeable segments of some churches (especially LUMC and HMC), while other have very few (like the EMMC or the NRMC).

Business Ventures . . .

It may surprise some people to see that successful businesses are operated by Low German speaking Mennonites, because many believe they are interested only in farm work. The majority of them, however, work in industries unrelated to farming. These people have always been business-minded, but because of language barriers, have not always been able to utilize their skills to the fullest extent.

In Mexico, from where they came, business people were needed to keep the villages running smoothly. There were doctors, mechanics, store owners, teachers, and other skilled workers. There were also print shops and book stores, and every village had a cheese factory, where milk from local dairy farms was processed into cheese and then sold. Someone also had to be in charge of tax collection, the road system, and other community services.

The decision to give up a regular pay check to become self employed is a difficult one for anyone to make, even more so when your first language is not English. However, various businesses are presently being opened in Essex and Kent Counties by Low German-speaking Mennonites. Some of these are fabricating plants, roofing services, janitorial services, autobody and paint shops, and lawn maintenance services. Most of the business owners have worked for employers in their field for many years, often working a full day and then working on their own after hours.

For the first generation self employment was almost impossible, but today, at times already the fourth generation, it is as possible as for anyone else.

Nancy Kroeker
Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church

Leisure Activities

The Mennonite people of Kent and Essex have worked hard to make their livelihood and continue to do so. However, there is more to life than work--and so it is for the Mennonites!

There are many different ways in which Mennonite people spend their time when not working: the range of alternatives is really endless and reflects the activities of the surrounding society to a considerable extent. In the following paragraphs only a few general trends can be pointed out, together with some illustrations.

That wonderful "Mennonite cooking"!

*The tantalizing aroma of cooking and baking from Mother's kitchen can surely make your senses perk up and your mouth start watering! And so it has been in many a Mennonite home! If you have come from a traditional "Russian Mennonite" home and have been away for some time, I'm sure you have been homesick--not only for your family but the traditional cooking that you miss so much: the **Zwieback** (roughly translated as baked buns but really quite a unique recipe!), **Verenike** (fruit- or cheese-filled pirogies), **Piroshki** (pie, sometimes known as "pie by the yard"), **Pluma moos** (fruit stew), and **Borscht** (hearty, unmistakably unique vegetable soup). Some other favourites are **Kielke** (noodles), **Kotletten** (meat balls), **Glums** (cottage cheese), **Plautz** (a kind of fruit cake or pie), and of course the wonderful **Rollkuchen** (fritters) that go so perfectly with watermelon. The special recipe, so-called "Mennonite" sausage has also become very popular, even among non-Mennonites. All of these dishes represent the Dutch/North German but also the Ukrainian/Russian influence that the Mennonites have absorbed during their years of living in different countries and cultures.*

*The Mennonites who have come to Ontario from Mexico or other Latin American countries have brought other delicious recipes with them. Some of these are tacos, beans, "Mennonite" cheese, and **Floutas** (deep-fried tacos filled with pork).*

*Who doesn't have fond memories of the numerous **Faspas**--those Sunday afternoon meals--that were attended by family and friends featuring some of these wonderful cooked and baked goods?! Home made, inexpensive, and oh, so good!--especially when served with coffee and much good conversation!*

*Irene Woodsit
Faith Mennonite Church*

One primary way in which Mennonite people of all ages like to spend their time is with their **families**. This includes the time spent with the immediate "small family," which includes the parents and possibly one or more children. Activities may include such things as doing household or yard work together, family games or outings, and driving children to sports activities or music lessons. However, for most Mennonites the extended family is also very important: so there are grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings, and cousins to visit and family gatherings to celebrate. A popular expression is to go "*spazieren*"--not meaning to go for a walk but for an afternoon or evening visit. And, of course, everyone knows the value of good food, be this a backyard barbecue, a picnic in the park, or a potluck dinner, in contemporary or traditional foods!

Another popular use of leisure time among Mennonites is **travelling**.

They have come to Ontario with an incredible history of migrations to begin with--most under duress; besides this, they have been a part of North American society, of which travel and tourism is such an important aspect. So the Mennonite people do a great deal of travelling! This takes various forms. Especially in earlier years, but continuing to the present, visiting one's extended family members or friends (often still from "the Old Country") has been important. Such trips might have been within Ontario but also to other Canadian provinces or countries. The Mennonites who have immigrated here from Mexico, for example, do much driving back and forth to Mexico. Many others have relatives in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or British Columbia. Another more recent trend has been to visit relatives in Germany, who have migrated there from Russia within the last decades.

Then there is, of course, travelling as tourism. One favourite destination has long been Florida, in fact, quite a number of Mennonites see Florida as their "winter home" for at least several weeks or even months each year. Florida has been especially appreciated by pensioners, but also by farmers--when the crops were in and the air got cold in Ontario. More recently, tours are becoming popular to many destinations of North America and, indeed, the world.

Platz, Anyone?

The following is just one sample of the many popular Mennonite foods.

Mix together the following ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 egg
- shortening (size of egg)
- 5 Tbsp. sugar
- 4 Tbsp. boiled and cooled water

Spread dough into 8" x 8" pan. Top with fruit: cherries, peaches, apples, or any other.

Sprinkle topping over fruit:

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup flour
- 3 Tbsp. butter

Bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 30-40 minutes.

Serve warm--Delicious!

A third significant use of leisure time has long been **sports**. For decades baseball has been an important part of Mennonite community life--for people of all ages. Other popular sports have been volleyball and hockey. Sports has meant active participation by the children, youth, and younger adults, but also help in organizational matters by the parents and other older people and, of course, hours spent in watching and driving younger athletes to practices and games. In more recent years golf has become quite popular among members of all age groups, in fact, some of the most avid golfers are senior citizens who may be seen on one of the areas golf courses several times a week. In another way, professional sports are also followed closely by many younger or older people, favourite teams being from Detroit or Toronto--but, of course, ranging across the entire spectrum.

SPORTS ACROSS FOUR GENERATIONS

Young people of every generation have shown their need to find outlets for youthful energies and aggressions apart from school books and hard work in the fields. Today you find them in arenas, gymnasiums or recreation centres. Sixty years ago, you found them at only one place--the softball diamond.

It was played in every public schoolyard, in backyards and disced potato fields, and in the forest clearing of Point Pelee National Park. Why softball? It was affordable, exhilarating, competitive, and fun. It allowed everyone to participate. All it took was a bat and a few balls.

The first permanent diamond was wrestled from nature, evening by evening, with shovels and axes on the grounds of our newly build school--the UMEI. Rusty old gas pipes were trucked from Port Alma to form the backstop, while wagonloads of gravel and red soil were shovelled and raked into place to make an acceptable infield. Leamington, whose teams had exotic names such as the Vultures, Crows, Kiwis, Sparrows, and Buzzards, was always represented at the tournaments held at our annual provincial conference retreats, and in later years there was a team to represent the Mennonites in a county league.

The sixties belonged to the third generation. The burgeoning biological growth of our community necessitated a rapid expansion of facilities that would eventually see seven diamonds in use on every sunny Sunday in the summer. Parents, former players in the Youth Leagues, along with others, became the coaches, umpires, and conveners of the Sunday School league. It is not exaggerating to suggest that we had a picnic every Sunday from spring until fall. Participation and enthusiasm were high!

We are now well into the fourth generation, and not that much has changed, except for the venues. While ball continues to be played, we as grandparents are also drawn to watch our progeny at figure skating and hockey, at basketball games, at soccer matches and skipping events. We cheer them on. The games may change from generation to generation, but the values they instill do not. Enterprise, discipline, the desire to excel, learning to play as a team, and the building of lifelong friendships exist today as they did in the past, helping to shape faithful members for our churches and society.

*Herb Hamm
North Leamington United Mennonite Church*

Another important use of leisure time among Mennonites has long been **volunteer work**. This is an old tradition, where it was assumed that people would help each other when in need, no matter what this might be. In more recent times, there is much participation--especially by retired persons--in such service work as delivering food in the Meals-On-Wheels program, chauffeuring persons to medical clinics, etc., if they are no longer able to drive themselves, helping in the Windsor Hospice program, in schools, and with special projects like cancer fundraising drives. Retired members of the Mennonite community have also organized and staffed the MCC "Et Cetera Shoppe" in an excellent and productive manner.

Recreational Activities . . .

When an informal survey was taken to see what recreational activities were popular, the following were listed (in no particular order):

*family outings
watching television
needlework
gardening
boating
golfing
walking and cycling
hockey and baseball
committee meetings
visiting in coffee shops*

Further Explorations . . .

- 1. It would be interesting to see how many present-day Mennonites in Essex and Kent make their living mainly by farming and how this compares to earlier years.*
- 2. A study could be undertaken of the businesses and industries that have been established by Mennonites: the "traditional" ones that might be expected but also the more unusual ones.*
- 3. A larger sociological survey of the beliefs and values of Mennonites in North America has been published under the title **Mennonite Mosaic** (see "Further Readings"). How do the Mennonites in Essex and Kent compare to these broader trends?*

Part Four

Cooperative Projects and Institutions

Introduction

Wherever Mennonite communities have been established throughout the world, either by immigration or by evangelistic and missionary efforts, cooperative programs and efforts have been typical. The Mennonites of southwestern Ontario have been no exception!

Cooperative programs have occurred in a variety of ways. There have been programs of financial aid and support, such as the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union (MSCU), the Leamington Mennonite Home for senior citizens and others needing caring support, or the burial societies. Other joint projects have been started to address needs in the larger community and world, such as the Et Cetera Shoppe, the Mennonite Community Sale, and Shalom Counselling Services. A unique organization is the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association (EKMHA), which strives to preserve the Mennonite historical heritage through its archival and artifact collections and programs of public interest.

On the following pages, the work of some of the most significant cooperative organizations of the Essex-Kent Mennonites is described.



A good example of Mennonite cooperation: the "Platz Booth" at the annual Mennonite Community Sale, 1996.

23. Mennonite Central Committee

Motto: In the name of Christ.

The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is the service, development, and relief agency of the North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. MCC has responded to various kinds of human needs since 1920.

Every year about 4-500 people enter MCC assignments, most of these as volunteers. MCC workers serve with local churches and community groups in some fifty countries of the world, including Canada and the United States. The work is varied and changing, including health care, agriculture, education, technical assistance, job creation, and disaster response.

The Community Sale

"On April 17, 1971 the Women's Mission Association will sponsor an Auction Sale at the Leamington Fair Ground." That statement is found in the minutes of the Women's Mission Association meeting of March 1971. With this notice to the church membership of the LUMC, of which NLUMC was still a member, the so-called "Arena Sale" or "Mennonite Auction"--later renamed the "Mennonite Community Sale"--came into being.

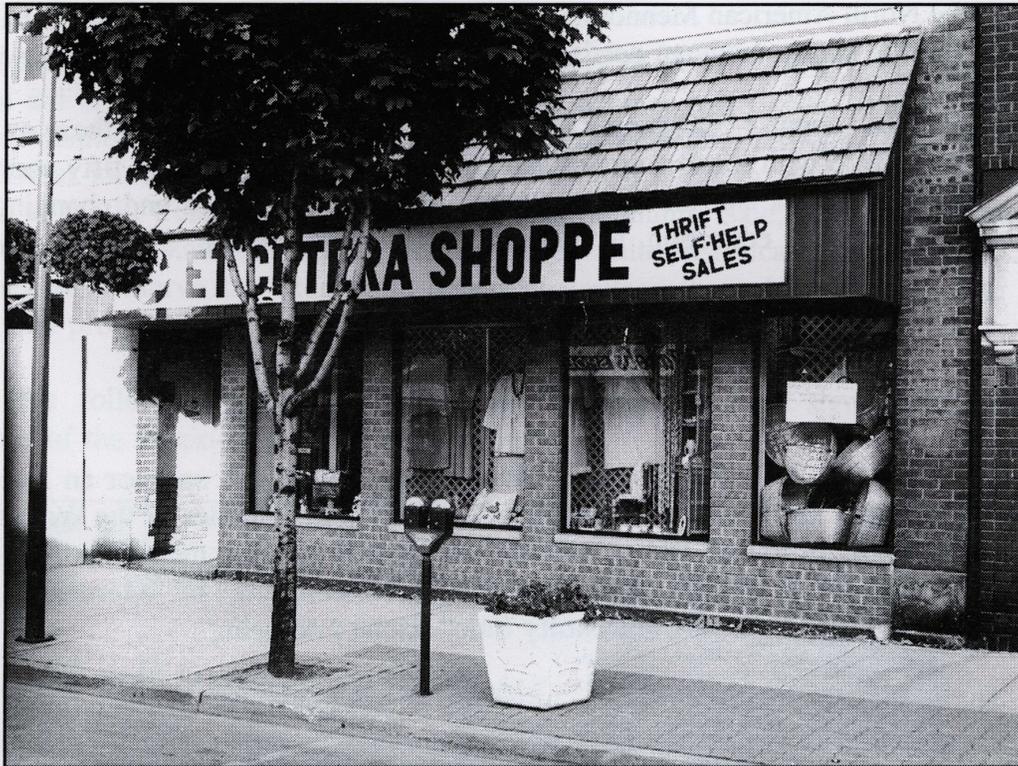
The reason for its birth? The same set of minutes tells us that the purpose of the new organization is "to raise funds which will be donated in part to the Leamington District Memorial Hospital and to a Foreign Missions project of our church."

This first Sale was held in the old Flower Building on the Leamington Fair Grounds. The auction itself was held just outside the front door of this building under a plastic canopy--because, of course, it rained! The proceeds, which amounted to \$3,392.90, were distributed as described above.

Twenty-five years later the planning, enthusiasm, fun, and plain hard work still makes the Sale popular, enjoyable, and rewarding. It is held annually on the first Saturday of June at the UMEI. Hundreds of people are involved, and various charitable organizations, including MCC, benefit from the sales and purchases. Will it continue? We hope so!

The Et Cetera Shoppe

The **Et Cetera Shoppe** is unique in many ways. It is sponsored and operated by the local Mennonite churches. Its 135 volunteers manage and keep the multi-facets of the shop functioning smoothly. The shop accepts donations of clothing, dishes, hardware, books, lamps, and any other items that can be sold or recycled. Local craftspeople are encouraged to donate their artistic creations of afghans, quilts, flower arrangements, braided rugs, and other crafts.



The Et Cetera Shoppe in Leamington. (Courtesy John H. Dick)

Ten Thousand Villages (formerly known as **SELFHELP Crafts**) is a program of MCC, whose goal is to provide employment for third world producers of handmade crafts. This program has become an important part of the Shoppe. The crafts are purchased from producers in underdeveloped areas to provide minority groups, refugees, or handicapped persons an opportunity to make a living and eventually become self-sufficient. All proceeds from the Shoppe help support the international service work of MCC.

The Shoppe also reaches into the community by providing space for two MCC offices for assisting new immigrants.

The Ontario Mennonite Immigration Assistance Committee

The Ontario Mennonite Immigration Assistance Committee (OMIAC) is a program of MCC Ontario (MCCO). Through OMIAC, MCCO has been assisting Low German-speaking Mennonites who have moved from Mexico to Ontario.

In Leamington the MCC Help Centre is located at the Et Cetera Shoppe on 19 Erie Street, North. Here staff and volunteers help Low German-speaking newcomers with documentation and settlement needs, such as citizenship papers, Ontario Health Insurance forms, language difficulties, and household needs, such as clothing, kitchen utensils, and furniture.

A local advisory committee for OMIAC, the **Inter-Mennonite Missions Committee**, made up of representatives of the Mennonite churches in Essex and Kent Counties, advises and supports local MCC workers involved in the work. This committee also organizes an annual Christmas toy and visitation program with Low German Mennonites, and the yearly "*Mennonitentreffen*"--the "meeting of Mennonites."

One Immigrant Story . . .

I was born and lived in Mexico to the age of fifteen. We lived in conservative villages with no running water, indoor plumbing, hydro, radio, television, or newspapers. I attended the village schools for four months during winters and one month during the summers for four years.

In August 1969 my family came to Ontario--unfortunately without proper documentation, so we were turned back at the U.S. border. We tried again in September and actually made it all the way to Tilbury, Ontario. We immediately went to work for the rest of the harvest season and then watched a lot of TV during the winter. I learned some English from this. In early spring I started to work again, continuing until late fall; this continued for several years. I worked in a variety of farm and food processing jobs.

In 1980 I went back to school. I started in first grade and completed my education at St. Clair College in Windsor in 1983. In April 1984 I started working for MCC, helping my people, the Mennonites from Mexico. At first I did a lot of interpreting at medical and government agencies. Over the years my work has become mostly documentation work with citizenship and immigration. I also help in the Et Cetera Shoppe as time allows. Working for MCC and the Shoppe has been a real blessing for me, and I have met many wonderful people!

*Anna Wiens
Evangelical Mennonite Church*

24. The "*Morgenandacht*" Radio Broadcast

Motto: "How can they believe in one of whom they have not heard?" - Rom. 10:14

The Mennonite churches in the Leamington area have sponsored a German Christian broadcast on CHYR radio since February 19, 1955. At the outset, it was the youth fellowships of the churches that led the way in negotiating a contract and preparing the programs for a fifteen-minute broadcast. A special choir was formed, local Mennonite ministers presented a brief sermon on a rotational basis, and a number of persons served as announcers. Later, the youth asked for permission to take over the sponsorship of this ministry, and the churches agreed.

Called "*Morgenandacht*" ("Morning Devotions"), it was aired at 8:15 on Sunday mornings until a few years ago when it was moved to 7:45 a.m. Judging from correspondence received, it is being widely heard and appreciated, especially by senior German-speaking listeners. Production and transmission costs are being covered by donations received from churches and individuals. The church members involved in its production are all serving on a voluntary basis.

Should you be interested in an inspirational time of worship in the German language, tune in to 96.7 FM Sunday mornings at 7:45!

Behind the Scenes . . .

Saturday evening, October 15, 1994, was a dark and quiet night in Leamington. About 11:30 p.m., Stan Schachowskoj, the producer of the program "Morning Devotions," was at home, relaxing in the bath. Suddenly he remembered that he had not delivered the tape to the radio station for the 7:45 a.m. broadcast the next morning.

He jumped out of the tub and frantically dialled the radio station, CHYR, and was fortunate to reach someone in charge.

Around midnight Stan drove through the peaceful and quiet streets of Leamington, where most people already lay sleeping. He reached the station and dropped off the precious tape. Nobody knew how close the faithful Leamington radio audience came to having fifteen minutes of silence on that Sunday morning!

Kurt Schachowskoj (Long-time host of the program, "Morning Devotions")

25. The Leamington Mennonite Home and Apartments

Motto: "Carry each other's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." - Gal. 6:2

In the early sixties, members of Leamington United Mennonite Church felt a need for a nursing home for the elderly. The purpose of the Home would be to provide care and home comfort in Christian surroundings.

On February 24, 1963 the congregation voted to build such a Home. A formal sod turning took place on June 8, 1964, and the official opening of the **Leamington Mennonite Home (LMH)** followed on June 23, 1965. The finished building contained forty-four beds, a nurses' station, kitchen, dining room, main lounge, sitting room, barber and beauty shop, library, board room, and laundry room. Twenty-eight beds were added in 1971, as well as an auditorium.



The Leamington Mennonite Home in 1965. (Courtesy Helen Epp)

Continued need for housing for the elderly, among Mennonites but also in the general community, led to the construction of the 16-unit **Homeview Apartments** just south of the Home and then the 38-unit **Pickwick Apartments**. In 1988-1989, twenty-seven life-lease townhouses were built, followed by a 43-unit life-lease apartment building, making it a complex with space for a total population of approximately two hundred at various levels of care. Currently the Home is operated by a corporation representing four Mennonite churches, LUMC, NLUMC, FMC, and HMC, with a large staff and many volunteers.

26. The "Marigolds"

"Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength fails." - Psalm 71:4

The "Marigolds" committee was established in response to the New Horizons Program, initiated by the Canadian government in 1972. Funds were made available to help seniors become involved in activities that would enhance their quality of life.

A group of men, calling themselves the "Woodpeckers," had earlier applied for a grant for wood-working machines for the Leamington Mennonite Home. In 1978 a group of women calling themselves the "Marigolds," likewise was organized. Subsequently the two groups amalgamated under this name, providing items such as a slide projector, organ, photocopier, and many other items to the residents of the Mennonite Home and the larger senior constituency who make use of the Heritage Activity Centre.

The Marigolds also organized tours for seniors for several years. Other activities included programs for entertainment, with speakers and music, slide and film presentations, and various festivities throughout the year.



Members of a "Marigolds" tour in Holland, Michigan, 1994. (Courtesy Rudy Wiens)

27. Heritage Gardens Activity Centre

"Show respect for the elderly and revere your God." - Lev. 19:32

The Heritage Gardens Activity Centre is a meeting and activity place for seniors, administered by a committee of six in conjunction with the Leamington Mennonite Home Board.

The Activity Centre was started in 1994 at the south end of the Heritage Gardens condominium complex at 31 Pickwick Drive. The space, which has been completed by donations and voluntary labour, contains a fully equipped kitchen, dining area, exercise room, and recreation room. Fully wheelchair accessible, the Centre is frequently booked for family gatherings, choir practices, and quilting sessions as well as travelogue slide presentations, and music and drama programs.



Coffee at the Heritage Gardens Activity Centre, 1996. (Courtesy Rudy Wiens)

The present program consists of a Monday morning coffee hour and Thursday afternoon games time, including carpet bowling, pool, and table games. There is a weekly exercise session, and the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union provides weekly banking services. The plan is to have the Centre operating every day of the week, as new programs are developed.

28. The Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association

"In days to come, when your children ask you, 'What does this mean?', say to them, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us . . .'" - Ex. 13:14

Since the arrival of the first Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties in 1925, they have always had a strong historical awareness. The need to preserve their history was focused more sharply in the early 1970s, when a joint history committee was established by the Leamington United Mennonite Church and the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. The committee was actively involved in organizing programs, preserving artifacts, and publishing a church family picture directory in 1984.

In the mid-eighties, the members of the joint history committee felt a need to expand its horizons, so that all Mennonites of the two counties would be represented. Thus the **Essex-Kent**

Mennonite Historical Association (EKMHA) was established on May 1, 1987. It became an incorporated body and was licensed to issue tax receipts for charitable donations. The Association was to be operated by a Board of Directors which was comprised of thirteen individuals. This would make it possible to have representation from a number of churches.



Helen and Peter A. Epp at the Heritage Centre in 1994.

Almost from the beginning, the Board of Directors started plans to

establish a permanent Archives and Heritage Centre. Those dreams were realized in the spring of 1992, when the EKMHA entered into an agreement with the Leamington Mennonite Home and Apartments to purchase 950 square feet of space for \$80,000 on a life-lease basis. The Heritage Centre was established on the second floor of the Heritage Gardens Apartments at 31 Pickwick Drive in Leamington.

Today the Heritage Centre contains many artifacts which include photographs, documents, books, magazines, journals, and many personal and household items. As well, the Centre contains a collection of videos, slide presentations, and booklets that have been produced locally. It is staffed by volunteers and is open year-round on a half-time basis. For the past several summers the Canada Employment Centre has provided funding to employ a student for the summer months to assist in research and archival work.

In addition to operating the Heritage Centre, the EKMHA has sponsored programs, conducted bus tours, and hosted an annual fund-raising dinner.

The Historical Association maintains an active formal membership of about 150 individuals each year, and the members represent most of the Mennonite churches in Essex and Kent. Memberships are available for ten dollars per person or twenty dollars per couple on a yearly basis.



Astrid (Gossen) Koop in the Peter A. Epp Room at the Heritage Centre, 1996.

It is through the efforts of the many hard-working volunteers and God's guidance that the Association has gained a high level of visibility in its role of preserving history in the local Mennonite community.

29. Shalom Counselling Services

"To another the gift of healing [is given through the Spirit]." - 1 Cor. 12:9

The **Shalom Counselling Services** centre was established in Leamington in May 1992 in response to needs seen by local Mennonite pastors for Christian counselling. The six supporting churches are the Leamington United Mennonite Church, North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Faith Mennonite Church, Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church, Harrow Mennonite Church, and Windsor Mennonite Fellowship.

The name *Shalom* was chosen to reflect the Hebrew meaning of peace and wholeness for individuals and groups. Shalom Counselling offers individual, marital, group, and family counselling.

It is a related organization of Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, administered by a Regional Committee of ten members, which in turn is overseen by an Ontario board. The Director/Counsellor at present is Marian Wiens.



Marian Wiens, Director of Shalom Counselling Services.

30. Mennonite Savings and Credit Union

*"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all,
especially to those who belong to the household of faith." - Gal. 6:10*

The Mennonite Savings and Credit Union (MSCU) was founded in 1964. From its humble beginnings with twenty-two members, no employees, and \$192 on deposit, MSCU has grown into the fifteenth largest credit union in Ontario with nearly ten thousand members, over fifty employees, and in excess of \$173 million in assets. MSCU now serves the Ontario Mennonite, Amish, and Brethren in Christ communities through six full service branches, five partial service locations, and a number of extended area services.



Leamington MSCU and manager Elsie (Tiessen) Dick, 1996.

MSCU's story is one of committed Christians seeking creative ways to apply their churches' traditional practices of sharing and mutual aid to an increasingly complex contemporary setting. It is a story of striving to apply biblical principles to the realm of the financial marketplace. One example of MSCU's unique approach to mutual aid and community life is the Member Assistance Services program, which currently administers more than \$1.8 million in low interest loans to members who are experiencing various financial distress.

The Leamington branch, which opened in 1989 and is located on Erie Street South, is the newest of MSCU's full service branches. With a staff of five and a membership that now exceeds one thousand, the Leamington branch continues to grow at an extremely rapid pace as Essex County's vibrant Mennonite community embraces MSCU and its philosophy.

31. Burial Societies

"So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." - Rom. 14:8

The Mennonites of Essex and Kent Counties have organized or become members of two burial societies, the Vineland Burial Society and the Old Colony Burial Society.

Vineland Burial Society

The **Vineland Burial Society (VBS)** was founded in 1934 for the purpose of aiding in the burial of a deceased member. The aim is to be of service one to another and to help in carrying the cost involved.

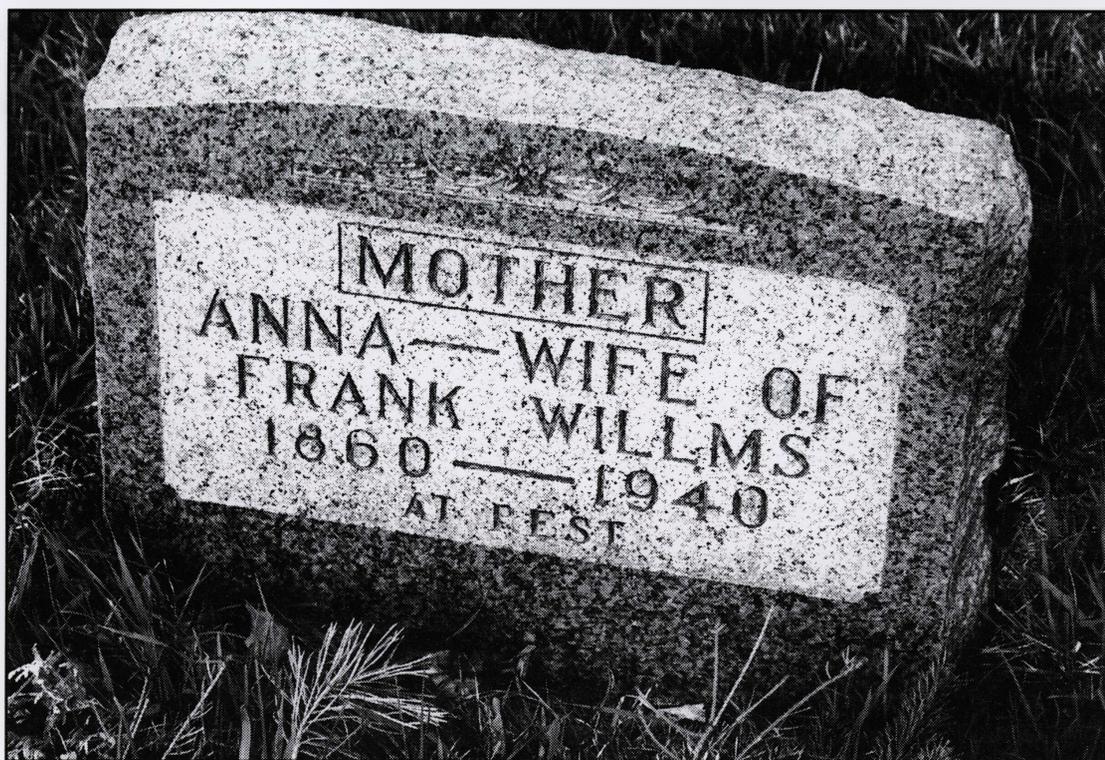


Reid's Funeral Home, Leamington, has served Mennonites for several generations.

In 1934, membership stood at 165. The first funeral of a VBS member was held on February 3, 1934, at a total cost of thirty-five dollars. The adult levy was forty cents at the beginning, but was raised to fifty cents shortly after the first funeral.

Membership increased steadily over the years, but dropped considerably in 1945, when a large number of members left the Society to form the Virgil Mutual Burial Society. At the end of 1994 membership of the Vineland Burial Society stood at 9,368 members. Over the sixty-one years of its existence, that is, to the end of 1994, the Society has aided in the payment of funeral costs for 1,578 deaths with the amount of \$2,085,392.

Membership is limited to residents of Ontario who are normally healthy persons of Mennonite faith, or to such who are of Mennonite background, their spouses and their children.



Gravestone of Anna Willms at the old Albuna Townline Cemetery, on Highway #3, west of Leamington; it is one of several cemeteries that have been used by Mennonite families.

The Old Colony "Begräbniskasse"

The *Begräbniskasse* is a fund that will pay the full amount of a simple funeral to any family that has paid their dues. Participation is voluntary and is open to Old Colony Mennonite Church (OCMC) members. The fund was started in 1979, when membership in the Vineland

Burial Society had been offered to one of their members. Rather than participating in that Burial Society, the church decided to create its own *Kasse*.

The fees started with an annual fee of thirty dollars. The *Kasse* would in turn pay a maximum of six hundred dollars to either the family or the funeral home in the case of a funeral. This was later changed to allow participants the option of paying thirty, sixty, or ninety dollars per year and the *Kasse* would then cover six hundred dollars, nine hundred dollars, or the cost of the whole funeral.

In 1993 another change was made to the system. Every participating family would pay eighty dollars per year. In return the *Kasse* would pay all the services for the funeral, including the grave, stone marker, and casket. The cost remained the same, no matter how many funerals were provided for a family in a year.

When the *Begräbniskasse* started in 1979 it had 46 members, all from the Wheatley congregation. Sixteen years later, it has a combined membership of 233 members from three congregations and a representative committee of five members selected from all three Old Colony Mennonite Churches in Wheatley, Kingsville, and Dresden.

Part Five

Scenes From Mennonite Life

Introduction

As has already been suggested, the life of the Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties is a colourful mixture of many different kinds of experiences. Some of the major developments and basic convictions have been sketched out in the previous chapters. Of course, as has also been pointed out, much remains to be filled in if the story is to be completed!

The life story of a group cannot be neatly told in abstract theory only, however. There are the countless experiences of individuals and families, which make the history come to life. Some of these have already been told on the preceding pages. In this part of the book a collage



Younger members of the Evangelical Mennonite Church enjoying community life, 1996.

of a variety of different thoughts and experiences, different "scenes" from the story of the Mennonites in Essex and Kent is presented. Some of these "scenes" are in form of anecdotes, others as photographs. They are loosely listed in chronological order, but intentionally left in a somewhat random order--after all, that is what Mennonite life is all about!

Mennonite Settlement on Pelee Island

When the Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union arrived in Ontario in 1924, they spent the first months with the Mennonite and Amish families in Waterloo County. In the spring of 1925 six families from the immigrant group accepted an invitation from a certain George Cruikshank to share-crop his tobacco acreage on Pelee Island.



The Epp family on the way to Sunday worship, Pelee Island, 1926.

The families destined for Pelee Island were all from the former Molotschna Colony, namely: the widow Elizabeth Dick with her children Jacob, Anna, and Abe; Peter A. and Maria Driedger with their children Jacob, Peter, Abram, Mary, Agatha, Annie, and John; Rev. Johann F. Dick, his wife, young daughter Mary, and Johann's sister-in-law, Helena Unruh; John A. and Maria Wiebe with children Jacob Friesen, John, Sarah, Katie, Abram, Betty, Mary, Nick, Henry, and Anne; Gerhard and Katharina Thiessen, their infant daughter Hildegard, and Gerhard's mother, Agnes; the widow

Anna Wiebe with children John, Ewald, Anna, and Maria.

The newcomers quickly settled in. Worship was held in Mr. Pegg's Mission Hall on Middle Island Road. Other individuals and families soon joined them, and in its heyday the congregation totalled about 85 members. Later the population dwindled, as people moved to the mainland. Today many descendants of the original Island families live in Essex County.



Youth group on Pelee Island, 1931.

(Astrid Koop)

THE SCHÖNFELD CONNECTION

When Mennonite "old timers" get together, they will sometimes talk about the "good old days" in a place called "Schönfeld." And some people wonder, where or what was "Schönfeld"?

The Schönfeld settlement was established by the Mennonites in the steppes of the Ukraine in 1868. It was located 75 km north of the older and better-known Molotschna Colony and 60 km east of the Chortitza Colony. The settlement was unique, in that it was not purchased as one block of land, as the others usually were, but that it consisted of various parcels of land which were bought as they became available. Settled partly in the traditional village pattern, partly as isolated estates, the Schönfeld Colony, as it became organized, was scattered over a large area (up to 132,000 acres at its maximum) and interspersed with other German and Ukrainian settlers. In 1873 it was recognized by the government as a Volost, an administrative area like a county.

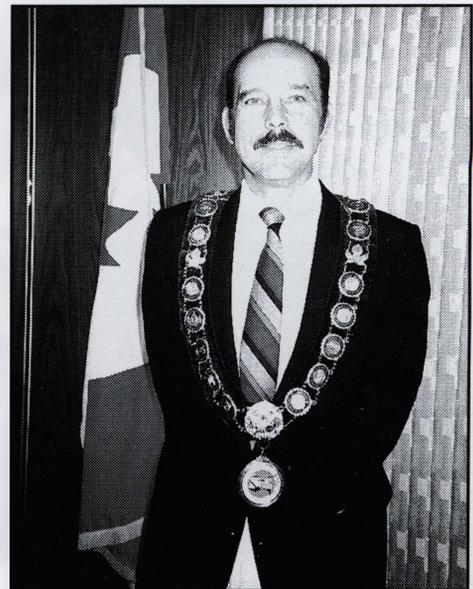
Several villages formed the heart of the settlement, including Schönfeld (the site of the municipal office), Rosenhof, and Blumenfeld. The main occupation was farming, but related industries and businesses were also developed.

The thriving community was interrupted by the First World War (1914-18) and the following anarchy (1918-20). Farms were plundered, the settlers brutally treated and forced to flee for their lives, so the settlement, like many others, came to a tragic end in 1920. Some of the Schönfeld families came to Ontario and joined the emerging United Mennonite Church.

Further Explorations . . .

The relationship of the Mennonites to the larger society, including political participation, is a long and complicated one. Early Anabaptists/Mennonites wanted no participation at all. As persecution eased and Mennonites became stable members of the civic community, many got involved in political activities, such as voting or being elected to government offices. In Kent and Essex Counties Mennonites have been involved in various civic organizations and levels of government.

It would be a valuable study to trace the involvement of Mennonites in politics throughout the years!



Robert Schmidt, Reeve/Mayor of Mersea Township (1991-97) and Warden of Essex County (1996).

A Wedding Celebration, 1932

Before the wedding much preparation took place. Receptions were sometimes held in greenhouses, but we had a big tobacco barn and used about half of it. White cotton material was gathered and nailed to the sides and top of the barn to protect guests from the birds that were nesting there. Then fresh branches were nailed all around to make the area more festive. Dad made a big "Welcome" sign for the entrance. The women baked about twenty cakes along with cookies, *Zwieback*, and raisin bread. Sandwiches were made on the wedding day, which was always on Sunday.

Saturday was *Polterabend*, when invited guests came to share their gifts, unwrapped items such as tea towels, pie plates, and pillowcases. It was depression time, and people had no money but were thankful to be in a wonderful country. For entertainment the young people had practised poems, dialogues, and songs. Then on Sunday morning tables were set for the noon meal of *Borscht* and pie. What a treat!

The bride's veil was trimmed with myrtle--maybe for good luck. A pot of it was grown in every household, so there was always some available.

The wedding started at two o'clock with the choir singing, "*Gott grüsse dich*," at which the couple walked in, accompanied by flower girls. At that time, men sat on one side of the church and women on the other.

After the ceremony the guests were invited back to the bride's parents' house. While the tables were set, the young couple had their picture taken. Many songs were sung during the meal, after which tables were removed for the evening games. All the young people of the church were invited for the games, like *Schlüsselbund*, which had couples walking in a circle arm in arm and singing songs. German and Russian folk songs were popular, as English songs were not known until "You are my Sunshine" became a favourite.

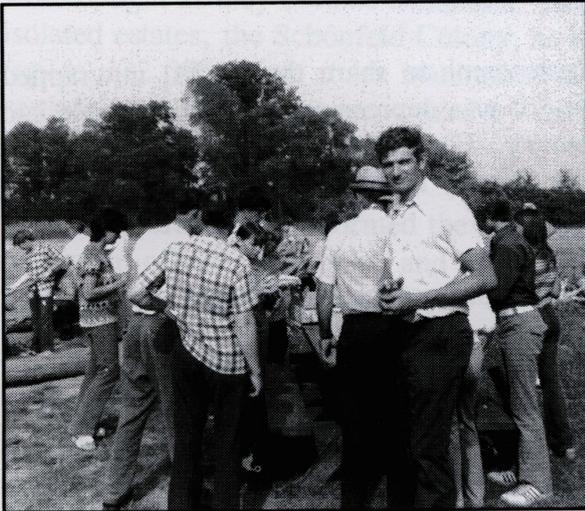
The evening came to an end with a final song, during which a friend of the bride removed her veil and myrtle crown, and a single male the groom's boutonniere. A married friend then pinned a ribbon in the bride's hair, signifying matrimony. All single women and men then, in turn, formed a circle, while the bride and groom, blindfolded, tried to touch one of them, to indicate the next bridal couple. Finally the bride and groom were raised on chairs to kiss, and this was repeated for the new couple.

What a wonderful day it was!

(*Agatha Schellenberg*)

The Point Pelee Connection

At one time, some three hundred private landholdings existed within the boundaries of present-day Point Pelee National Park. Over the years, the Park management has been buying these holdings, so that today only three remain. One of these has for many years been held by the William Krause family, some of whom are members of the Mennonite church. The Krauses are operators of the only commercial fishery on the west side of the Point. The fishery was formerly located inside the park; today it is several kilometres north of the entrance gate.



EMMC church picnic at Camp Henry, Point Pelee.

annual Sunday School picnics were held on the Point. (Not to be forgotten is the dust we swallowed as a caravan of weary picnickers, wending our way home along the main artery of the Park--a gravel road!) Throughout the years, Mennonites have been frequent users of the picnic sites, the nature trails, the interpretive centre, and have watched the birds migrating in the spring and the Monarch butterflies in the fall. The youth have participated in Easter sunrise services there on numerous occasions and have otherwise utilized the park's facilities frequently.

(Alfred Willms)

Other than the the Krauses, few, if any, Mennonites were ever owners of property in the Park. Nevertheless, many Mennonite families lived within the Park from 1930-60. Some rented homes and worked in the area, others share-cropped, some managed orchards, and others fished. During those years the largest commercial operation, I believe, was Point Pelee Orchards, growers and shippers of apples. A number of its managers were Mennonites, and the owners must have had a preference for "Johns"--namely, John Tiessen, John Toews, and John Penner.

It was during those bygone days that the



Irma Dyck Platford at the entrance booth, Point Pelee Park, 1996.

The Tradition of the "Verein"

Soon after the first Mennonites arrived in Essex County, the women began to organize into "Vereine," that is sewing or other activity circles. The first group began to meet in the fall of 1925 on Pelee Island. Over the next ten years other groups formed in Leamington, Kingsville, Harrow, and Windsor. Their focus was on fellowship and mission projects. They met in homes on a regular basis to sew, quilt, knit, and embroider. At first, the articles were raffled off among the members, but later they were auctioned and the money given to missions. As the women worked they enjoyed the social time together. Since most of them did not drive, the men drove to the meetings and also stayed to visit.

During the Second World War, the work was expanded to making clothing and blankets for the Red Cross. After they became aware of the Mennonite refugees following the War, they sent aid in form of clothing, blankets, canned fruit and meat. They also responded to requests for material aid from MCC and missionaries, and faithfully prepared articles for the annual mission sale. Gradually other organizations like the Cedar Springs Hospital and the Leamington Mennonite Home were added to the list being supported.

Through the decades the number of groups increased and the membership grew. At one time there were 275 members in twenty-three *Vereine*. However, in the late 1970s a decline began. Groups were less active, fewer new members joined, and the women began to be more



Quilting for MCC at the Harrow Mennonite Church, 1994.

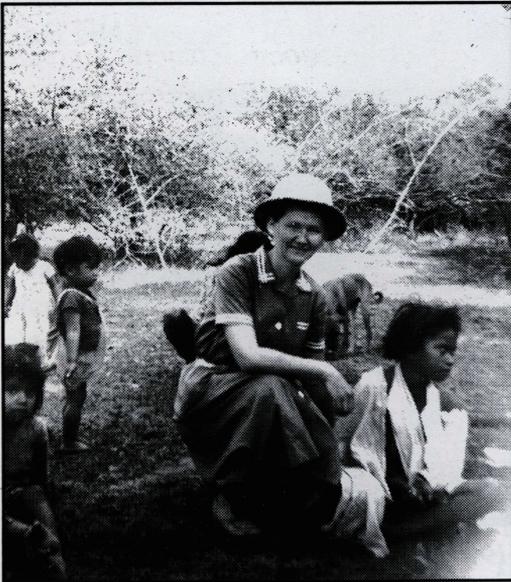
involved in other areas of church work. In more recent years the women of some churches have again started to meet for sharing and inspiration. There are also many opportunities for women of all congregations to work together in quilting sessions, the Et Cetera Shoppe, and the Mennonite Community Sale, as well as in other ways.

The motto for the Women in Mission was 1 Cor. 3:9, "For we are labourers with God."

The Tradition of Evangelistic Services

In former years some Mennonite conferences appointed travelling ministers or evangelists to be available for special evangelistic meetings organized by one or several congregations. These "Deeper Life Services" had their roots in European Pietism and the American "revival" tradition; their special emphasis was on being spiritually "born again" (John 3:7) and on spiritual rededication of those who were already committed Christians.

In the Leamington area, evangelistic services have taken place from time to time, regularly in individual Mennonite congregations, occasionally as an inter-Mennonite undertaking, and once in a while also on an inter-denominational basis. For example, in the early 1970s, the Leamington Ministerial Association, in which the Mennonites have been actively involved, invited the Billy Graham Evangelistic Organization to lead a week-long "crusade." More recently, in 1993, the Mennonite churches of the Leamington area worked together in organizing a series of spiritual renewal meetings with Rev. Myron Augsburger, a well-known evangelist from Washington, D.C.



Long-time missionary Eleanor Mathies with Lengua children at the Menno Colony mission in the Paraguayan Chaco, 1959.

Missionary Activities

One aspect of the Mennonite faith has always been the concern for others in need, be these physical or spiritual, close to home or far away. For many years the churches in Essex and Kent have supported various missions and service programs, especially those of the Mennonite Central Committee and the different Mennonite mission boards. There have also always been some individuals who went into full-time missionary or voluntary service programs of various kinds. Most important have been the MCC short-term voluntary service programs, which include North American and overseas positions and may last from a few months to several years, and the programs of the mission boards of the different Mennonite conferences, which tend to be of longer duration.

For many years, annual missions emphasis weekends have been an important part of many Mennonite congregations. At these events, visiting missionaries give presentations on their work and the local members are encouraged to support larger missionary causes.

... AND THEN there was the problem of sorting out which *Peter Dick*--or was that *Dyck*--or *Dueck*?--you meant. Did he own a farm on the townline, or did he work at the car plant in Windsor? And, by the way, were you just talking about *Mary Friesen*--the one who came from Manitoba, or was she one of the *Tiessen* daughters?--It's the kind of conversation most Mennonites have heard--or been a part of! So how were the people identified? Why, they got "*Eatjenaomes*," of course!

Eatjenaomes--Nicknames

The following item illustrates the use of the Low German language, the traditional language of the Russian Mennonites. It also illustrates the use of *Eatjenaomes*, nicknames, that were common in Mennonite communities; most were quite vivid and did not need explanations!

Ver lange Tiet, enne Twintjajoare, auls de Menniste hia daut goldene Essex County besiedelde, kaume veschiedene Familjes toop. Våle haude demselwjen Familiennaome, enn uck foaken denselwjen Väanaome. Dann word ann foaken een "Eatjenaome" aunjehonge. Toom Bieschpell, Tiesses gauf et een Schoof! Doa weare Predja Tiesses, Roppofsche Tiesses, Bloome Tiesses, enn Schnurrboat Tiesses; enn Jehaun enn Jehaunnes Tiesses. Hia wohnde Predja Schmette, enn doa weare Willan's Nursery Schmette (uck Iesabohn Schmette jenannt, wiels se bie de Iesabohn wohnde). Donn gauf et de New York Koope enn Betschla Koop.

Niefelds gauf et uck veschiedene - Duke's Niefelds oda Aupel Niefelds (dån eare Grootjinja too disen Dach noch jieda Wåatj naom Windsa Moatjt met Appel foare!). Enn donn wea doa Lehra Niefeld, de Brooda von Ältesta Jasch Niefeld (daut weare Kornelius Niefelds Sähns), enn Fescha Niefeld, dee bie Port Crew met de Kjnalses enn Kruses fesche deed.

Doa weare Diakon Wiense enn Jeschwista Wiense, Familex Klaosse enn Duke's Klaosse, de groota Cornies von de Insel, Heena Toews enn Hohne Toews enn de Wheatleysche Toewse. Enn'et gauf Våasånja Haum (dee uck Schriewa Haum jenannt word) enn Jehorr Haum, Districtmaun Jaunze, schmocka Jaunze, enn Predja Jaunze, Ältesta Driedja enn de groota Familienkreis von Driedjasch, Predja enn Choaleita, dee aula scheen sunge.

De Konrauds staumde nich aula von Biernd Konraud, oba de weare aula vewaund. Donn wea doa Bultje Wellms enn schmocke Wellms, wittbetjsja Unga enn Wolodj Unga, Teajelschien Derkse enn Sinn Dach-schoollehra Derkse; Miera Frees enn Dokta Frees, Predja App enn Naoba App, Garage Ditj enn Stoa Ditj enn Våasånja Ditj enn Windsa Ditj.

Jao, so wear'et, enn wåa kaun nich noch mea oppriehe?

(Elizabeth Janzen Dick)

There have been many fascinating individuals among the Mennonites of Essex and Kent! Some have stayed on, others have left the area but are still remembered fondly. One such person was an artist, Rudolph Dyck.

Rudolph Dyck (1911 - 1982)

Rudolph Dyck was born in Blumenort, Ukraine, in 1911. In 1926, after the Russian Revolution, he emigrated to Canada together with his family. For several years the Dycks lived in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, then moved to Essex County during the first years of the Great Depression. Rudy's creative artistic ability manifested itself during the 1930s, and he enrolled in correspondence art courses from Switzerland.

He was active in the local Leamington United Mennonite Church--especially in the choir. His fellow choir members remember his beautiful tenor voice and great artistic ability. He was baptized in 1936 by Rev. N.N. Driedger. Before leaving the Leamington area for Toronto in 1940, he created a German Bible verse in charcoal. It enhanced the pulpit wall of his white frame church in Leamington for many years, and a copy of it hangs in the North Leamington Church to this day.

Rudy pursued his career as artist which included landscapes, seascapes, portraits, and commercial art for many years, first in Canada and then the United States. He died suddenly in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1982.

(Victor Dyck and Anne Segedin)



The Bible motto that was created by Rudolph Dyck, now at the Heritage Centre.

A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR AT MONTREAL RIVER

In the early 1940's, during the Second World War, the Conference of Historic Peace Churches was called into being. Through this organization Rev. E.J. Swalm of the Brethren in Christ, Rev. J.B. Martin of the (Old) Mennonites, and Rev. Jacob N. Driedger of the United Mennonites requested the government to exempt young men from military service; finally the "Alternative Service" program was worked out under the Military Problems Committee. Thanks to new conference structure in Ontario, we were fortunate: all that was required of us was to have a document signed by our pastor which would grant us "CO"--conscientious objector--status.

I received notice to report at the Alternative Service Camp at Montreal River in northern Ontario in January, 1943. Our group from Leamington included Richard Taves, Nick Schmidt, John H. Dick, John P. Driedger, Henry Koop, and me. We took a bus from Leamington to Windsor, then a train for Sault St. Marie. At "The Soo" we were piled into trucks for the last eighty miles along Lake Superior. At midnight our truck finally jolted to a stop before a narrow bridge over a deep gorge; on the other side we saw lights flickering--our future home.

We were herded into a bunkhouse holding about forty and laid claim to one end before heading for a midnight snack. Here the first shock hit us; the food was not like mother's! We thought we'd never eat again! Next morning at eight, trucks appeared to take all 200 men to our assignments. Some of us shovelled gravel or snow, others cleared brush, some cut logs. We worked up quite an appetite and even began to enjoy our beans three times a day, along with the fresh bread.

Over 90% of the men were either Mennonite or Brethren in Christ. An Old Order Mennonite, Rev. Merle Schantz, had come along to act as our spiritual advisor, and I came to appreciate him very much. We were also treated well by our overseers.

We had a church service every Sunday, with various groups taking responsibility; it was here that I gave my first sermon. Sunday afternoons, weather permitting, we could go for long hikes. We could hardly wait for the snow to melt, so we could play ball. We fielded four teams, ours being the "Leamington Dynamites."

In May we began to hear rumours that the government was planning to close our camp and send us to farms. In June we were told to get ready to leave. We packed with mixed feelings. Our Camp Director, E. Tench, told us in his farewell speech that he had not wanted to come to this camp to be in charge of a bunch of "COs," but had experienced a change of heart; he thanked us for our cooperation. After another truck ride we found ourselves on the train heading south to our various destinations, thanking God for His caring and keeping.

(Cornie Driedger, North Leamington United Mennonite Church)

Music and singing: often on the program!



Musical ensemble at Faith Mennonite Church, Christmas 1995.



Performance of "The Sound of Music" at the UMEI, 1994.

Spiritual Growth by the Campfire

In the summer of 1995 Krista Oltean-Lepp, a young member of the Harrow Mennonite Church, came home after having spent a year at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario with a wonderful experience of spiritual growth. She asked pastor Jim Brown if we in the Harrow Church could start a group that could get together around a campfire to "Sing, talk, listen, and pray." David Lepp, another member of the congregation, offered the group the use of his parents' farm for such a meeting.

Every Wednesday evening from twelve to fifteen people gathered for a time of fellowship and spiritual growth. Krista asked me to join them, and I was amazed at the deep level of sharing of thoughts and experiences that took place, as well as at the affirmation that was expressed for those who talked of their doubts or joys. None were told that they shouldn't feel the way they did; all were accepted as they shared and others listened.

It was wonderful to see the young adults taking part in the experience! The singing was rich, and the prayers were heartfelt. We praised God as we heard of answered prayers! Our church has been blessed by this experience!

Sue Goerzen, Harrow Mennonite Church

A Spiritual Journey . . .

In recent years Mennonites have begun to visit their ancestral homeland in the Ukraine. A rich collection of archival materials, as well as many cemeteries, homes, farms, and other buildings--such as schools and factories--have been found, while others have long been demolished. Such a trip can be a highly educational but also a deeply emotional and spiritual experience!



The Schartners and Penners visiting the Ukraine in 1995: on the Dnieper River.

. . . and one last anecdote, not to be taken too seriously:

A Slight Difference in a Name

In 1989 Victor Kliewer, the newly installed pastor of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church, and his wife Val were not yet too well acquainted with their church members. One afternoon they followed an invitation for coffee and arrived at the home of Annie and Neil Konrad. The Konrads were surprised but delighted, and they had a nice visit together.

That evening the phone rang at the Kliewer home: it was Anna Konrad on the line. "Abe and I are so sorry you couldn't come today," she said. "We waited for you all afternoon!" Pastor Kliewer was surprised. "I don't understand what you mean," he replied. "We just were at your house!"--"Not at ours," answered Anna Konrad. "We just waited and waited!"

Kliewers had indeed been invited for coffee: by Anna, not Annie, Konrad!

Now the Kliewers called to apologize to Neil and Annie Konrad. "But what must you have thought of us!" responded Annie Konrad. "We must have looked not at all prepared! And I had nothing to serve you with your coffee except a few store-bought cookies. Please excuse us!"

(Annie Konrad, North Leamington United Mennonite Church)

Conclusion

It has recently been estimated that there may be as many as 10,000 Mennonites living in Essex County alone, with more in Kent County (*Windsor Star*, August 9, 1997; page A5). It has already been noted that accurate statistics are hard to determine, but even these suggest that one of the largest concentrations of Mennonites in Canada is found in these two counties.

The present *Introduction* has, in a preliminary way, tried to portray a cross-section of the rich heritage that exists within this community. Much more could, of course, be added--indeed, various suggestions have been made throughout for those who may be interested in exploring further topics.

Hopefully, this volume will contribute to a better understanding and greater appreciation of what it means to be "Mennonite"--for those who may be interested or critical observers from the outside, as well as for those who find meaning and purpose for their lives in the context of this community!

Appendices

A. Addresses of Mennonite Churches

Blenheim Mennonite Church

Pastor: Isaac Harms
1996 Membership: 27
P.O. Box 1799
Blenheim ON NOP 1A0
Tel.: (519) 676-1411

Dresden Old Colony Mennonite Church

Pastor: Peter W. Friesen
1994 Membership: 25 (larger attendance)
c/o Isaac and Tina Fehr
R.R. 1, Thamesville ON NOP 2K0
Tel.: (519) 692-5805

Faith Mennonite Church

Pastor: Glenn Brubacher
1996 Membership: 241
269 Sherk Street
Leamington, ON N8H 3K9
Tel.: (519) 326-6391

Gospel Christian Mennonite Church

Pastor: Ben Wall
1996 Membership: approximately 50 families attend
R.R. 1
57 Sterling St., Site 6, Box 25
Wheatley ON N8H 3V6
Tel.: (519) 825-3754

Harrow Mennonite Church

Pastor: Jim Brown
1996 Membership: 55
3167 Walker Road
Harrow ON NOR 1G0
Tel.: (519) 738-2148

Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church

Pastor: Peter W. Friesen
1994 Membership: about 80 (larger attendance)
1521 Gosfield South Road 4, R.R. 2
Kingsville ON N9Y 2E5
Tel.: (519) 733-2891

Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church

Pastor: Peter Reimer
1996 Membership: 61
108 Mersea Road 3, R.R. 2
Leamington ON N8H 3V5
Tel.: (519) 322-9915

Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church

Pastor: David Penner
1996 Membership: 165
Box 84, R.R. 4
Leamington ON N8H 3W1
Tel.: (519) 326-9734

Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church

Pastor: Henry Regier
1996 Membership: 213
219 Talbot Street East, R.R. 3
Leamington ON N8H 3V6
Tel.: (519) 326-3605 or 326-6273

Leamington United Mennonite Church

Pastor: Menno Epp
1996 Membership: 766
78 Oak Street East
Leamington ON N8H 2C6
Tel.: (519) 326-6031 or 326-2727

New Reinland Mennonite Church

Pastor: William Thiessen
1996 Membership: approximately 35 families attend
Site 2, Box 1, R.R. 3
Wheatley ON N0P 2P0
Tel.: (519) 322-1938

North Leamington United Mennonite Church

Pastor: Victor Klierer
1996 Membership: 508
625 Mersea Road 6, R.R. 5
Leamington ON N8H 3V8
Tel.: (519) 326-8216 or 326-7928

Reinland Mennonite Fellowship

Pastor: John Dyck
1996 Membership: approximately 20 families attend
Box 3, R.R. 1
Coatsworth ON N0P 1H0
Tel.: (519) 825-9494

Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church

Pastor: Peter W. Friesen
1994 Membership: about 100 (larger attendance)
Wheatley-Tilbury Townline, R.R. 1
Wheatley ON N0P2P0
Tel.: (519) 825-4400

Windsor Mennonite Fellowship

Pastor: Erwin Wiens
1996 Membership: 37
1709 George Avenue
Windsor ON N8Y 2Y8
Tel.: (519) 974-1346

B. Addresses of Mennonite Institutions

Et Cetera Shoppe/OMIAC

19 Erie Street North
Leamington ON N8H 2Z2
Tel.: (519) 326-3665

Leamington Mennonite Home

22 Garrison Avenue
Leamington ON N8H 2P2
Tel.: (519)326-6109

Mennonite Central Committee/OMIAC

10 Erie Street North
Leamington ON N8H 2Z2
Tel./Fax: (519) 326-0494

Mennonite Heritage Centre

31 Pickwick Drive
Leamington ON N8H 5C4
Tel.: (519) 326-0456

Mennonite Savings and Credit Union

248 Erie Street South
Leamington ON N8H 3C1
Tel.: (519) 326-8601

Shalom Counselling Services

33 Princess Avenue, Suite 301
Leamington ON N8H 5C5
Tel.: (519) 326-3778

United Mennonite Educational Institute

614 Mersea Road 6, R.R. 5
Leamington ON N8H 3V8
Tel.: (519) 326-7448
Fax: (519) 326-0278

Suggestions for Further Reading

There are many excellent books that provide general information about the Mennonites of the world and specifically in Essex and Kent Counties. Some of the most helpful ones are listed below. In addition, there are also numerous books that deal with individual persons or congregations or other special topics; these have not been included here but can be located in the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Leamington or in other Mennonite church and historical libraries.

Further, many interesting and informative articles appear in various Mennonite newspapers and journals, such as *The Mennonite Reporter*, *Der Bote*, *Die Mennonitische Post*, the *Conrad Grebel Review*, and the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. Again, these can be found in Mennonite libraries.

One of the most valuable reference works related to Mennonite studies is *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*; the first four volumes were published from 1955-59, and a fifth supplementary volume was published in 1990.

Suggestions for further reading:

N. N. Driedger, *The Leamington United Mennonite Church. Establishment and Development 1925-1972*. (No publisher indicated; Leamington, 1972; 176 pages. Originally published and also still available in German.) Survey of the background and history of the Mennonite settlement in Essex County to 1972, with special focus on the Leamington United Mennonite Church, of which the author was elder from 1933 until his retirement in 1967. Even though this was not designed to be a scholarly work, it is the most informative book on the Mennonites in Essex County during the period it describes; many photographs.

Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History. A Popular History of the Anabaptists and Mennonites*. Third edition. (Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 1993; 452 pages.) One of the most readable surveys of Anabaptist and Mennonites history from their origins in the sixteenth century to the present. Includes photographs, maps, and charts.

Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus. The Rescue and Resttlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution*. (Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, Altona, 1962; 571 pages.) A thorough study of the emigration of the Russian Mennonites in the 1920s and after the Second World War. Includes many illustrations, maps, and tables.

Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920. The History of a Separate People.* (MacMillan of Canada, Toronto, 1974; 480 pages.) Careful study of the earliest years of Mennonite settlement in Canada. First volume of a series.

Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940. A People's Struggle for Survival.* (MacMillan of Canada, Toronto, 1982; 640 pages.) The second volume in the series of Mennonite life in Canada. (The third volume of the series has been written by T. D. Regehr.) and is scheduled to be published in 1996.)

J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *Mennonite Mosaic. Identity and Modernization.* (Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 1991; 308 pages, many charts and graphs.) A thorough sociological study, containing much excellent information about Mennonite convictions and values.

Karin Kliever, *History of the Old Colony Mennonite Church.* (Leamington, unpublished manuscript, 1995.) This research paper of about 30 pages is on deposit at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Leamington.

Harry Loewen, *No Permanent City. Stories from Mennonite History and Life.* (Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 1993; 224 pages.) The book consists of forty-four very readable stories which have been carefully selected from different times and places throughout Mennonite history.

Howard John Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God. Mennonite Confessions of Faith.* (Institute of Mennonite Studies, Elkhart, Indiana, 1985; 369 pages.) Collection of reprinted confessional statements, including the Dordrecht, Ris, and other confessions, together with explanations and interpretations.

Margaret Loewen Reimer, *One Quilt, Many Pieces.* Third edition. (Mennonite Publishing Service, Waterloo, Ontario, 1990; 54 pages.) Short overview of different Mennonite groups in Canada; photos and helpful charts.

Maurice Martin, editor, *Mennonites in Ontario. A Mennonite Bicentennial Portrait 1786-1986.* (Ontario Mennonite Bicentennial Committee, Waterloo, Ontario, 1986; 175 pages, oversize.) An excellent collection of black-and-white, as well as colour photographs depicting Mennonite life in Ontario.

Memories: Sixty Years of Life in Essex and Kent Counties, 1925-1985. (Leamington, Ontario, 1985; 78 pages.) Specifically deals with Essex and Kent Mennonite churches and their histories.

T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970. A People in Transition.* (University of Toronto, Toronto, 1996; 563 pages, illustrations.) The third volume in the series on Mennonite life in Canada, the most complete work to date (first two volumes by Frank H. Epp above).

Harry Leonard Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country. Mennonite Colonization in Mexico*. (University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1971; 387 pages.) Traces the origins of the Mennonite emigration from Canada to Mexico and then developments there until the 1970s.

Gisela Schartner and Astrid Koop, *Biographies of Our Late Leaders and Histories of the Mennonite Churches in Essex and Kent Counties, 1925-1995*. (Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association, Leamington, Ontario, 1995; 141 pages.) Published for the seventieth anniversary of Mennonite settlement in Essex and Kent Counties, the book is divided into seven chapters dealing with the different Mennonite conference bodies in the area, together with biographies of the ministers; photographs of churches and leaders.

Walter Schmiedehaus, *Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexiko*. (CMBC Publications, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1982.) Originally published in 1948, this book was a valuable historical document and was reprinted by CMBC Publications/Steinbach Post.

William Schroeder and Helmut T. Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas*. (Springfield Publishers, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1990; 134 pages.) A comprehensive atlas of Mennonite settlements in all parts of the world; 85 pages of maps, 49 pages of text and index; weak on Ontario (no mention of Essex and Kent Counties and Leamington).

C. Henry Smith, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites*. Fifth edition. (Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kansas, 1981; 589 pages.) Classic history of the Mennonites, first published in 1941, then repeatedly in revised forms. Deals with the time from the Reformation beginnings to the Second World War.

Edith Tiessen and Astrid Koop, *Mennonite Graves on Pelee Island and the Reesor Settlement*. (Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association, Leamington, Ontario, 1991; 36 pages.) A brief review of these two Mennonite cemeteries.

Abe Warkentin, *Strangers and Pilgrims/Gaeste und Fremdlinge*. (Mennonitische Post, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1987; 361 pages, oversize.) This very interesting album consists mostly of photographs, illustrating the life of the Mennonites in Mexico and other Latin American countries.

Some churches in Essex and Kent have published their own material. Many churches have telephone directories of their participants and leaders, some with lists of committees, often printed annually. The following list names a few photo directories which deal specifically with an area church or group of churches.

Essex County Mennonite Churches: Faith, Harrow, Leamington, North Leamington, Windsor. 1990. (Leamington, 1990; about 102 unnumbered pages.) The photo album is published cooperatively by the five participating churches listed in the title. There are brief introductions to each by the respective pastors; otherwise the book consists mainly of photographs with little descriptive writing.

Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church. (Leamington, 1988; unnumbered pages.) Photos of members, with an index of addresses included at the end of the book. There is a second Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church photo directory (undated) available as well.

Leamington United Mennonite Church. (Leamington, 1978; 104 pages.) Foreword by Rev. Henry Dueck. Photos of buildings and members of LUMC (which still included the NLUMC at the time); no further explanatory comments.

United Mennonite Churches of Essex County. 1984. (Leamington, 1984; 140 pages.) The photo album is published cooperatively by four United Mennonite Churches of Essex County: Leamington United Mennonite Church, North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Faith Mennonite Church, and Harrow United Mennonite Church. Most of the book consists of photos of church buildings, various leaders and committees, and member families. There is a brief "Foreward" by "The History Committee" and short introductions to each of the separate churches.

The Editorial Committee

For approximately two years a group of representatives from almost all of the Mennonite churches in Essex and Kent Counties met to discuss and plan the present book. Members brought a variety of different interests and backgrounds to the project and were active, not only in helping to shape the overall format but also in contributing information and photographs and writing anecdotes as well as parts of the main text.

It has developed into a rich experience of getting to know one another and participating in a unique inter-Mennonite project!

During the time that the committee has been in existence there has been a certain amount of turnover in the membership. At the time the project was nearing completion the persons included in the photograph below were participants.

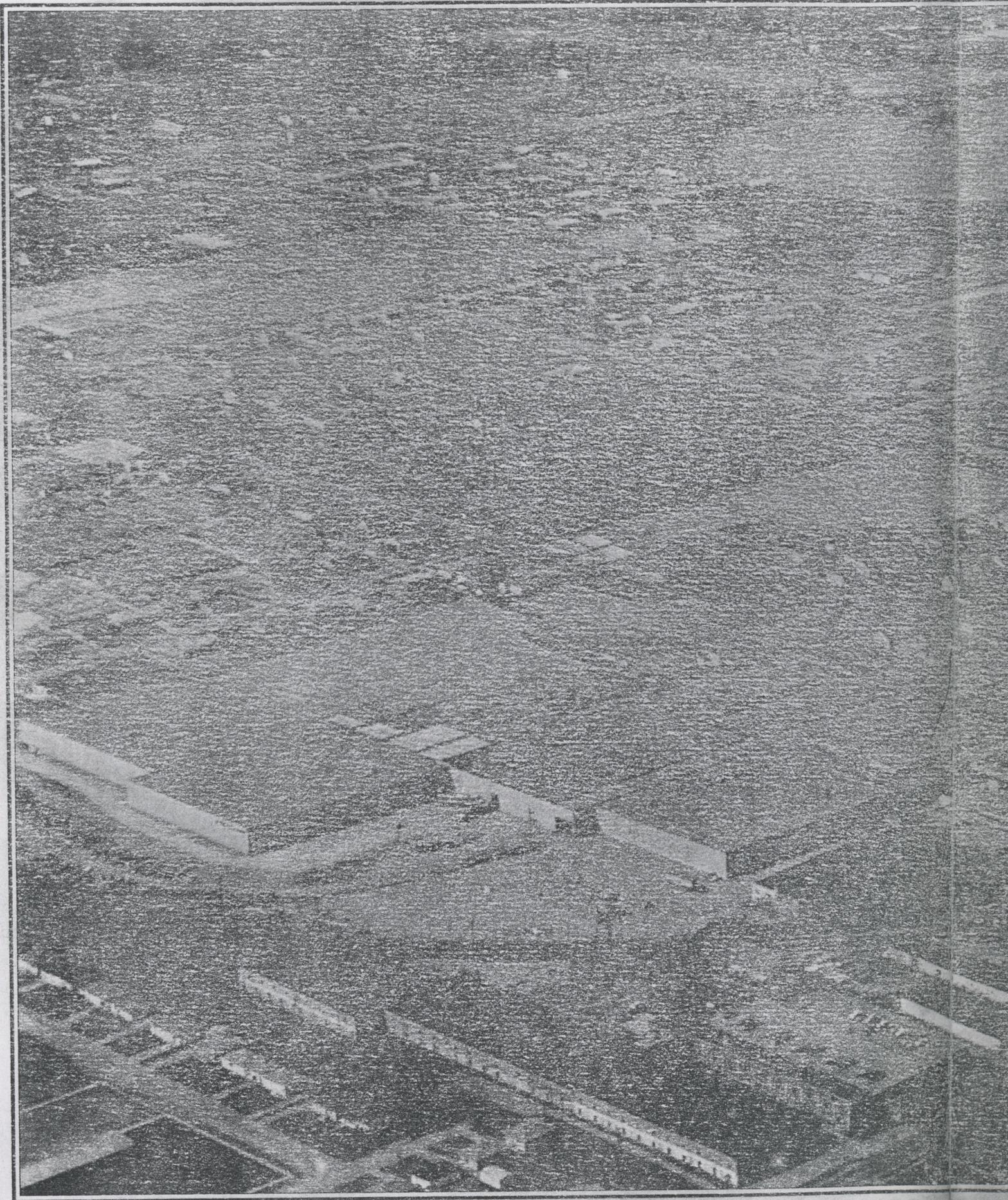


*Members of the Editorial Committee, Summer 1997: **Standing:** Irene Woodsit, Jacob Enns, Jessie Quiring, Bruno Penner, Gisela Schartner, Henry Friesen, Walter Klassen. **Seated:** Peter Bartel, Astrid Koop, Victor Kliewer, Maren Kliewer, Bill Hiebert. **Absent:** Alfred Willms. (Courtesy George Schartner)*

. . . our appreciation to **Speedprint**, "your friendly printer," for excellent service in the printing and production of this book!



Victor and Helen Huebert, owners of "Speedprint," Leamington, 1996.





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CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD NEWS



The Mennonites of Essex and Kent Counties are heirs to a rich history, even as they seek to relate their faith and values to everyday life. This book is an introduction to this fascinating community in its uniqueness and diversity!

