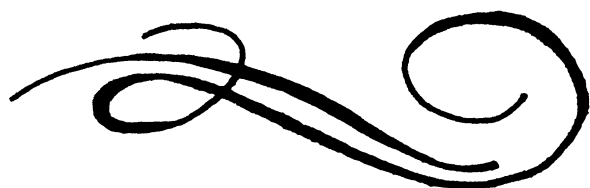


# MEMORIES



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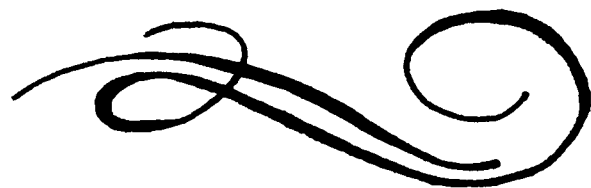
Sixty Years of Mennonite Life

in Essex and Kent Counties

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1925-1985

# MEMORIES



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Sixty Years of Mennonite Life  
in Essex and Kent Counties

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1925-1985



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## GOD 'S PEOPLE

Are we your people, Lord?  
We say it often, and affirm it.  
We came to Essex County. Labour, wit  
Increased our substance, gave us place.  
How much was our hard work, with grace  
Thrown in? These years afford  
A time of thoughtful quietness;  
We wait on you for insight; bless!

We are your people, if indeed  
That grouping gathers all who need  
Your care, ongoing ministration,  
As your elect of every nation.

We are your people with our strength  
Of trust and faith, like Israel of old.  
Yet we confess that in the length  
Of sixty years, we've often let unfold  
Our seamy side: the wash of life  
Has shown a tendency to strife.  
Sins personal and sins collective  
Leave us repentant, introspective.  
Like Simon Peter, boldly we confess  
You Lord, one moment, only to regress,  
Denying you with word and deed.  
Then cock-crow, tears...forgive, we plead.

We claim you as our heritage, Herr Zebaoth!  
Nor fear to call on you in special way.  
You brought us here. Machno and Hungersnot  
Beset us. Many fell; we were not prey.  
You showered us with gifts, redressing  
The former times with goodness, blessing.  
The handful we once were is now a throng  
Where children, new believers, make us strong.

Full sixty years! Beneath the cross  
We leave both failure and success,  
Our times of glory and of loss.  
Forgetting all, we strive and press  
To that high calling, heavenly favour!  
To be your people, Lord and Saviour!

Victor A. Dirks, February 27, 1985  
For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Mennonites in  
Essex and Kent Counties

## ORIGINS

"The origin of the Anabaptists ... is crucial to the later development of the Mennonites in Canada and to their continuing self-understanding."

Frank H. Epp  
Mennonites in Canada  
Volume I, p. 23.

Although each of the nine Mennonite churches in Essex and Kent counties displays its own unique set of characteristics and modes of expression, the churches share a common origin and belief structure. It is important and necessary to explore these shared beginnings and principles of faith for it will lead to a better understanding of how and why these local congregations developed the way they did. Moreover, a closer examination of the churches' origin reveals that the various Mennonite churches have many more similarities than differences.

The Mennonite churches have descended from the Anabaptist movement which emerged in sixteenth-century Europe during the Reformation. The movement began in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525, when a group of believers broke away from the established Catholic and Reformed Churches in order to form a biblical church. Among the early Swiss leaders were Georg Blaurock, Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz and Michael Sattler. The term Anabaptist, a Greek term meaning rebaptizer, was applied to this early radical group because it rejected the commonly practised infant baptism and began to perform the baptism of adults. For the Anabaptists, personal repentance followed by the experience of regeneration and a commitment to a new life was the only legitimate basis for baptism. Since baptism and a commitment to a new life required sin consciousness and repentance, baptism was not to be administered to infants who could not distinguish between good and evil.

Indeed, the Anabaptists demanded the restitution of what they considered to be the true apostolic church whose membership was based upon personal faith and conviction. Thus, they sought the establishment of a church body of believers unsupported by, and independent of, the state. This concept of a free church of believers negated the traditional sixteenth-century view of a unified Christian society in which the church congregation and the political assembly of the state functioned together as one body. In such a corporate society, infant baptism was the external sign of membership in the church as well as in the state or society as a whole. The Anabaptists' repudiation of infant baptism was therefore considered seditious, for it precluded membership in the wider Christian society and threatened the very nature of the unified "Christian community which existed at the time.

The Anabaptists also rejected the use of the sword in defence of the state. In fact, all forms of force and violence were repudiated by the group which cited Matthew 5: 43-44 as the basis for its position. In light of the constant warfare in Europe and the threat which it posed to Switzerland's security in the sixteenth century, the Anabaptists' refusal to defend their homeland was considered disloyal and treasonous.

The Anabaptists not only rejected the union of church and state but also repudiated the symbol of loyalty to the state: the oath. In Matthew 5:33-37 Christ had clearly commanded against the use of the oath and had prohibited all swearing. For the Anabaptists the oath was not necessary since it had been designed to ensure that the truth was spoken, but the Christian disciple spoke the truth as a matter of course since he belonged to the Truth which was Christ. The refusal to swear the oath in general and the oath of allegiance in particular was considered a threat to the unity and foundation of sixteenth-century society and subsequently resulted in the imprisonment, loss of citizenship, exile, and death of many Anabaptists.

By 1530 the Anabaptist movement had spread into the Dutch and Belgian provinces of Emden, Friesland, and Groningen as well as the North German provinces of Schleswig-Holstein, Westphalia and the Rhineland. The congregations which developed in the Lowlands were eventually organized and led by Menno Simons, a Dutch priest who had renounced the priesthood in 1536. Menno Simons led the Anabaptists in their pursuit of an apostolic church in which discipleship was emphasized. By about 1545 the Anabaptists were labelled as Mennists or Mennonists and eventually came to be called Mennonites after their organizer and leader Menno Simons.

Linda Tiessen



## MIGRATIONS

Because of the severe persecutions experienced by the Mennonites, their history has been characterized by numerous migrations throughout Europe and North and South America. The development of the Mennonite Church in general, and our local congregations in particular, has to a large extent been influenced by this pattern of migrations.

When Swiss authorities became increasingly intolerant of the Anabaptists in the 1530's, they migrated primarily to southern Germany and France. Eventually many of these Swiss Mennonites journeyed to Pennsylvania from the 1680's to the 1720's as part of a greater migration from western Europe to America. Approximately 8,000 Mennonites came to the United States during this time in search of religious toleration, economic betterment and freedom from military service.

Smaller groups of Swiss Mennonites also went to Poland and Prussia and were joined in this migration by Mennonites from the Netherlands. They settled in the areas of Danzig, Elbing, Marienburg and along the Vistula River into Poland. When in 1763 Catherine the Great of Russia invited farmers from western countries to settle in the Ukraine, many of the Mennonite farmers in Poland and Prussia were attracted to her offer since restrictions had been placed on their religious and economic activities. Their exemption from military service in Poland and Prussia was also being threatened at that time. Consequently, from 1787 - 1870, approximately 1,900 families comprised of 8,000 persons migrated to Chortitza, Molotschna, Samara and Vilna. While this eastward migration was in progress, numerous Mennonites, who feared a loss of some of the rights and freedoms originally granted by Catherine the Great, decided to journey to North America. From 1873 - 1884, 18,000 Mennonites left Russia and settled in Canada and the United States.

An even larger number of Mennonites emigrated from Russia

to North America after World War One. With the Bolshevik takeover in 1917 came the threat of a complete dissolution of the religious, cultural and economic way of life of the Mennonites in Russia. Thus, from 1922 - 1930, 25,000 Mennonites settled in Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Paraguay. Approximately 21,000 of these settled in Canada and many more would have come had the opportunity to leave the Soviet Union not been dismissed by Soviet authorities.

During this time there was a movement of the Mennonite people within America as well. After the First World War, many Old Colony Mennonites moved from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico, and some Sommerfelder Mennonites from western Canada settled in the Chaco of Paraguay. During the war, the Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments had placed restrictions on private Mennonite schools and had forced numerous schools to close because of failure to comply with government regulations. As a result, many had made the decision to move.

The Second World War gave rise to tremendous shifts in populations including the Mennonites. From 1941 - 1943, 35,000 Russian Mennonites were evacuated from the Ukraine by the German army which was retreating from that area. These Mennonites were to have been settled in the Vistula area where they had lived 150 years earlier. However, due to the outcome of the war, 2/3 of the Mennonites who fled the Ukraine were repatriated by the Soviet army in 1945. Mennonites from Prussia and Poland also fled their homeland upon the invasion of Russian troops. Of those Mennonites who left Russia, Poland and Prussia, 7,000 eventually migrated to Canada from 1948 - 1952. Approximately 5,000 settled in Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina.

Since the 1960's, approximately 10,000 Mennonites have been allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union and have taken up residence in the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States and Canada. A large number of Mennonites has also returned to Canada from Mexico since the 1960's.

In migrations to North America and within that continent, Mennonites have been a people on the move. Indeed, it has often appeared as though they have been on an endless pilgrimage throughout their history. Harold S. Bender, a noted Mennonite historian, has written that "the Mennonite self-image which has emerged is one of a pilgrim in a sometimes strange and hostile world."

Linda Tiessen

## HISTORICAL EVENTS OF THE FAITH MENNONITE CHURCH

In February, 1961, plans precipitated to begin services in the Margaret D. Bennie School, Sherk Street, in Leamington. George Janzen served as pastor at the outset. These services culminated in the organization of a new Mennonite congregation in the Leamington area. We as a group decided to part ways with the United Mennonite Church mainly in order to have an all-English language church and Sunday School worship. The families interested in an English language program were concerned about the spiritual needs of their immediate families, as well as of the many young people who married non-Germanic persons and who were looking for a place of worship more suited to their needs.

On June 18, 1961, the formal founding of the congregation took place under the name "Faith Mennonite Church". On this day fifty people joined the congregation by transfer of membership, and by renewal of the Christian covenant; an additional three were baptized upon confession of faith and received into membership.

During the year 1962, the congregation was accepted into the fellowship of the General Conference Mennonite Church and affiliated districts; on July 28, as a member church of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada; on August 9, as a member church of the General Conference Mennonite Church, North America; and on November 10, as a member of the Ontario United Mennonite Conference.

November 10, 1961, marked the completion of negotiations to purchase a three-acre lot on Sherk Street from the Diocese of Huron of the Anglican Church. Early in 1963, plans for a church building were discussed and prepared under the direction of William Krause, chairman of the Finance and Stewardship Committee. The ground-breaking service was held on July 14, 1963, and construction was begun immediately. The Finance and Stewardship Committee along with the chairman of the congregation

served as architect, contractor and foreman in the planning and building of the structure. All construction except the masonry was done on a voluntary basis by members of the congregation and a few friends. Upstairs the church holds approximately four hundred persons and the auditorium in the basement seats another one hundred and fifty people.

On April 19, 1964, the cornerstone was laid, signifying the foundation of the church which is Jesus Christ (I Cor.3:11). It is also expressing the faith and devotion of those who have laboured here, have encouraged and contributed to the work, and have prayed that the gospel of Jesus Christ would stir many people to faith and service. The witness of this church is to the salvation that we have through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

July 12, 1964, was the "Day of Dedication" for the new building. Speakers for this special occasion were our pastor George C. Janzen, Rev. Leonard O'Neil from the Leamington First Baptist Church; Dr. Leland Harder from the Mennonite Biblical Seminary at Elkhart, Indiana; William Dick of the Ottawa Mennonite Church; and Rev. J. C. Neufeld of the Leamington United Mennonite Church.

Since its inception the church has been served by five pastors: George Janzen, 1961 - 1966; Jake Rempel, 1966 - 1970; Art Wiebe, 1970 - 1972; Peter Janzen, 1972 - 1981, and Edwin Epp, from 1981 to the present.

The Faith Mennonite Church has also experienced growth. The present active membership is approximately one hundred and thirty adults, consisting of people from United, Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Mennonite religious backgrounds. Ethnically, culturally and vocationally we are also a very diversified group. We have Sunday School for all ages followed by a worship hour for everyone. A children's story is always a part of the worship service. Various activities such as Young People's, Ladies' Mission Circle and Fellowship groups are also a very important part of our congregation.

Our church has four committees:

1. Stewardship and Finance Committee which handles all church finance problems and general maintenance of the church and grounds;
2. Worship and Membership Committee which aids the pastor and deacons in suggesting changes in worship; it also sets dates for guest speakers and musical groups, etc.;
3. Missions and Service Committee which lines up aid for those in need in the church and community as well as for M.C.C.:
4. Youth and Education Committee which lines up the Sunday School program and helps youth leaders with suggestions and activities.

The chairman and secretary of each of these committees make up our church council which is headed by an elected church chairman.

We have a unique difference from many churches in that we do not collect church dues. Our finances are completely voluntary and our members are notified in monthly newsletters or bulletins how close we are to budget. The rest is left to faith in our membership. After all, the church was founded by faith and for this reason received its name "Faith Mennonite Church".

Our church to this date does not have a hired caretaker. To overcome this, each family takes its turn at cleaning the church; then on Sunday morning this couple is responsible for passing out the bulletins and welcoming guests for the service.

Due to the ever-increasing rate of divorce in our country, our congregation has accepted divorced persons, and divorced persons who have remarried into the fellowship as active members; furthermore, divorced persons have been re-married in our church. This has been done only after the couple has had consultation with the pastor, and after our church council has agreed with the pastor's recommendation.

Basically the aims and objectives of our church are the same as those of all other Mennonite Churches: to be some one or to become some one in praise of the wonderful grace of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

We are proud to be a part of the Essex County United Mennonite Churches.

Rose and Herman Tiessen

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE  
HARROW UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH

Rummaging through a box of old papers from the attic, I came across a copy of an old letter dated November 16, 1928. It was written by my uncle, John Schroeder, who lived in Kingsville at that time. The letter was to a Mr. Hyman in Indiana, making final arrangements for the purchase of a 205-acre farm northwest of Harrow. A group of Mennonites had decided to join together to purchase this farm, and to divide it into individual parcels, and to go into market gardening. This group then, was the beginning of the church in Harrow.

In March of 1929, about five families moved into the old farmhouse and began construction on a small house for each family. Whenever a small house was completed to a liveable stage, the family would move into it, thereby making room in the farmhouse for another family. The original group of purchasers consisted of about twelve family units.

The group began meeting for worship in the living room of the old farmhouse, which was the largest room available. My father, Gerhard Papke, usually led these meetings. He was a school teacher in Russia and before World War I had spent two years in Switzerland studying theology. Occasionally ministers would come from Leamington and conduct Sunday morning worship. Some of those I remember well were Rev. N. N. Driedger, Jacob D. Janzen, Jacob Epp (still in the Leamington Mennonite Home), Abram Rempel, Nicholai Schmidt, and Jacob Driedger. On rare occasions Aeltester Jacob H. Janzen from Kitchener would come and conduct the service.

Times were very hard, the Depression was in full swing, and the land was not too suitable for vegetable production. Several of the original settlers soon moved away. When John Janzen and his family moved to Leamington, Sunday morning worship was switched from the living room of the farmhouse and held in the



house they vacated.

The group's social life centered around the weekly Verein, today known as the "Women's Mission Circle". The women would gather at someone's home one afternoon weekly, to sew and visit. The men would join them for coffee and Zwieback later.

The Verein continued through the years and as the group grew larger, it split into two groups divided into the younger and older ladies. In 1967 the two groups from the Harrow church became part of the Southwestern Ontario Conference and thereby became part of the Canadian Conference.

The youth were not formally organized in the early years but were drawn together through a youth choir led by Mr. Peter Riediger. He gave many years of patient dedication to this leadership. I still have an old song book of music in four parts written in numbers, not notes, copied and painstakingly reproduced by Mr. Riediger.

In the early forties the number of families on the original farm had dwindled to seven. However, several Mennonite families had moved to the surrounding area and joined the group for worship. In 1944 the Mennonite community in Harrow got a real boost when the Herman Lepp Sr. family settled permanently on the Ridge Road. Mr. Lepp immediately began serving as minister, first on a part-time basis, but soon as the regular minister. Since the congregation was now too large to hold services in a house, we rented the old town hall on King St. East in Harrow.

In the late forties the congregation began to feel the need to have its own church building. The site of our present church was purchased and the church was built in 1951. Abe Heinrichs was building chairman and much of the labour was done by church members. The church building was dedicated on November 25, 1951.

At this time the group was not organized as a separate congregation, but still held membership in the Essex County

Vereinigte Mennoniten Gemeinde. On January 1, 1953 the Harrow congregation obtained its own charter and became the Harrow United Mennonite Church.

In July of 1953, the Harrow Church joined the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and in August of 1953, it joined the General Conference of Mennonite Churches.

Rev. Herman Lepp Sr. continued to serve as our pastor. On May 22, 1953, the congregation asked him to be their Aeltester. He worked faithfully for the Church and the Kingdom of God until his illness in late 1965. He passed away in January of 1966. In all, he gave over twenty years of his life in service to the Harrow Church. He will be long remembered by those who had the privilege of knowing him.

After his father passed away, Herman Lepp Jr. consented to accept the position of minister. He began serving immediately and was ordained on March 17, 1968, by Rev. J. C. Neufeld. Upon request of the congregation, Herman served the church with communion in October of 1969. (Herman not being an Aeltester, this was a first.) He served as our pastor until the end of 1978, a full thirteen years of dedication and service to the Harrow Church. At this time Herman asked the congregation to be relieved of his pastoral duties and with great reluctance and apprehension we honoured his request. Our congregation will be forever indebted to Herman for the excellent service he has given for minimal financial reward.

Our prayers for a new pastor were answered when Henry and Leonora Paetkau agreed to come to Harrow and to serve us on a part-time basis. We have been blessed with their presence until the present time and hope for a long continuation.

In January of 1980 the Harrow Congregation took on an outreach project to sponsor six Vietnamese refugees. There were two young sisters and a brother, and three single male individuals. These have now moved on and become self-sufficient.

At the time, however, it was quite a challenge for our small congregation to house, to feed, and to look after the needs of these new Canadians. In retrospect it was a very good experience for all concerned.

In January of 1981 our Pastor Henry Paetkau began serving fulltime, the first time our church had hired a fulltime minister. At this time the Harrow congregation began work on establishing a Mennonite Fellowship in Windsor. We received financial support for this project from both the Ontario and Canadian Conferences. Pastor Henry's untiring efforts in this endeavour have born fruit. He began slowly, at first with meetings and Bible studies in a private home in Windsor and then Sunday evening worship at Trinity United Church. On January 6, 1985, the Windsor Mennonite Fellowship began having Sunday morning worship services. They are now looking for a permanent half-time minister.

At the present time our church at Harrow is facing a happy problem. Due to increased enrollment, our Sunday School facilities have become inadequate. On special occasions our sanctuary bulges at the seams a bit, and our basement is overcrowded for fellowship meals.

Consequently, we are seriously looking for some way to expand the capacity of our church. We hope and pray that with divine guidance and by carrying on the faith of our fathers we will be able to meet this challenge. I am sure that building our present church was quite a challenge at the time since our membership was only 44. It has fluctuated up to 62 in 1964, back down to below 50 in the late 1970's and now it has hit a high of 70 in December, 1984. In my opinion, this recent growth is largely due to the very special talent of our Pastor Henry of communicating with and of listening to people of all ages.

Over the years many people have given untiringly of their time and talents to keep the church going. I think of my dear

father, Gerhard Papke, who although not a minister, led Bible studies and preached in those early years. I think of the work and patience of Mr. Peter Riediger who led the youth choir for so many years. Our church group has always been fortunate in having more than its share of dedicated people. We are grateful for the Sunday School teachers, pianists, worship leaders, speakers, and all those who have served and are serving in so many ways to further God's Kingdom.

It is now almost 56 years since those first Mennonites came down the muddy concession road to settle on the original farm here near Harrow. At that time we were the newcomers, the outsiders in the community, with different customs and backgrounds from the local people. Our worship services and singing were completely in German. Many changes have taken place over the years. The German language has almost disappeared except for an occasional song or poem now. We are attracting more and more people of non-Mennonite backgrounds and we are hoping for continued growth in this direction.

With growth inevitably comes change, and I welcome that. The only thing I hope and pray does not change in our church is the steadfast faith that our forefathers exhibited.

My prayer is that we shall always remain true to this faith.

Rudy Papke

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LEAMINGTON  
EVANGELICAL MENNONITE MISSION CONFERENCE CHURCH

It was in 1967 that Rev. I. P. Friesen and Rev. Henry Peters, through the invitation of Mr. Peter Harder, came to Leamington to conduct revival meetings. Upon the termination of these meetings and because of the spiritual interest and hunger shown by the group, Rev. Dave Friesen from Aylmer started to conduct Sunday afternoon services in the homes of those interested.

In 1968 the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) asked Rev. Jake Hoepfner from Manitoba to come and take on this challenging work on a full-time basis. It soon became evident that the homes were too small to host the participating group, and so the United Mennonite Educational Institute was used free of charge for Sunday morning services and the Hillman United Church for midweek Bible Study and choir practice.

The baptismal service was held in the summer of 1970, at which time eight candidates were baptized and received into membership.

In 1971 the group felt it was time to build their own church structure for fellowship and so the building was erected on its present site, which was donated by Rev. Jake Hoepfner. With the help of the E.M.M.C. and neighbouring churches, the outside was completed with the downstairs ready for use by the fall of 1972.

In the fall of 1972 a change of pastor took place when the Hoepfners terminated their ministry and Rev. Gordon Brown was asked to take on the work. During the Browns' four-year ministry in Leamington the upstairs of the church building was completed and the membership increased to 26 members. It was also during their ministry that Mr. George Konrad from the North Leamington United Mennonite Church responded to the invitation to come and direct the choir. George has served in that capacity since and has worked hard at bringing the choir to its present capability.

In the fall of 1976 Rev. Gordon Brown terminated his ministry in Leamington and for one year the church was without a pastor.

In the spring of 1977, after much prayerful searching, John and Tina Driedger responded to the invitation and call to go to the ministry, and he was ordained and installed as the local pastor. John has served up to the present time in this capacity.

Our first Bible School students were sent off to school in the fall of 1978 and since then a total of 26 students have followed suit, ranging in age from 17 to over 50.

As the congregation grew larger, so did the need for more parking space. In 1978 additional parking space was purchased at the back of the church building. The Lord wonderfully supplied the financial needs through individuals and neighbouring churches.

In 1979 another progressive step was taken when a fifteen-minute English message was added to the present one-hour German service. This created another need. With the services getting longer, it seemed as though the old stacking chairs were just a little bit too hard. So the brethren decided it was time to install the long-anticipated pews to replace the chairs. Here again, the Lord bountifully provided through local giving as well as through the donations of one of the neighbouring churches.

More people, more pews, more mess. In 1980 the brethren felt we needed a part-time paid janitor to do the regular cleaning up to replace the existing system where everyone was responsible for taking his turn. A part-time janitor was hired to take care of that need, but what about the personal needs of people such as widows and the poor? Two deacon couples were elected and ordained to take care of this need on behalf of the congregation. These couples are the John Friesens and the Bill Giesbrechts.

In the year 1981, Willie and Mary Giesbrecht returned from Bible School, our first graduates, and were assigned the position of Youth Overseer. That same year a pulpit assistant program was started and five local men were elected to aid in preaching so that the local pastor would not be required to speak in two services each Sunday morning.

Then, in 1982, the brethren felt it was time for the church to take on the full financial support of the pastor, thus freeing the E.M.M.C. Mission Board to reach out into other fields. This same year one of the pulpit assistants was elected as minister. This was Mr. Bill Wiebe who is presently attending Steinbach Bible College for further training.

In January, 1983, the question was raised whether we should start thinking about adding on to the existing building, seeing that it was usually full on Sunday mornings. And so through the year preliminary plans were drawn up, a building committee was elected, new ideas were brought out, and some changes were made to the preliminary drawings.

In 1984 it was agreed to start planning on digging. In June the digging for the foundation of the addition began, and by the end of July the roof had been removed from the original part of the building and a new roof covering the entire structure was in place. The day when the roof was taken off, we had 40 to 60 men who came out to help. Most of the work was done and is being done by voluntary help.

During the time of changing the roof and the first month or so, we were not able to use our sanctuary but we were able once more to use the U.M.E.I. for our worship services.

There is still much work to be done, but we thank God and praise Him for all that He has done, and we look to Him for the future. To God be the glory!

Enrique Klassen

## A HISTORY OF THE LEAMINGTON MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH

In the Beginning

Because of the indescribable hardships, the loss of property and life, and the religious persecution experienced by the Mennonites in Russia during the years 1918 to 1922, many looked for a new home. The suffering had produced a renewed faith and fervour which served them well when they resettled in Canada, for God had graciously provided the way and means for the mass emigration of some 20 000 Mennonites from Russia to Canada in the years 1923 to 1930.

The first of the many Mennonite settlements in Ontario began in 1924 in the Kingsville area. The Henry Schmidt family was among the first of the Mennonite Brethren to settle near Leamington in 1925, along with other Mennonites.

In search of spiritual fellowship, the new settlers gathered in private homes regardless of particular Mennonite affiliations. In 1925, Elder Koop, who had immigrated to this area, and Isaac Tiessen were asked to preach. In 1926 Daniel Boschman and Henry Thielman organized Sunday School for Mennonite children in the Kingsville, Ruthven, Wheatley, and Leamington areas. A choir was also organized. Regular worship services were held jointly by the United Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren in the Kingsville Town Hall, Ruthven United Church, a rented hall in Leamington, and at private homes in Coatsworth and Windsor. With the steady increase of Mennonite immigration from Russia, as well as from the Canadian and American West, religious life centred in Leamington. An active young people's organization was led by Isaac Tiessen and Cornelius Tiessen. Mid-week Bible studies and prayer meetings, Sunday services, and Bibelbesprechungen flourished.

These joint services and activities continued until 1932



when the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Ontario was established. In August of that year the Leamington Mennonite Brethren became a branch of the Conference. So it was that on October 2, 1932, at a meeting of sixteen Mennonite Brethren in Leamington, it was decided to form a separate Mennonite Brethren church. The separation from the United Mennonites was cordial.

The Christian heritage that our forefathers had left us in Russia was awakened to renewed vigour by the political turmoil experienced in that land; thus, those who had barely escaped with their lives were inspired to heartfelt thanks, to a rededication to their Christian faith, and to the difficult challenge of pioneering a church.

Isaac Tiessen was elected to serve the sixteen-member church whose members bore names such as Schmidt, Boschman, Klassen, Thielman, Willms, Dick, Abrams, Bartel, Koop and Dueckman, and which rented a meeting hall above the T. Eaton store for \$70 annually. With the exception of a two-year break, Tiessen, along with his wife Anna, faithfully served as leaders of the church until 1947, at which time he became an assistant to the leader until 1958. A. Huebert, G. Dick, D. Boschman, P. Friesen, W. Toews, D. Bergman, H. Wiebe, J. Kroeker, and D. Derksen served as alternate ministers. These men were followed by salaried pastors, Henry Markentin, A. J. Konrad, A. Willms, and Albert Baerg, the present pastor.

With the registration of the Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church, an official seal bearing the inscription "John 3:16, John 11:51,52," was created.

Although motor vehicles were not as plentiful as to-day, the pastor acquired a chauffeur's licence which enabled him to transport visitors, often in borrowed vehicles.

Because of the growing need for a church-owned place of worship, a committee consisting of F. Bartel, G. Dyck, and G. Willms was formed in late 1935 to seek the opinion of the individual members and to develop a plan to secure a meeting

place. Although the economic climate was not conducive to launching capital projects, a committee consisting of Peter Dick and Gerhard Dyck was instructed by the membership in August of 1937 to locate a suitable property for the erecting of a house of worship. The membership did not immediately select a site, although several possible sites were suggested, but instructed the committee to continue its search. Then at a membership meeting in June, 1939, a majority of the membership voted to purchase for \$430 a property on Elliot Street owned by F. Gregory. Construction began immediately with a great deal of voluntary labour. The total cost was \$5 031. The dedication of the new church took place on December 24, 1939. The service was led by J. Kroeker with Rev. N. N. Driedger of the United Mennonite Church as the guest speaker. A strong feeling of thankfulness to God for His grace and guidance in the building of a house of worship was evident.

A scripture verse, I Corinthians 1:23 was inscribed in both German and English on the wall behind the pulpit. It read: Wir aber predigen Christum, den Gekreuzigten and "But we preach Christ crucified".

In 1944 a house across the street from the church was purchased for \$3 200; this house became the parsonage.

Because more space was needed, an addition was made to the front of the church in 1949. However, by 1964 a planning committee was established to research the feasibility of building a new church since the current facilities were overcrowded. In 1965 a 5 3/4 acre piece of property on Highway 3 east of Leamington was purchased for \$23 000, and a \$90 000 building project was launched. The Elliot Street church building and parsonage were sold. The last service at the Elliot Street church was held on the evening of February 6, 1966. A week later, February 13, a special service of thanksgiving and praise marked the opening of the new church.

Since even more room was eventually needed, an education

wing consisting of additional Sunday School classrooms, a gymnasium, a fellowship room, and kitchen facilities was completed in 1980 at a cost of \$271 000.

### Sunday School

The teaching ministry of the Sunday School has played an important role in the life of the Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church from its beginning by serving to broaden the knowledge of many children and adults concerning the Lord. From its inception to the present time numerous individuals have participated in the Sunday School teaching ministry which is still being carried on in the English and German languages. Sunday School singing is a vital arm of the ministry in which many children have learned to develop their skills as well as their love for church music. Christmas Eve, Mother's Day, and Promotion Sunday programs have served to demonstrate the children's achievements and to glorify God. In addition, opportunities for recreation, such as the annual retreat at Camp Henry on Point Pelee begun in 1953 and continuing to this date, have been offered. Annual Sunday School picnics held first in co-operation with the United Mennonite congregation and then separately, have served to channel the exuberant energies of the youngsters and adults along spiritual lines.

When we think of the many who have passed through our Sunday School under the light of God's Word, and of the many resulting decisions made for time and eternity, we know that God's Word will not return void. We hope that this ministry will continue to serve the church as well as the community in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### Music

Singing has always played an important part in the spiritual heritage of the Mennonite Brethren Church. It has given

opportunities for personal expressions of faith and thanksgiving. From the beginning, the Mennonites in Essex County have had a choir, with rehearsals being held in halls in downtown Leamington and in private homes. I can vividly remember being introduced to this beautiful music since Father had purchased a Fussharmonium and the choir came to practise in our home on occasion.

Isaac Tiessen was the first choir director. He was followed by Daniel Boschman, Abram Huebert, and, in 1937, Gerhard Willms. Other choir directors were Ben Neufeld, Jake Hamm, Victor Penner, Frank Bartel, John Bartel, and Edgar Dyck. The choral music was sung a cappella using Ziffern, a numerical system that determined the pitch of each note. The director established the key of the hymn by using a tuning fork. Later, pianos and the organ were used to accompany the singing, and standard musical notation was adopted.

The choirs received special training at workshops conducted in the local churches by trained musicians such as Cornelius H. Neufeld, Ben Horch, Jake Hamm, Dick Friesen, Herbert Richert, and George Wiebe. Annual Saengerfeste were held in which choirs from Ontario Mennonite Brethren churches united to present mass choir anthems as well as hymns sung by individual choirs. The service of the choirs continues today and it enhances the Sunday worship services.

A number of smaller musical groups were also organized, such as male quartettes, trios, and octettes. In 1955, a radio ministry, Heimatlicht, was launched over radio station CJSP at Leamington. It continued until 1967.

### Evangelical Outreach

According to Matthew 28:19,20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age," the mission of the church is clear. We praise God for those in our church who have

responded to the call of God. Among the first couples to serve were Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Pankratz who served first in a Jewish mission in Winnipeg and later in Montreal and Europe. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Thielman served in Japan under MCC; Mr. George Neufeld served in England under MCC; Mr. and Mrs. Peter Willms served in Japan for sixteen years under the auspices of the Brethren in Christ; Connie Hamm (now Medinetz) served with MCC in Atlanta, Georgia; Reinhold and Renata Buxbaum served in Austria; Don and Eleanor Neufeld worked with the Mennonite Brethren Christian Services in McAllen, Texas; Phil and Lydia Hamm are serving in Japan; Linda Derksen served in Peru for two years under Christian Service; Joan Whitfield served in Nepal under the Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship; Ruth Schmidt served under Christian Service in Fresno, California; and Greg Wiens served for five months with Trans-World Radio in Bonaire, South America.

The missionaries whom we are supporting financially and prayerfully are Miss Dorothy Kopper, Zaire; Mr. and Mrs. Peter Janzen, Brazil; Mr. and Mrs. Albert Friesen, West Germany; Mr. and Mrs. Henry Warkentin, Germany; Miss Annie Dyck, Colombia; and Mr. and Mrs. Alan Epp, Yorkdale Community Church, Toronto.

Many more programs are being carried on today in our church in an effort to serve God and the community. Among them are worship services for senior citizens in our area, outdoor worship services during the summer months, Pioneer Girls, a Christian Service Brigade for boys, Family Nights, mid-week Bible studies, a Family Sponsorship Program for Laotian refugees, Daily Vacation Bible School, a Women's Missionary Fellowship and a Men's Missionary Fellowship.

May the God who knows all hearts bless the efforts of our church.

Peter Bartel

A CHRONICLE OF THE  
LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH  
1925-1980

Beginnings:

The chronicler (one who relates an order of events) like the historian, inevitably makes a personal selection of the facts and events he chooses to consider. Hopefully, this chronicler for the Leamington United Mennonite Church will have selected information that readers generally will want to hear about.

Frank H. Epp states in his Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940 that the first Mennonites from Russia during the immigration of the 1920s arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, in July, 1923 (p.172). Apparently Ontario was not as suitable and popular a place for permanent settlement at that time. Be that as it may, Epp writes of immigrant families from Russia arriving en masse in the Essex County region, including Pelee Island, in the spring of 1925 (p. 222).

N. N. Driedger in The Leamington United Mennonite Church enlarges on the above information by observing that already in the autumn of 1924, a committee had been struck consisting of new immigrants and established Mennonites in Waterloo, to investigate job opportunities in Essex County (p.23). Rumour had been rife that labourers were needed in tobacco fields and possibly in Windsor factories.

Rumour or not, the committee mentioned above commissioned the Jacob W. Lohrenz immigrant family to go to Essex County to investigate, and to serve as liaison between immigrant families wanting to go there and prospective employers in Essex County. Lohrenz had studied in England for mission work but had been unable to serve on the mission field because of an eye impairment. His knowledge of the English language could now stand the immigrants in good stead.

Lohrenz came to Essex County and found employment in a brickyard near Kingsville, and since he had some theological training and had preached in Russia, he was made the first minister to the Mennonite families that followed him to Essex County. Unfortunately, he left in less than two years to take a ministerial position in the U.S.A. At the time of his leaving there were well over thirty families in the county.

To the Mennonite immigrants, no doubt ever existed concerning whether or not they should worship together. "No Sunday without a religious service" had been the watchword before coming to Canada, and the same watchword was to remain in effect. Therefore, smaller and larger worship units appeared almost spontaneously in various places, the worship at times consisting only of singing and having a sermon read. On occasion, a Sunday school was conducted. The John J. Dick home in Cottam, for instance, was the site of some of these assemblies. The John Bergs of Kingsville also had services at their home, and, in Coatsworth services were held in the home of John Martens Sr. Similar meetings were held around Leamington, for a time in an upstairs room of Arthur Brown's hotel at the corner of Talbot and Princess Streets. For a while Miss Mary G. Dyck was in charge of a Sunday School at the Abram Barg home.

Occasionally, through special efforts, all of the units assembled together, as in the summer of 1925 when the first baptismal service was held in the Ruthven United Church with Rev. Jacob H. Janzen of Waterloo officiating. (He had been a minister-teacher, and when the General Conference immigrants organized in Ontario in June, 1925, Janzen was ordained as an elder to confirm his leadership function.)

In the spring of 1926 the following three persons were elected as ministerial candidates in Essex County: Jacob D. Janzen, Nicolai Schmidt, and Cornelius Tiessen. The first two were ordained on June 13 of the same year by Rev. J. H.

Janzen, with the service again in the Ruthven United Church. Cornelius Tiessen declined ordination at the time but continued to preach and to assist in youth work.

The congregation formally established:

The previously mentioned organization of General Conference immigrants which was under the leadership of J. H. Janzen, initially called itself "The Mennonite Refugee Church in Ontario". Hence Essex County immigrants too belonged to the Mennonite Refugee Church.

In several years, however, it became clear that because of distance and growing numbers in the county, a move toward autonomy should be made. That unanimous move took place on January 20, 1929. The new church was called the "Essex County United Mennonite Church"; it had a membership of several hundred, including those on Pelee Island.

The preceding event, however, had minimal consequences at first. Janzen continued to serve Ontario immigrant communities, including Essex County, as itinerant preacher (Reiseprediger). One of Janzen's prudent and practical innovations was the church council, an organizational unit not in use in Russia. Membership on the council varied according to the size of the congregation, but at first the ratio was one to every twenty-five members. The council, partly because of its small size, acted as a buffer in problems of integration internal to the Mennonites themselves. They were from diverse regions in Russia, such as from Molotschna, from the Old Colony, etc. and each region had its own method of conducting worship services and its own church rules.

However, in 1931, Janzen informed the immigrant communities in Ontario that he was resigning his office as itinerant minister and suggested, moreover, that each seek a leader (elder) out of its own ranks. The news of the resignation was received with astonishment and regret in the county; yet despite promises of further support, Janzen did not alter his



decision, for he already had intentions of moving to Vancouver. And so, after a secret ballot, Nicolai N. Driedger, who had come to the mainland from Pelee Island in 1930, became elder.

#### Building a Church:

The issue of constructing a church dragged on for several years before a decision was made to build. Thus, in the beginning years the upstairs of a building just south of the Leamington library was found suitable for worship. In Kingsville, the town hall was available on Sundays, and on Pelee Island, private homes became sanctuaries. Still, the need existed for their own building; in Leamington, for instance, townspeople were annoyed when the Erie Street North sidewalk became obstructed after a service.

Finally, after some difficult decision-making, one acre of open farmland was purchased on Oak Street East in Leamington, the site of the present new building. In the spring of 1933, a simple rectangular wooden building was partially in place, thanks to a great extent to the fortitude and efficiency of William J. Schellenberg and Abraham Willms, the head carpenters. The first church service was held in the new basement on Boxing Day in 1933, and services continued there until the sanctuary upstairs was eventually finished. The church dedication was November 25, 1934, with Rev. David Toews of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, officiating. With their own elder and their own church, the people could now look forward to some consolidation and stability. With a church building in Leamington, services in Kingsville were now discontinued.

#### Church Growth:

The Leamington church experienced three rather distinct periods of growth. The first occurred in the 1930s when because of depressed economic conditions in the West which were even more severe than in Essex County, numerous Mennonites found their way to the Leamington area. Indeed, during the decade between 1934-1943, about 170 members from other Mennonite congregations were added to the Leamington church register.

A second distinct period of growth took place after World War II. One of the consequences of the war was the tremendous accumulation of refugees, including Mennonites, in Europe. Gradually some of these Mennonites were permitted to enter Canada, first those who had relatives in Canada, and then those without family connections. The arrival of each immigrant in Leamington became an occasion in the life of the church, for relatives and friends were re-united after years and even decades of separation. When immigration finally ceased, the church had increased its membership by some 250 members.

One might label the third period as growth by division. By 1953, membership had climbed to almost a thousand, and facilities on Oak Street were being taxed to the limit. Since further expansion of the present building or the construction of an entirely new building seemed out of the question, the membership decided to build a moderately-sized church on Concession 6. The decision was reached on July 26, 1953, and the new church was dedicated on June 7, 1954. What was remarkable was that individuals, without external compulsion, found their way to the new church and that one church agreed to be a virtual facsimile of the other in the conduct of worship services, etc. No doubt, strong leadership and a membership determined to be harmonious were contributing factors.

#### Growing up:

In 1958, the Essex County United Mennonite Church finally became the Leamington United Mennonite Church to reflect the consolidation of Mennonites in the Leamington area. By now the Mennonites of the area were prepared not only to continue the support of their own school, the United Mennonite Educational Institute, but also to look ahead to support their aged (Leamington United Mennonite Home, 1965), their aging (Pickwick Apartments, 1979), and the other endeavours one would expect from a committed church family.

THE LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH  
1981 to 1985

Prior to January 1, 1981 the Leamington United Mennonite Church and the North Leamington United Mennonite Church were known as one church body, under the leadership of one elder. On the above-mentioned date this was changed. Each became an autonomous congregation and each eventually acquired its own separate charter. The Mennonite Home as well as the adjoining apartments also obtained separate charters at that time, since they are the property of both churches.

H. T. Dueck was elected leading minister of the Leamington United Mennonite Church with a large majority vote. However, he accepted the call only temporarily as he had other plans for the future. In August, 1981, Rev. Dueck resigned from the leadership position to attend the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana, to prepare for mission work in Mexico. Beginning in February, Henry Winter reluctantly agreed to serve as interim leader and Henry Dueck assisted him whenever this was possible. The Duecks were commissioned for missionary service on August 29, 1982. With Rev. Dueck's departure, the office of elder has probably come to an end in our congregation. Rev. Dueck is a willing and gifted worker in the church and has been missed by the congregation.

The search for a fulltime leader finally ended when Rev. Menno Epp, from the Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary, Alberta, consented to come to Leamington and assume responsibilities of leading minister in our church. He wrote us early in 1984 that he could come to us in August of that year. The installation service for Brother Epp took place on August 29, 1984.

Prior to our contact with Menno Epp, our Search Committee followed several other leads which always ended in a negative answer. Whenever some of the members of the committee felt somewhat discouraged, Brother Winter would admonish us by

saying "Fear not, God will never forsake us if we keep trusting Him". Now it is time to praise the Lord and give thanks to Him, for we know Brother Menno Epp is the man whom God has chosen for us. Thanks to the co-operative effort of ministers, pulpit assistants and deacons, the proclamation of the Word has not suffered during the time of transition. Our congregation owes Henry Winter a special debt of gratitude for looking after our needs as well as he did. He was also a fulltime employee of the H. J. Heinz Company during this difficult time. It became necessary for him to ask for time from work on numerous occasions such as funerals and other special functions.

Three additional deacons were elected in the spring of 1983. The installation service was held on June 26 of that year.

On June 22, 1982, it was decided by a majority vote to build a new church. A Building Committee was elected with Walter Brown as chairman. Their first mandate was to engage an architect and to have building plans drawn up. The collecting of voluntary financial contributions was to begin immediately. Architect Raymond Masters was hired. His building plans were approved on August 7, 1983, and construction was begun three weeks later on September 1. John Wiens was appointed coordinator and official supervisor of the entire building project. It was also decided to accept as much voluntary labour as possible to help with the project. When the building was completed, it was noted that more than 22,000 hours of voluntary labour had been contributed to the project. The result was that a large sum of money has been saved. Thanks be to God that no serious accidents occurred during the fourteen months while construction was in progress. November 4, 1984, was set aside as a special day of thanksgiving to God, as well as the dedication service to honour and glorify the Lord. Financial support was better than had been expected and work went on harmoniously throughout the entire project. Anticipation ran high about the fine church facility that we would have. The ladies provided coffee breaks twice daily from Day One until the building was completed. The project became

known as "A labour of love".

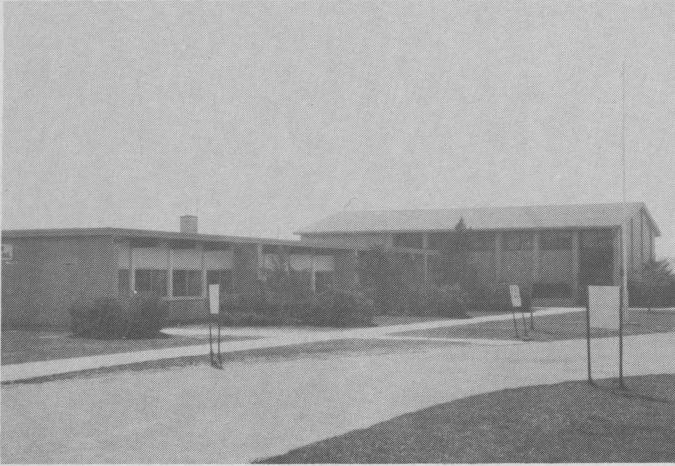
We want to remember four persons who played a prominent part in the spiritual and educational program of the church and who have died in this four-year period. They are Rev. H. Winter, Deacon P. F. Willms, Rev. J. P. Penner, and Rev. J. D. Janzen.

Eleven deacon assistants were elected for the year 1984, to assist in the home visitation program. Youth workers were called into service by the church this year. Rick Neufeld served temporarily in the spring and when he left to continue his education, Joel and Brenda Wiebe succeeded him and are still serving at this time.

Our testimony is "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Peter Warkentin

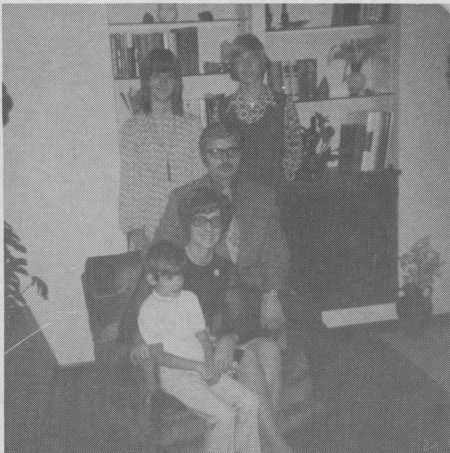
FAITH MENNONITE CHURCH



Margaret D. Bennie School



Present church



First pastor:  
George C. Janzen and family



Present pastor:  
Edwin Epp and family

HARROW UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH



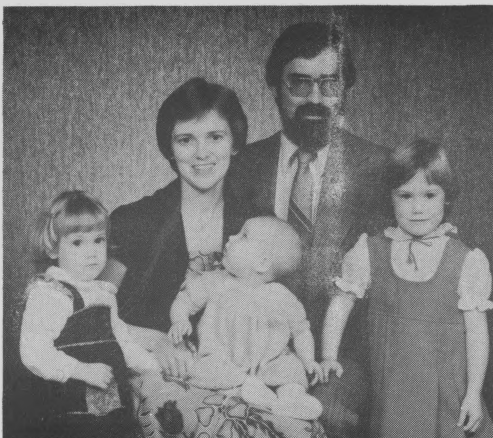
First pastor: Herman Lepp Sr.  
and Mrs. Lepp



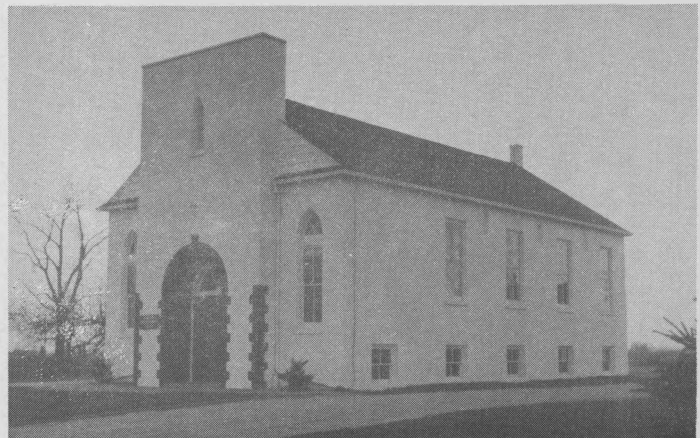
Sunday picnic at the Harrow  
settlement in the 1930's



The old Harrow Town Hall where  
the congregation met in the late  
1940's

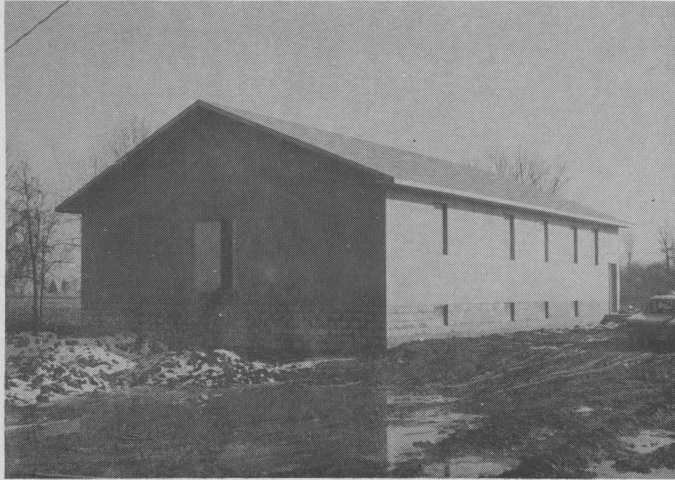


Present pastor: Henry Paetkau  
and family



Present church

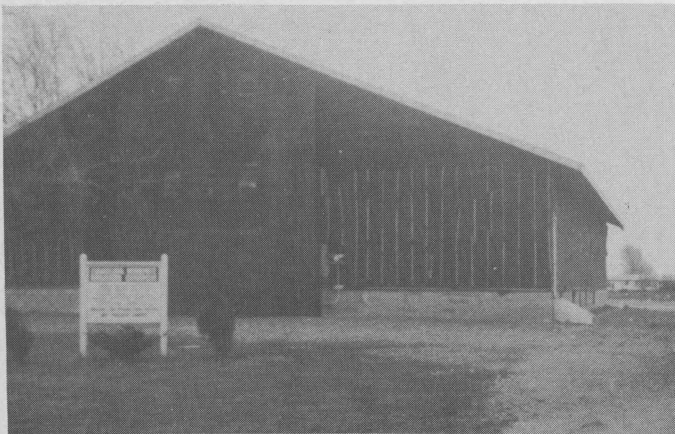
LEAMINGTON EVANGELICAL MENNONITE MISSION CONFERENCE CHURCH



Under construction



An early gathering



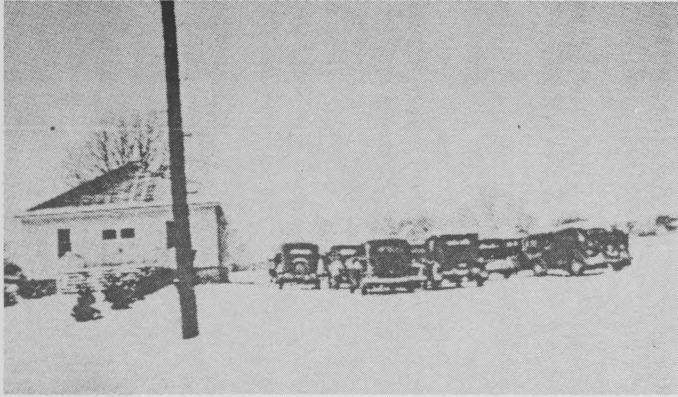
Present church



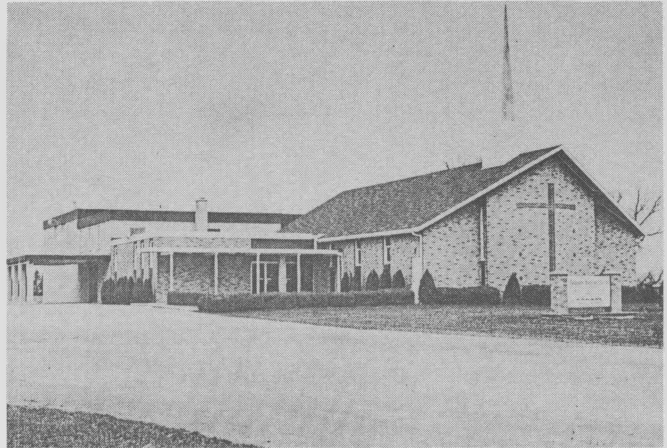
An important day



LEAMINGTON MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH



First church building,  
Elliot Street



Present church



First pastor: Isaac  
Tiessen and Mrs. Tiessen



An alternate minister: David  
Derksen and Mrs. Derksen



Present pastor: Albert Baerg  
and family

LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH



First elder: N. N. Driedger  
and Mrs. Driedger



The first Mennonite church building  
in Essex County, begun in 1933



The church as it was from  
1948-84



Present pastor: Menno Epp  
and Mrs. Epp



Present church

NEW REINLAND MENNONITE CHURCH



First and present church building



Leadership of the congregation



Present pastor: Cornelius Quiring  
and Mrs. Quiring

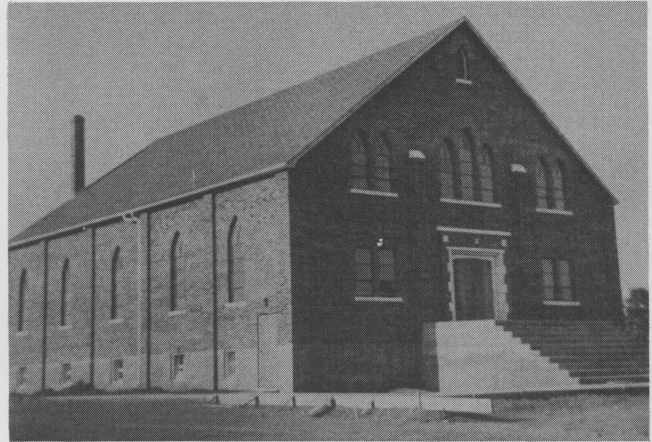


Another view

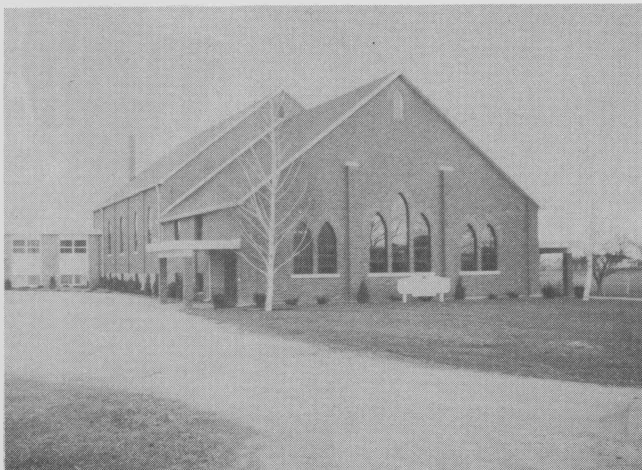
NORTH LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH



First leading minister: Jacob C. Neufeld and Mrs. Neufeld



First church building



View of church, 1985



Present pastor: Cornelius Driedger and Mrs. Driedger

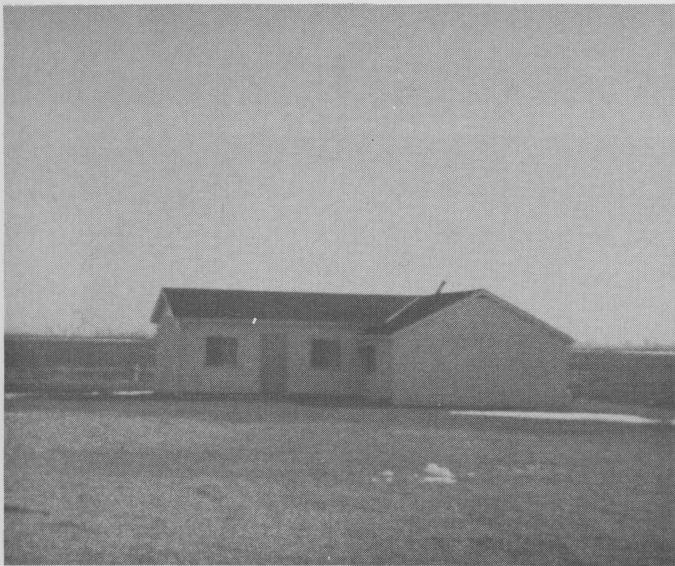
OLD COLONY MENNONITE CHURCH



First meetings were held  
in this house



First church building,  
near Coatsworth



Present Sunday School building



Present church building

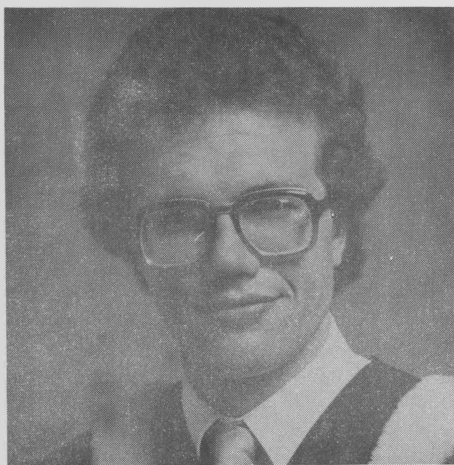
WINDSOR MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP



First pastor: Henry Paetkau and Mrs. Paetkau (front left) with the fellowship council



Interim pastor, January - June, 1985: Henry P. Epp and Mrs. Epp



Pastor as of August 1, 1985: Jacob W. Dyck



Present meeting place: Remington Booster Community Centre

REMINISCENCES OF LIFE IN RUSSIA



Jacob Gossen, back row, fifth from left



De Pracha (the beggar), part of the  
village scene



Henry C. Neufeld, 1908



Margaretha Rempel in her school uniform



Agatha Driedger Dick arriving at Waterloo, July 19, 1924



Anna Toews Tiessen and her friends



Frank P. Tiessen's Sunday School class, 1928



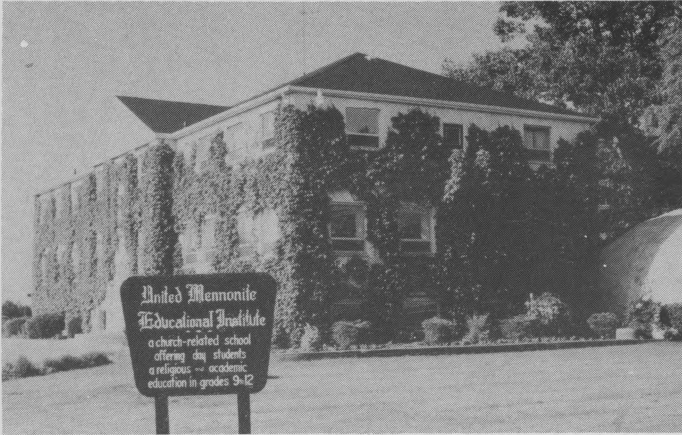
Home of Rev. and Mrs. J. Dick on Aylmer Avenue, Windsor



Jacob P. Driedger's first home on Pelee Island, 1925-28



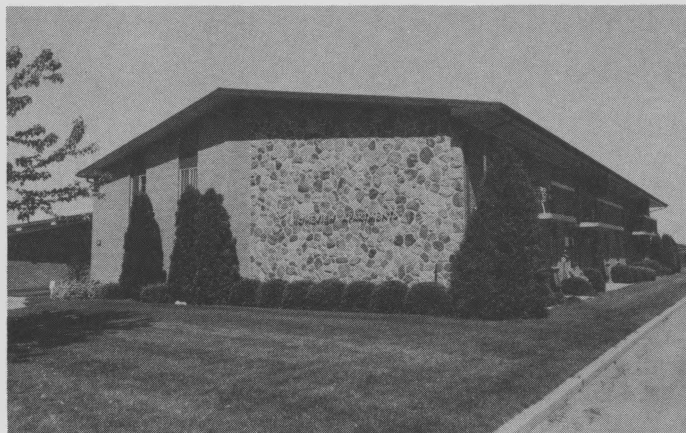
OTHER MENNONITE INSTITUTIONS



United Mennonite Educational Institute



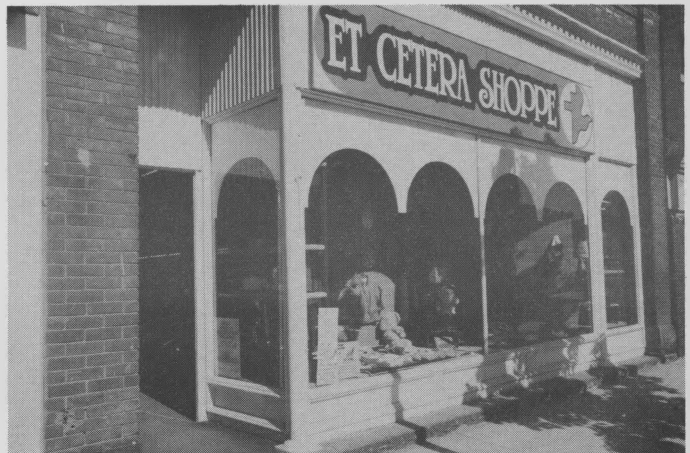
Leamington Mennonite Home



Homeview Apartments



Pickwick Apartments



Et Cetera Shoppe

## NEW REINLAND MENNONITE CHURCH

The Reinland Mennonites settled in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the late 1800s. Here they had freedom of church and school until the early 1900s. Then they felt that their freedom of church and school was threatened by the Canadian Government. The general feeling among the Mennonite communities was that if they gave in to the study of English in the Mennonite schools, they might be asked to give up more in the future. Taking this very seriously as a threat against their faith, they set out to find a country that would allow them to follow their religious and educational practices freely.

Various parts of Central and South America were considered. Since the Mexican Government guaranteed their freedom of both church and school, they began the move to Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1922 under the leadership of Bishop John Friesen. The railroad was the best source of transportation for the farm machinery and livestock which were needed to start the new settlement.

Hardship and difficulty were experienced because many friends and relatives chose to stay in Canada. Furthermore, many feared the Mexican army which met them at the Mexican border to assist them to their final destination.

Families set up tents and began building their homes. Church services were held in tents as well, before a church was built. There was one church built for every four villages, and the first one completed was in Neuenburg. The move to Mexico continued throughout the 1920s, and many more churches were built. Various other Mennonites later also settled in northern Mexico.

A school was established in each village. Basic subjects taught were reading, writing, and arithmetic. The main subject taught was religion.

Farming was the main source of income. Crops such as

beans, corn, and oats were grown. After cheese factories were built by the Mennonite communities, the sale of milk became the main income. Eventually farming became too difficult, and many of the settlers returned to Canada.

In 1964 a few families took up residence in Essex County. Church services were held in homes. A building was later purchased and named "Old Colony Mennonite Church." The Old Colony Mennonites from Manitoba assisted in setting up churches in Ontario, first in Aylmer and then in Wheatley. In 1973 the new Old Colony Mennonite Church was built to accommodate the increasing Mennonite population. The customs of the Old Colony Mennonite Church were not acceptable to many of the members. This led to the separation of the New Reinland group from the Old Colony Mennonite Churches in Aylmer and in Wheatley in 1984.

We have recently purchased a building which is now the New Reinland Mennonite Church. Regular church services are being held, although the building is being renovated. Our church services (as well as our Sunday School), are now in both German and English. However, many members of the younger generation have difficulty understanding the German language. Our new church is located on the sixth concession east of Highway 77. Our bishop is Cornelius Quiring.

Henry Friesen

## NORTH LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH

The Leamington United Mennonite Church grew rapidly in the 1950s, reaching a membership of over 900 by 1954, not including children and other adherents. It was thus decided to build, with the usual volunteer labour, a second church with a seating capacity of 400, just across the road from the United Mennonite Educational Institute on the 6th Concession, just west of Highway 77. On June 7, 1954, the North Church, as it came to be known, was dedicated.

The need for more room for the Sunday School prompted the consideration for an addition. After lengthy planning and discussion, it was decided to build an educational wing to the west of the church building. The sod-turning service was held on April 12, 1961. On May 14, 1961, the cornerstone-laying ceremony was held with Rev. J. C. Neufeld and Rev. N. N. Driedger officiating. On September 24, 1961, the addition was dedicated, and the following Sunday classes were held there. For the first time, 4-year-old children were accepted, thereby extending Sunday School from 10 to 11 years.

Until November 1, 1980, the church formed part of the Leamington United Mennonite Church on Oak Street in Leamington. At that time it became autonomous and adopted the name "North Leamington United Mennonite Church," with Rev. Cornelius Driedger as its leading minister.

After several years of discussions and planning the membership decided on September 26, 1982, to go ahead with the much-needed alterations to the church front. In October of 1982 work was started on a 37 by 50 foot addition with full basement for Sunday School classes. A main entrance with foyer and lobby and an elevator for the handicapped was included. Again, the usual volunteer labour brought the estimated cost of \$160,000.00 down. It was then decided to renovate the interior of the church, to insulate the walls, and to put new windows in the main sanctuary and basement. Dedication and cornerstone-

laying took place on Sunday, June 5, 1983, with Rev. Peter Janzen, Ontario Conference minister as guest speaker.

Buildings are necessary as a place for worship; the real church, however, is people. Jesus said to Peter: "... and on this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:19).

A highlight in the life of a church occurs when members are called and are willing to serve in the ministry. November 18, 1984 stands out. Following is a quotation from Herb Hamm's report of the occasion to the Mennonite Reporter: "Too often there are periods in our church lives when we slide along from Sunday to Sunday in a well-planned calendar of events, that leaves us feeling comfortable, and as a group, in a state of undeserved contentment. Fortunately, every once in a while an event comes along that grabs our spiritual awareness and shakes us to the disturbing realization that we are, by and large, Christian under-achievers. Just such an event unfolded for the North Leamington United Mennonite Church on a recent Sunday morning when two of its members, Paul Warkentin and Walter Warkentin were ordained to the ministry. Both men understood the needs of the church, and both responded positively when the call from the membership was made. It marked yet another step in the continuing marriage of the paid and lay ministry that enhances the worship-practices in many of our conference churches today."

Highlights that have become annual events:

- Child dedication on the first Sunday of the new year
- Participation in Week of Prayer with area churches the first full week of the new year and in services during Holy Week.
- Inter-Mennonite pulpit exchange. On June 3, 1984, the Tavistock Mennonite Church was in charge of the morning service. On September 30, 1984, our church returned the service.
- Church family pot-luck dinner at the U.M.E.I. This year it was held September 2, 1984, after the morning worship service.

Peter A. Epp

## OLD COLONY MENNONITE CHURCH

I was born and raised in Mexico and I got married on my twentieth birthday which was September 28, 1958. I worked in a store as a clerk in Mexico until 1965. We then decided we were going to go to Ontario and we did.

On the 22nd of April, in 1965, we arrived in Aylmer, Ontario. We stayed in Aylmer for two weeks but we couldn't make a living there because I could not find any job suitable for myself. We then heard of a farmer in the Wheatley area who wanted a worker. I bought myself a car which was a 1952 Chevy. We started our 2-hour journey to Wheatley. We stopped in Blenheim at a second-hand store and bought some dishes, pots and pans. I received the job on the farm; the farmer also had a house for us on his farm where we were allowed to live. It was only a part-time job for me and so my employer helped me find other work elsewhere. It was a job at Nelson's Wood Products in Wheatley. Later on I got a job in a canning factory which was also situated in Wheatley. I worked there until the end of the season. I was still employed on the farm until the end of 1965. I then heard that Ford's in Windsor was hiring. I drove to Windsor and I received the job. I worked there until the end of 1966.

There was not much going on in this part of the country. There was no church but we had prayer meetings in the white house shown in the photograph. Then someone bought the public school in Coatsworth and we renovated part of the place into a church. We called that place our church for almost a year. Before all this happened we didn't find it interesting because there were only five Mennonite families living in Wheatley then.

We returned to Mexico in December, 1966. Before we returned to Wheatley again, they had bought the public school and had already renovated the place into a church. We found this fairly interesting. We stayed in Wheatley until 1969 and then we once again returned to Mexico. We stayed there for a

year. I still had property down there but I then sold it and came back to Ontario.

By this time, 1970, the number of Mennonite people living in Wheatley had increased sharply. So, many people agreed on buying the land where we have our church now. There was only a garage on this piece of land. We changed the whole thing and made it into a church. We now use that building for our Sunday School classes. The church we have now we started to build in 1971. It was on the same area of land. It's just that we now have our church and the Sunday School on the same area of land they bought around fifteen years ago. Just recently we built washrooms onto the Sunday School building to replace the outdoor washrooms. The indoor washrooms are very convenient.

Back around 1966 there were only two preachers from the Aylmer area who came to Wheatley and gave us our church sermons. Now there are six, five from Aylmer and one from Leamington.

We have stayed in Wheatley since 1970 and we enjoy living out here now. Though we have visited Mexico from time to time during these fifteen years, we have never lived out there again or stayed for over a month.

As of now, there are over 150 Mennonite families that belong to our church. I have been on the church board for over 12 years now. Our church is on the Wheatley-Tilbury Townline in Romney Township.

Peter Dyck

## WINDSOR MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP

Since the mid 1920's, a number of Mennonites have been attracted to Windsor because of its opportunities for employment. Some of these Mennonites have stayed in the city for varying periods of time before moving on, others have worked there but chosen to live elsewhere in Essex County, while still others have settled down and made their homes in Windsor.

Many of the first Mennonites to come to Windsor arrived from Manitoba with the hope that economic conditions would be better there. Among the very first arrivals was the Heinrich C. Huebert family, whose home soon became a centre of Mennonite activity. It was there that Rev. J. H. Janzen of Waterloo conducted the first formal Mennonite worship service on April 3, 1927. By 1929, three ministers, Rev. Wilhelm Schellenberg, Rev. Jacob Braun, and Rev. Johann J. Dick had joined the ever-increasing group of Mennonites in Windsor. These men were assisted in the preaching ministry by United Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren ministers from the Leamington area. The Windsor group flourished during these years; there were regular worship services and Bible studies held in various homes, along with catechism instruction for the young people, choir practices, a ladies' sewing circle, and, for a time, a Sunday School for the children.

Unfortunately, the effects of the Depression on the city's economy forced a great many of the Mennonites to leave Windsor for the county and its opportunities in agriculture. For the next ten years, those who remained continued to worship regularly in homes and, for a time, in a Lutheran church on Sunday afternoons. However, because of the difficulty with the German language encountered by the youth, and because of the problems caused by the distance between Windsor and Leamington, a number of the families began attending other churches in the city, such as the Baptist and the Lutheran.



The Second World War provided yet another occasion for setback in the development of a formal Mennonite presence in Windsor. Because the Mennonites feared that they might be identified with a local association for the promotion of German culture which was unpopular in the community, they decided to cancel their worship services. After the war, there was an attempt to gather the Windsor Mennonites together for worship, but it was unsuccessful because too many Mennonites had moved away, or had gone to other churches, or had found it more convenient to drive to Leamington on Sundays than to attempt a fresh start in the city.

This state of affairs continued virtually unchanged for the next thirty years, except for a mission Sunday School begun in October, 1957, by the Leamington Mennonite Brethren Church at H. E. Bondy School, after a successful Daily Vacation Bible School held there. However, in December, 1959, they handed the work over to Campbell Avenue Baptist Church because it was simply too difficult to try to run a Sunday School in Windsor effectively from Leamington.

Then in December, 1975, Alvin Roth of London, Ontario, was appointed by the Conference of United Mennonites of Ontario to conduct a survey of all the Mennonites in Windsor in order to determine whether they were interested in organizing themselves for worship. The intention was to begin with a Bible study group which would eventually expand to form a church. A little more than a year later, on January 18, 1978, nine interested people met in the home of Henry and Mary Janzen on Belleperche Place. Rev. Peter Janzen, then pastor of Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington, was present to represent the Conference. It was agreed to hold Bible studies every second week in various homes. By the time five meetings had been held, attendance and interest had dwindled so much that the meetings were discontinued.

The next attempt to organize the Windsor Mennonites began in 1981, again under the aegis of the Missions and Service

Committee of the Conference of United Mennonite Churches of Ontario. A reference council made up of representatives from the Conference, Essex County Mennonite churches, and Windsorites was set up to oversee the Windsor project. Rev. Henry Paetkau, pastor of the Harrow United Mennonite Church, was appointed by the Conference to undertake, on a part-time basis, the work of organizing and leading Bible studies for the Windsor Mennonites. Once more the hope was that the bi-weekly Bible studies would lead to Sunday worship services. From September, 1981, to June, 1982, an average of 8 to 10 people met regularly at the home of Henry and Mary Janzen. The season closed with a well-attended family picnic at Jackson Park. After the summer hiatus, Bible studies resumed, this time with fewer and fewer participants until on February 24, 1983, the meetings were once again discontinued.

However, like Caleb of old, who was confident that the fearful Israelites were strong enough to take possession of the promised land despite its fortifications, Henry Paetkau remained firmly convinced that the Mennonites could, despite previous failed attempts, penetrate the "fortified" city of Windsor in order to establish a church. Under his leadership, plans were made to begin holding regular worship services on Sunday evenings at Trinity United Church on Tourangeau Road. Since the first of these services on November 27, 1983, the Windsor Mennonite Fellowship has been meeting every week, and it appears that the Mennonites have at long last broken through the formidable "fortifications" of the city. Henry Paetkau was assisted in the preaching ministry by various pulpit assistants from the Leamington churches and by other guest speakers.

Trinity United Church provided a home for the Fellowship until December 30, 1984, when a switch to Sunday morning services was made. This decision necessitated some changes, among them a move to another location, Remington Booster Community Centre, 701 Edinborough Street. It also meant that Henry Paetkau would no longer be the pastor because of his commitment to the

Harrow Church on Sunday mornings. The Fellowship will miss Henry's inspiring ministry and his unflagging zeal. Fortunately, however, Rev. Henry P. Epp, the former pastor of St. Catharines United Mennonite Church, now retired to Leamington, has agreed to serve the Fellowship on an interim basis until it can successfully conclude its search for a pastor to serve it on a half-time basis.

At present, the Windsor Mennonite Fellowship meets for worship every Sunday morning at 10 o'clock at the Remington Booster Community Centre. After the sermon there is a short coffee break, a tradition which began at Trinity church and which has been helpful in giving the members an opportunity to become better acquainted with each other. This is followed by Sunday School for all ages until 11:45 a.m.

Since morning services began on January 6, 1985, the average attendance has been 25 to 30 people, the majority being Mennonites from various backgrounds. Included in this number are several Mennonites who live in the county but who have committed themselves to helping the Windsor group become established. Since its beginnings the Fellowship has been happy to welcome a stream of Mennonite university and college students who have enriched the worship services by their presence and their talents.

The council of the Fellowship, made up of Henry D. Janzen (chairman), Alfred Willms, Gerald Lepp, Mary Janzen, and Rev. Henry P. Epp, is drafting a constitution, another important organizational step. Since the Fellowship is a church-planting project of the Conference of United Mennonite Churches of Ontario, as well as of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, it receives financial support from both bodies.

With God's help, the Fellowship hopes to serve as a spiritual home to the Mennonites who live in the city, and to provide a peace and reconciliation witness to the Windsor community.

Mary M. Janzen

## A MEMORY FROM MY CHILDHOOD

On a summer day in the year 1912 when conditions in Russia were still calm and peaceful, my mother, the late Agenetha Neufeld, and I travelled with a wagon and team of horses to Kowalicha, the home of my grandmother, Margaretha Enns. Our purpose was to drive Grandmother's car from her home to Kopanie, a distant Russian village, where Mother and my Aunt Margaretha Enns (later Mrs. Abram Dick) could receive injections against tuberculosis, a disease which was greatly feared at that time.

In order to put the doctor who was to give the shots into a good humour, the space between the front and back seats of Grandmother's car was filled with apples from her plentiful orchard. Since there was now no foot-room for the adults, I had the back seat to myself.

To see an automobile driving through a Russian village in those days was a rare event, and the village children would run to the street at the first sound of its approach. The convertible top of the Neckarsum which was folded back, allowed me, then an eight-year-old lad, to throw apples in generous numbers to the children. How they scrambled over each other in their eagerness to get an apple! By the time we reached the doctor's residence at the end of the long, crooked street, not many apples remained in the car.

However, the children were happy, I'd had great fun, the doctor didn't realize that he'd received fewer apples than intended, Mother and Aunt Greta got their injections, and for me the experience became a memory which I have not forgotten to this day.

Henry C. Neufeld

Born in Schoenfelder Gegend,  
1904

## BEGGARS AND BANDITS IN RUSSIA

It is quite a relief living here in this wonderful land of ours, not having beggars coming continuously to our doors for handouts and picking up anything lying around which they can lay their hands on without being seen.

In Halbstadt in South Russia there was a law that beggars could come on one particular day only; I believe it was on Wednesdays. We would always have a stream of visitors that day! There were old men and old women. When the gypsies came, they would usually arrive two or three wagon-loads at a time, and they would camp on the pasture just outside the village. The men would deal with horses or make and sell tin pails, while the women, sometimes quite young ones at that, would go from door to door palm reading and begging for food or clothing. One gypsy woman came to our house once with a large fly-covered bone draped over her shoulder.

An old Russian woman came to our house in the summer begging for apples. My mother told me to take her to the orchard to the apple tree that had the ripe apples. I took her there expecting her to pick the apples off the tree but that she did not do; she picked them off the ground and when she found one that was all rotten she began eating it. I told her that it was a rotten apple. "Young fellow", she replied, "you are not too smart! Can't you see I have no teeth and can't chew the good apples? These rotten ones don't taste too bad once you get used to them." I almost got sick to my stomach. But she picked good apples as well and took them home.

And then there was "old" Matvey. He was a tall thin Russian, probably in his sixties. I never saw him working; he was supposed to be a sick man; he looked it, too, being so skinny. He would come to my mother and ask her for "a few crumbs to eat". My mother would say, "The same as usual?" - "O dear lady, God bless you, I could not ask for that much

again". Mother would tell him to sit down at the table, while she went to the pantry. Then she would set a whole home-baked loaf of bread, a knife, and a large jug of milk in front of him. That was usually enough food for two or three men at a sitting but old "sick" Matvey would clean everything up in a half-hour and then be unable to find enough words after that to thank Mother.

In Schoenfeld, on my uncle Kornelius Fast's farm where I usually spent my summer holidays, a beggar used to come around. He had somehow lost both of his legs and he would sit on his small wagon with an old horse hitched to it. He would drive from farm to farm for handouts. Toward evening he always landed at the Heinrich Wiens farm. (Mr. Wiens was later the deacon of our church in Leamington). Mr. Wiens would tell his hired hand to help him off the wagon, to unhitch the horse and to feed it, and to make sure old man "Pravda" had a place to sleep for the night. Pravda always claimed Mr. Wiens was one of his best friends. But when bad times came for us, the beggar Pravda was the leader of a gang of bandits and he was as ruthless as anyone could ever be. He even shot and killed his own brother just because they did not agree. Well, Pravda came to the Wiens farm one day with his gang and ordered a great big meal. Mr. Wiens was serving at the table himself as it was not a good policy to have women around when that gang came because too many women were being raped. After the meal Pravda told his men to beat up on Mr. Wiens. When they beat up on anyone the victims didn't always survive; my uncle received the same treatment and he could not sit down or lie on his back for weeks. When Pravda came around the next time to see his "friend", Mr. Wiens, he asked Pravda why he had ordered his men to almost kill him. "Well," replied Pravda, "had you not been my friend I would have shot you myself; but after that good meal a good licking was the right medicine for you because you are a Mennonite; you deserve it". That was real gratitude!

John Enns

Born in Tiegenhof, 1901.

## GOD'S LEADING

My name is Helen Wallman, nee Peters. I arrived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with my mother in November, 1948. My husband, Constantine Wallman, who had arrived in Canada in 1929 with his uncle, Paul A. Wallmann, and I were married in Winnipeg in 1950.

During the Second World War and our flight from Russia to Poland and eventually to Germany, we - my 80-year-old grandmother, my mother, and I - experienced many hard times and frightening moments. Toward the end of the war, the three of us lived in Hirschberg, Silesia, now Poland. To escape being captured by the Red soldiers, we decided to flee from Silesia towards western Germany.

In January, 1943, we and a few other Mennonites living in Hirschberg left on a refugee train made up of boxcars going towards Berlin. Our group consisted of fifteen people, including three old grandmothers and five children. In a small town in eastern Germany we were told to leave the train and to wait for future transportation. In the meantime, we were cared for by Lutheran Sisters. We slept on straw in a big room with many other refugees.

Our repeated efforts to leave were not successful. We were beginning to lose hope of ever escaping the terrible fate of being captured by the Soviet army. Finally, my friend and I decided to go to the railway station one more time to inquire about the possibility of continuing our journey to Berlin. On the way there we met a young Mennonite man from our city in Russia who had been drafted into the German army. With his help we were able to get classified information about the arrival of the next train to Berlin. When the train finally arrived, he even helped us board the train with our grandmothers and children.

Meeting this man on the street of a strange town and receiving his help were like a miracle from God to us.

Helen Wallman

Windsor, Ontario

## MEMORIES OF SIXTY YEARS AGO

In the latter part of the summer of 1928, almost sixty years ago, the girls and boys in our village decided to go on an excursion to the Black Sea, some sixty-five miles away. Since our village of Sarona was not a very large settlement, several young people from a nearby village were invited to join our group. It was a two-day trip to the Black Sea. Part of the trip was through mountains; with horses it was slow going.

The first night we stayed at a Russian Orthodox monastery just inside the mountainous area. That evening we attended the mass where we listened to the beautiful singing of the nuns' choir. The next day we reached the Black Sea area, where we spent two days. Here we visited a large German Lutheran farming community, where mostly grapes were grown. The grapes were ripening at the time and proved to be very tasty. We then also visited a wine cellar built into the solid rock of the mountainside. Afterwards we climbed to the top of the ridge that you can see in the background of the picture shown here.

But the best part of all was the swimming. It was a fine sandy beach and warm water. I will never forget it! We all enjoyed this trip, which we long remembered after we returned home.

In a few years, this group of young people you see pictured was scattered in many different areas. Some died and some were deported to labour camps in Siberia. Isn't it strange that I'm the only person of this group that escaped from Russia? And to think that I would be in good health at the age of seventy-seven years!

Jacob Gossen

Born in Felsenburg, 1907



## OUR HERITAGE

My father was not a rich, but a well-to-do farmer. As I was always keen on learning, he promised to see to it that I could study as far as I would. But before my education could cost him anything, the revolution set in and he was relieved of all his possessions. So my inheritance was gone too. Or was it? Father did not leave me millions. But he left me a spiritual heritage greater than any wealth.

In his good years, he once walked through his fields before harvest time, thrilled by the prospect of the waving grain. The verse came to him: "Do you not know that God's kindness leads you to repentance?" Overwhelmed, he fell on his knees and gave himself to the Lord. He kept that commitment to the end. The next incident I recall occurred after the First World War when the German occupation forces were withdrawing. A regiment guarded the nearby railroad bridge. At that time, in December 1918, there was anarchy everywhere in the Ukraine. We were living in fear. The Germans offered to take us with them to safety. We begged father to go. He said quietly but firmly, "God is our defence, not the German soldiers." How right he proved to be when, soon after, some bandits who robbed us were wearing German uniforms. They had cut off the last train and eliminated the soldiers. The greatest lesson I learned from father was when, in that unforgettable night of January 1919, the terrorists came. They first half killed him, then shot three of his adult sons. When they started to leave, father said, "You will answer before God for what you have done." "Shut up, you old man!" said the leader. "There is no God. Look at how you were praying and he did not help you. This is my God," he said, holding up his rifle, "when I use it I get all I want." A 14-year-old, I stood in night clothes, in shock, wishing father would keep quiet, for fear they would kill him too. But he spoke again, "There is a God. But he is a God of love. He sent Jesus into this world to redeem us. As long as I live I will pray for you that you accept him as your Saviour."

With no further argument they left. When some years later father was advised to deny his faith, he said: "I would rather starve than deny my Lord." And starve he did, for being a Christian. At father's funeral the minister spoke on Psalm 16, one verse of which says: "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

That is the heritage our forefathers left us. That is the heritage our people had in view when they went into exile and perished under persecution and torture. That is the heritage we had in mind when we came to Canada sixty years ago. Just about the first thing we did in those difficult times was to organize worship services and Sunday School. Where are we now in our prosperity? Do we still treasure this spiritual heritage?

Isaac Tiessen

I came to Kingsville on October 26, 1925.

## OUR LIGHTING FOR LONG WINTER EVENINGS

It was in Canada that most of us emigrants first became familiar with the use of electricity for the lighting of private homes. Our towns of Halbstadt and Ohrloff had electric light since about 1914, but, in any case, it was found only in the homes of the very well-to-do, in the hospital, in the new schools, and in other government buildings.

I recall that our girls' school and also the dormitory for thirteen girls, which was located directly above the classrooms, had electric lighting. However, we were instructed to use it sparingly, and woe unto us if we left a room without first switching off the light! In Halbstadt, I was told, the electricity was shut off at 10 o'clock in the evening. Because of this limited experience with electricity, small wonder that we never learned the German words for "plug," "switch," "cord," or "bulb," and so on.

In those days we had only petroleum lamps. Each house had several such lamps: one for the living room, one for the Kleinstube (small room), one for the Sommerstube (summer room), one for the kitchen, and one for the stable. When everything became scarce in Russia, petroleum, or "kerosene" as we called it then, was also unavailable for a number of months. The dark nights grew even darker!

We had to have been outside in the dark for a fairly long time before we could distinguish our hands right in front of our eyes. If we walked along the street in the evening, we could hear the footsteps of the person approaching us from a long way off especially when everyone was wearing Holz pantoffeln (wooden shoes). We greeted each other with the Low German Guten Abend (good evening) and then tried to identify the person we had just met by his or her voice.

During those times it was undoubtedly the older people who advised us to fill a saucer with sunflower oil, which was also scarce, to lay a wick made of a flannelette strip one inch by six inches into the oil, and then to light the end of the wick which protruded over the edge of the saucer. Try it sometime with Mazola oil; it works!

It is clear that we could not do any needlework or reading or homework by the light of such a feeble flame. For this reason, choir practices for the youth were rescheduled to Sunday afternoon. However, despite the poor lighting we could still sing the songs we knew from memory, and we could dream of better days ... and so began our dream of emigrating to America ...

Margaretha Rempel

Born in Tiegenhagen in 1901

## A FEW NOTES ON THE OLD COLONY MENNONITES

I'm writing this as an individual and I want to describe a little bit about the Old Colony Mennonite Church and some personal experiences. I was born in Patos, now Nuevo Ideal, Durango, Mexico, and lived there for sixteen years with my parents; then we moved to Ontario, Canada.

I was raised on the family farm until I was sixteen. There I experienced the so-called old-fashioned way of life. Travelling by horse and buggy and working the land with old machinery such as old John Deere tractors, Models B & A & G on steel wheels, since tires were outlawed by the church, since one could abuse the machinery by using it for travel.

As a Mennonite family in Mexico we also raised some livestock such as cows, pigs, chickens, etc. My father was a mechanic and we had a machine repair shop, and I spent a lot of time in the shop as I grew older.

### Mennonite Schooling in Mexico

Like all the others, I started school at the age of six in the Fibel level where I was taught the ABCs, counting to 100, and some printing. Next I progressed to Kathechismus where I was taught writing and spelling and beginner's math; then I progressed to Testamenter where reading was enhanced and writing and math got heavier, and finally to Bibler with math in general and good writing and good reading.

Discipline was good throughout the school, as the teachers had the right to punish any student who disobeyed, by having him stand up for any length of time, by having him sit on the Faul Bänke (lazy bench), or by lashing him with a whip. (The lazy bench was a bench on the stage.) The sports in the schools consisted of baseball and soccer and other easy games, but they were never played in competition.

### Social Life

The social life was very limited. The young men would go out at night and visit friends or meet at the fireside on the side of the road in the village, even though the fire was discouraged by parents and neighbours, or they would meet at the local variety store and chat over a coke and chips or peanuts or chocolate. Hunting and fishing were sometimes done in groups, and going shopping in town became a social event sometimes.

### Old Colonies All Over

To think back about sixty years when the Mennonites settled in Mexico in only two communities, Chihuahua and Durango, one is amazed to realize that there are now about ten or more communities in Mexico alone, and various others in Honduras and Paraguay and Bolivia, and in the last twenty years some in Ontario, Canada, as well.

Note: The Mennonites in Mexico known as Old Colony Mennonites are not officially Old Colony Mennonites. They are officially Die Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde.

Heinrich R. Friesen

Written in January, 1985.

### A HARROW PIONEER

It was my first night in southwestern Ontario where I would be working. I had some idea of the area by now, the great variety of farm production as well as the urban area of Windsor. I checked into a motel room in Leamington, went for supper, and then went out in search of Mennonites. On a Sunday, attending church would have done it well. In the middle of the week?

Perhaps the Mennonite Home listed in the phone directory would be a good place to start.

I drove there, parked, went in. It was after supper, but sitting in the lounge all by himself, was a tall man, a resident. I introduced myself, learned that I was speaking to Wilhelm Reimer, aged 93, a widower and resident there. If I needed to find a Mennonite, Reimer needed to find a listener.

For ninety minutes he talked, and I listened. He told me stories from his life, a life rich and varied with events and experiences. He had been born and had grown up in the Old Colony (Chortitza settlement) in Russia, had survived the first war and the revolution. He had come to Canada in the mid-twenties, and close to age 50, had become part of the Reesor settlement in the northern clay belt of Ontario. When the settlement broke up in the late forties, he and his wife moved to Harrow, bought a small acreage, and became charter members of the Harrow United Mennonite congregation when the coming of Reesor people to join the original Harrow Mennonites of "Harrowsche Darp" gave the stimulus to a new congregation. Now, since his wife's death, he had been living in the Home.

I marvelled at several things. He had accepted what had happened in Russia without the continuing sense of outrage so common among that generation. What did he consider his best years, I asked, to test him. "The years I lived up North, and would go each week to Kapuskasing to peddle the eggs I had produced on my little farm. I would pull them on a little wagon in summer, on a child's sled in winter. To get to Kap from Reesor and back I would ride the freight caboose. That is how I made a few dollars in those hard years. You think it was cold up North; let me tell you I never felt chilled until I got to Essex County, where the wind off the lake blows right through you".

Ninety minutes of telling me his life's pilgrimage, from

Russia to Canada, pioneering at Reesor and again in Harrow, never looking back, always accepting what God gave with gratitude. While he talked, I would figure out how old he was at various times in his life. He must have been 70 when he came to Harrow!

Five weeks later, I came to Harrow permanently, joined the congregation he had been part of as its oldest member. For in those five weeks, Wilhelm Reimer had died, been buried. How grateful I am that I acted on my heart's impulse that day in June of 1973! I wish I had had a tape recorder. Sometimes, on a Sunday morning, I wonder where he sat in church.

Victor A. Dirks

Mrs. Agathe Dirks

Born in Schenfeld, Pr.



## FIRST NEW FRIEND IN CANADA

Our family arrived as immigrants in Waterloo on July 19, 1924. The train stopped on the siding at the corner of Erb Street. From here we had to walk four or five blocks to the Erb St. Mennonite Church, where we were to meet our hosts. Father walked ahead of us carrying our heavier personal belongings which we had brought with us. Mother, Grandmother, my two-year-old sister Katie, and I followed at a slower pace.

Mother, who was expecting a baby in two months, held Katie on one arm. With the other hand she carried some shoe boxes containing a few children's clothes. Being only five years old, I was to hold Mother by the skirt, but there were so many people getting off the train that I was afraid we would lose Grandmother. She had been ill and was still weak. I ran back and forth between Mother and Grandmother trying to keep them close together.

As we crossed the tracks toward the sidewalk, a friendly lady with very curly hair met us. She was carrying a camera and asked if she could take our picture. She also asked Mother if she had anything for the coming baby. When Mother answered "no," the lady asked for our name and wrote it down.

We continued on to the church where we were served sandwiches and cookies with tea and coffee. Our first sandwiches. I remember I did not like them. Probably they were salmon sandwiches--something new to me. However, the cookies tasted very good.

After a short thanksgiving service, we were met by Mr. Bowman who took us to his home in his Model T touring car. The Bowmans cared for us like their own family, and we soon loved them.

We had been at the Bowmans only a few days when some visitors came. I recognized one lady as the one who had taken

our picture after we got off the train. She brought some things which Mother would need for the new baby. She also brought some used clothing for Katie and me, a wool shawl for Grandmother, and a used sewing machine for Mother. How happy my parents were, especially Mother; and how I loved the black patent leather shoes she had for me.

I believe this lady was sent by God as an answer to the prayers of a mother who had very little for her family and nothing for the coming baby.

The lady's name was Nellie Hagey. She was non-Mennonite, and had pledged herself to help some of the new immigrants. She was of modest means herself and lived with her blind mother.

Tante Nellie, as we soon called this kind lady, came again when our new baby brother arrived. Again she brought necessary things for the baby as well as useful things for the rest of us. She was very happy to see the healthy baby boy and adopted him as her godchild.

Tante Nellie had one special request. She asked if the baby could be named after her. Since her name was Nellie, she asked if the baby, being a boy, could be called Nello. So our baby brother was called Henry Nello. The first name was in honour of Mr. Bowman, whose name was Henry.

When we moved to Manitoba the following January, Tante Nellie came to the train station to say good-bye, and took more pictures.

In the years that followed Tante Nellie remembered us with cards and small presents at Christmas. When we moved back to Ontario, we visited her whenever we were in Waterloo. She was always glad to see us, and was especially interested in her godchild Henry Nello. I remember her fondly.

Tante Nellie has gone to be with the Lord now where she will be richly repaid for her compassion. May this short account of her kindness serve as an honour to her memory.

Mrs. Agatha Dick

Born in Schoenfeld, 1918

## MY FIRST HOME ON PELEE ISLAND

It was on the 6th of April in 1925 when a small group of new immigrants gathered on the dock at Kingsville, waiting to board the little steamer tied up alongside the dock. Kingsville among other things, had the distinction of being the most southern town in all of Canada, lying on the north shore of Lake Erie. About 16 miles across the water lay Pelee Island, Canada's most southern possession. It was this island that the little group on the dock was aiming for. That they were immigrants, anybody could see; their attire, their behavior, and their speech were foreign, not English. Among this group was the John A. Wiebe family with two grown sons, his older brother Jake, two almost grown daughters and a number of smaller sons and daughters right down to little Annie, still a babe in arms. There was also the family of Peter A. Driedger with three grown sons, followed by three daughters and a little boy, four-year-old Haenschen, later to be known as Johnny. Each one of these persons was carrying or holding on to something - a parcel, a box, a beaten-up suitcase that had seen much travel, a blanket roll held by a leather belt, or in the case of the smaller ones, just a paper bag probably containing some food. And this was about all the possessions these people had. They were poor, very poor. All they had had, their nicely furnished homes, their good productive land, their money, everything had been left in Russia, without their having received any compensation for it.

Now this group was ready to make a new start, a new beginning on the Island of Pelee. A wealthy American, Mr. George Cruickshank, owned a number of farms on the Island and through a succession of interesting incidents, he became aware of these people. He contacted them and was successful in persuading them to come to the Island and take over his farms on a share-cropping basis. And so this group on the Kingsville dock finally boarded their boat and soon were on their way to a

new adventure, to an island they had never even dreamed of ever setting foot on. In about 1½ hours the boat arrived at the Island. There was a man with a team and wagon meeting them at the dock. He motioned them to put their boxes and parcels on the wagon and then to follow him on foot. He drove on and the group followed into the unknown. After about two miles inland he turned into a farmyard. It was one of Cruickshank's farms.

The day was nearly spent; they gave us something to eat and then we bedded down for the night on the living room floor. The next morning we were shown the way to the farm we were to occupy, about a mile distant from where we were now. The Wiebes' farm was in the opposite direction, a half-mile away. When we came closer, we saw for the first time what was to become our home. It was an old grey one-storey building that hadn't seen any paint for a long, long time. The windows had not been cleaned; you could hardly look through them. As no doors were locked, we went inside and what we saw here was even more dejecting than the outside. The people that had lived here had not even taken the time to clean up a little. Dust, dirt and refuse were everywhere. The whole thing was not very inviting.

We went to the barn. There were six horses and two cows. A bunch of young pigs were in another building. We went back to get Mom and Dad and the girls. Our first task would be to clean up the house a bit and then to move in. There was little to move in as our furniture was still en route to the Island. It was all used and second-hand, given to us or bought at auction sales. It took two weeks until it finally arrived. All this time we slept on the floor, we sat on boxes and orange crates, we ate at makeshift tables (if they could be called tables). Our mother took sick, seriously sick. There was no doctor nor medication. Meanwhile the farm work had to go on.

This farm contained 240 acres of land and so the land had

to be plowed and prepared for the crops to go in. One good thing was that Mr. Cruickshank had arranged for credit at the local store so that we could get our provisions there. One of the biggest obstacles was the language. We couldn't speak English and sign language would not always bring the necessary results, but would often create humorous situations. Yet it was a difficult and troublesome beginning. But I never heard the older folks complain. We were all glad and happy to live in a land where we were free and would not be molested by anybody.

Jacob P. Driedger

born in Schönfeld in 1901

#### SOME REMINISCING - 1925

My parents, brother, sister, and I came to Wheatley at the beginning of March, 1925. There we worked for a farmer on shares, planting and harvesting potatoes (\$3 per 100 lbs.) and tobacco (25¢ per lb.).

My sister and I worked as maids in Leamington homes for \$5 a month. We were the first Mennonite girls in Leamington. During the harvest I helped at home.

By winter, there were more girls working in homes and it wasn't as lonely. We had every Thursday afternoon and every third Sunday off. As I learned the English language better, my wages went up to \$5 per week. I also received a pair of stockings, or a used dress, or material for a new dress, or a uniform and white aprons. In time, more Mennonites moved to town and then we girls, up to ten of us at times, could get together more often.

One day a number of us girls hired a taxi to drive us to the farm of Agnes Barkovsky (Konrad) on Highway 3 east of Leamington. The taxi cost \$2 for the eight of us! This ride was something special since the money we girls earned was usually given to our parents who had very good use for it.

Anna Tiessen (Toews)  
born in Schönfeld, 1909

#### SUNDAY SCHOOL, 1928

East of Leamington on the First Concession there lived several Mennonite families and all had children. It happened that one father asked me if I wouldn't like to have Sunday School with the children. So I had Sunday School on Sunday afternoons at the home of N. N. Tiessens (Ralph Tiessen's parents). At that time there were many such small Sunday Schools near Leamington, Ruthven, Kingsville, and Wheatley. In 1933 they all moved into the new church on Oak Street. I worked in the Sunday School for more than 25 years.

Everything was in German in the first years. We also had German school on Saturday mornings at my parents' home. An upstairs bedroom was cleared out and tables and chairs were set up. The teacher was Gerhard Reimer from the Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church.

Frank P. Tiessen  
born in Schönfeld, 1906

## WINDSOR

In 1926 a small group of Mennonite people came to Windsor, Ontario, in search of employment. Mr. and Mrs. Heinrich Huebert with four sons and two daughters, Mrs. Nick Dick (unmarried at the time) and Miss Helen Warkentin (later Mrs. Abram Friesen, Detroit) came from the Winnipeg area. They were soon followed by Mr. and Mrs. Heinrich Huebert (Molotschna, not related to above H.H.) and their four boys, Mrs. and Mrs. George Paetkau, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Sawatzky with two sons, Peter C. and George, Rev. and Mrs. John Dick and son George, Rev. and Mrs. Jacob Braun (later Kitchener) and Rev. and Mrs. William Schellenberg, all coming from Leamington or Winnipeg areas.

The girls soon found domestic work in the city while most men were employed by Fords, General Motors or the Chrysler Companies.

The country was new, the language strange, and as a result the immigrants lost no time in finding each other and gathering regularly for worship. The services were held in various homes, often in Rev. and Mrs. John Dick's large front room of their apartment building (pictured). Rev. John Dick (brother of Mrs. J. Unger and Mrs. P. Enns) and Rev. Jacob Janzen (father of Henry J. Janzen) had been ordained by Elder Jacob H. Janzen of Waterloo in the Ruthven United Church which the Mennonites rented occasionally.

The H. Huebert family on Gladstone Avenue also had a large room where choir practice was held regularly with Mr. Huebert directing.

Rev. John Dick instructed the German School class and the Catechism classes. On occasion, Sunday School was held in the German Lutheran church. Mrs. Nick Dick, Mrs. Herman Huebert and Henry Buller were Sunday School teachers.

The congregation grew, when in 1928 George G. Tiessen (writer of this article), John G. Braun, Henry Enns, John Enns, Henry Barkovsky, Abe Willms and Ernie Heinrichs arrived. These young men boarded in Windsor during the week and returned to Leamington most weekends to see their parents. Many of these men married in the 1930's, so we, too (George Tiessen and Mary Koop), were married in 1935 and although we lived in a Windsor apartment we visited our families in Leamington almost every Sunday.

In the early 1930's Mr. and Mrs. Johann H. Schroeder and three daughters moved to Windsor; Mr. Schroeder was the contact man between the early Mennonites in Essex County and the Mennonite Board in Rosthern, Saskatchewan.

Not everyone owned a car in those first years; a street car ran from Windsor to Leamington which was a great convenience even though it was slow going because of the countless little passenger stops on the way.

The ladies had Verein every week - the time depended on their husband's shift at the factory.

When Mr. Heinrich Huebert passed away in 1936 the choir was never the same again.

Rev. John Dick united five couples in marriage in Windsor. One of the couples was Abe and Mary Heinrichs (later of Harrow).

One Sunday per month a minister from one of the Leamington Mennonite churches would come to preach in Windsor.

In 1938 Peter and Betty Loewen and Peter Driedger (married Ruby Lacky) moved to Windsor. Both men were employed by the Ford Motor Company for many years.

During World War II the activities — ladies' Verein, choir practice, German school and all church services—were discontinued. German-speaking persons in the city were being harrassed and the Mennonite group was afraid to meet regularly after that time.



The aforementioned reason, and the fact that the Essex County United Mennonite Church was still considered the "Mother Church" by many, eventually brought most of the little Windsor group back to the safety of their families in the Leamington area.

George G. and Mary Tiessen

#### MY INVOLVEMENT WITH FAITH MENNONITE CHURCH

The beginning of my involvement with Faith Mennonite Church began after I received a call of invitation to come and attend the opening services at the Margaret D. Bennie School. This came following a 17-year estrangement from the Oak Street United Mennonite Church, where I had become a member at baptism.

With the consent of my parents and that of my church, I was joined in matrimony with a man whose mother belonged to the Mennonite Church in Russia, and whose father was of the Lutheran persuasion. My husband, having moved to Germany with his parents as a child, had been baptized at the age of five, in his father's church.

Our marriage text from Ruth 1:16,17 seemed very applicable since I moved away from both my church and my home to be close to my husband's family and their work.

Without transportation or telephone, having to care for two children, and being in ill health, I felt quite isolated.

One day, a young Anglican minister stopped in during a survey and found that there was a need for a church in our area. He began his mission work in the one-room school house

at Point Pelee.

We participated in this effort but it proved unsuccessful since most of the parents did not get involved in bringing their children to Sunday School. It was after this point in time that the invitation came from the yet unnamed Faith Mennonite Church. We went, and were warmly accepted "just as we were". Although many of us came from different backgrounds it was amazing how we were able to discuss, debate, and respect each other's viewpoints during what for many of us was the first encounter with Adult Sunday School.

It was for me the beginning of growth. Since we were a small group, everyone was needed to help. We felt inadequate. Many of us had never been on any church committees or taught Sunday School.

With the encouragement of George Janzen, our first minister, and his wife Kathy, we began! Soon a church building was needed. Following major surgery, when Kathy Janzen remained at my side to ensure recovery, we started to plan.

There was land available close by. It belonged to the Anglican Church but was available to us, with the provision that a church would be built on it. My husband volunteered his services as architect and contractor, and so together with our fellow members, the vision became a reality. This working together for a church of our choice has been a great privilege, and I personally have found wonderful support in times of need from some of our ministers and fellow church members.

I believe that Faith Mennonite Church will endure and continue to grow as long as we remember the words from Psalm 127: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."

Annie Krause

DIRECTORY OF CHURCHES

FAITH MENNONITE CHURCH

269 Sherk Street, Leamington, Ontario N8H 3K9

HARROW UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH

Walker Road

Box 746, Harrow, Ontario NOR 1G0

LEAMINGTON EVANGELICAL MENNONITE MISSION CONFERENCE CHURCH

Concession 3, Mersea Township

Box 84, Leamington, Ontario N8H 3W1

LEAMINGTON MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH

Talbot Street East

R.R. 3, Leamington, Ontario N8H 3V6

LEAMINGTON UNITED MENNONITE CHURCH

78 Oak Street East, Leamington, Ontario N8H 2C6

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Concession 6, Mersea Township

c/o Rev. Cornelius Quiring, R.R. 3, Leamington, Ontario N8H 3V6

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Concession 6, Mersea Township

R.R. 5, Leamington, Ontario N8H 3V8

OLD COLONY MENNONITE CHURCH

Wheatley Town Line

c/o Peter Dyck, R.R. 1, Wheatley, Ontario NOP 2P0

WINDSOR MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP

Remington Booster Community Centre, 701 Edinborough Street

c/o Henry D. Janzen, 1149 Belleperche Place, Windsor, Ontario  
N8S 3C4

Editorial Committee

Mary M. Janzen  
Astrid Koop  
Linda Tiessen  
Martha Wiens

Leamington, Ontario  
1985

DIRECTORY OF CHURCHES

FAITH MENNONITE CHURCH  
269 Sherk Street, Leamington, Ontario NBH 3K9

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Walker Road  
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N6S 3C4



