

# 80 Years: Our Country Canada

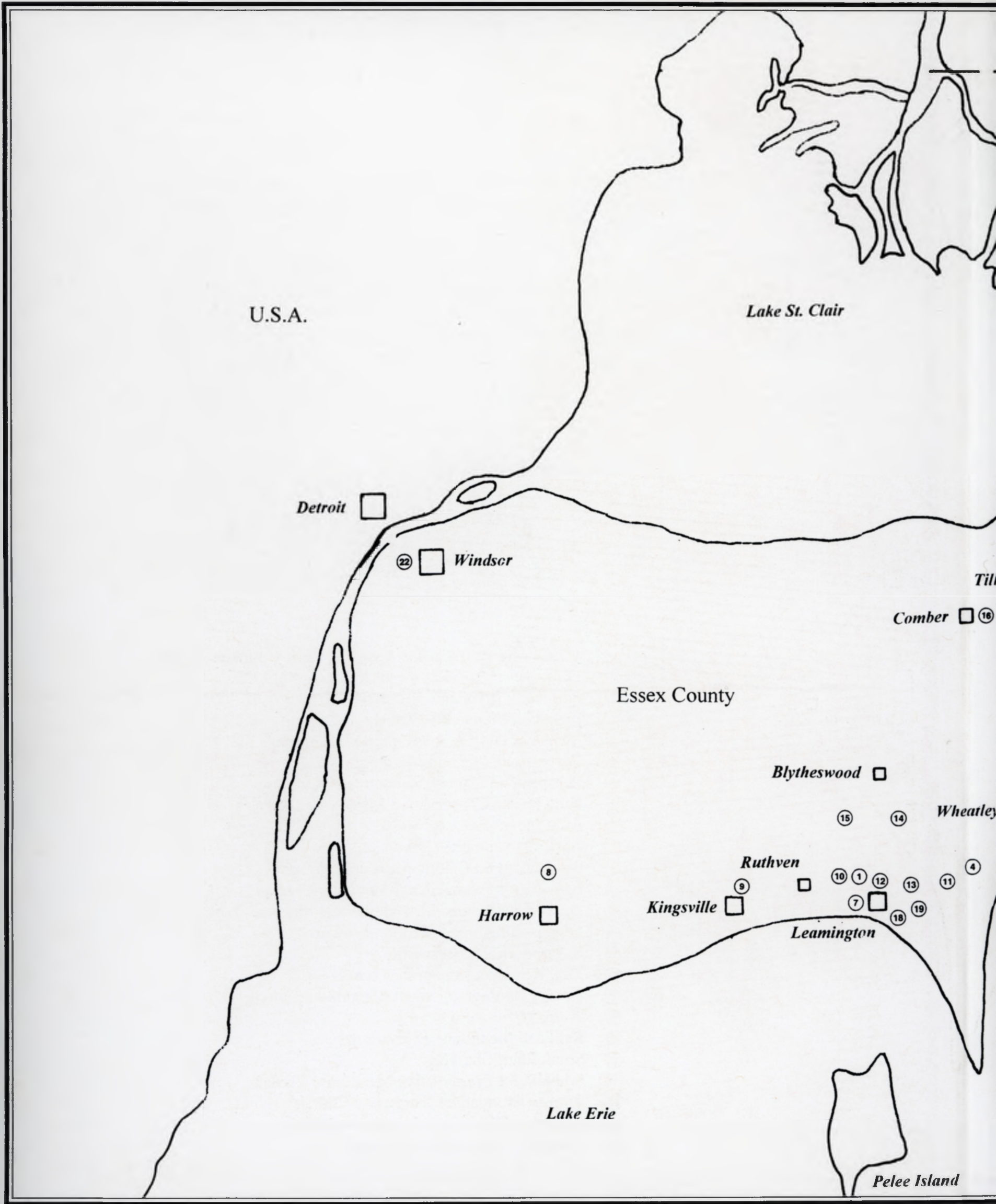
*Mennonite Life in  
Essex and Kent Counties  
Ontario Canada*

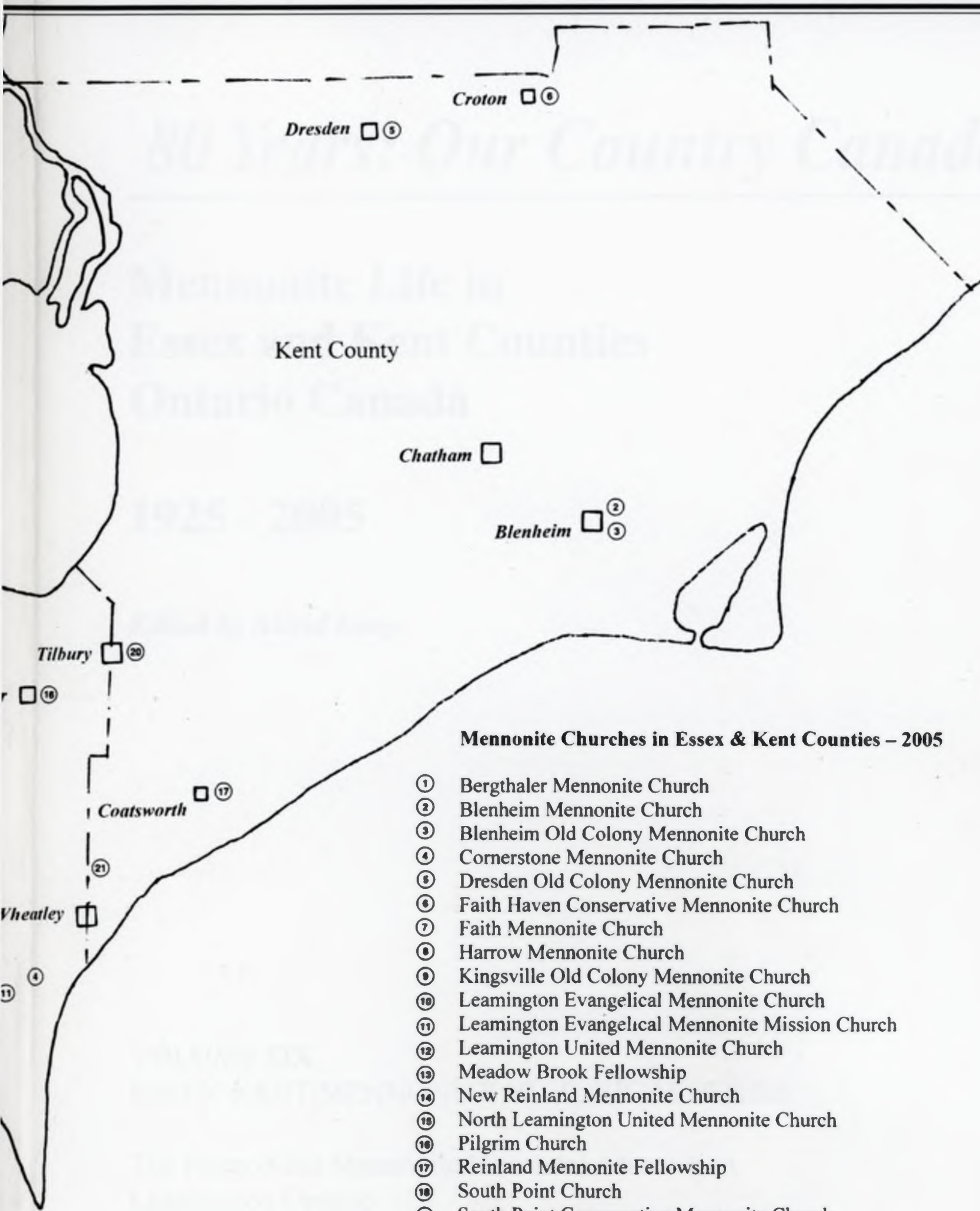


## 1925 - 2005

VOLUME SIX... ESSEX-KENT MENNONITE HISTORICAL SERIES







**Mennonite Churches in Essex & Kent Counties – 2005**

- ① Bergthaler Mennonite Church
- ② Blenheim Mennonite Church
- ③ Blenheim Old Colony Mennonite Church
- ④ Cornerstone Mennonite Church
- ⑤ Dresden Old Colony Mennonite Church
- ⑥ Faith Haven Conservative Mennonite Church
- ⑦ Faith Mennonite Church
- ⑧ Harrow Mennonite Church
- ⑨ Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church
- ⑩ Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church
- ⑪ Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church
- ⑫ Leamington United Mennonite Church
- ⑬ Meadow Brook Fellowship
- ⑭ New Reinland Mennonite Church
- ⑮ North Leamington United Mennonite Church
- ⑯ Pilgrim Church
- ⑰ Reinland Mennonite Fellowship
- ⑱ South Point Church
- ⑲ South Point Conservative Mennonite Church
- ⑳ Tilbury Evangelical Mennonite Church
- ㉑ Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church
- ㉒ Windsor Mennonite Fellowship



# ***80 Years: Our Country Canada***

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## **Mennonite Life in Essex and Kent Counties Ontario Canada**

**1925 - 2005**

***Edited by Astrid Koop***

**VOLUME SIX**

**ESSEX-KENT MENNONITE HISTORICAL SERIES**

**The Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association  
Leamington Ontario  
2005**



Published by the  
**Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association**

31 Pickwick Drive  
Leamington, Ontario  
N8H 4T5

**Printed by Speedprint Ltd., 45 Industrial Road, Leamington, Ontario, N8H 4W4**

**International Standard Book Number: 0-9682781-7-5**

**Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Series**

Volume One: The Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties, Ontario, an introduction; V. Kliewer, Ed; 1997.

Volume Two: The Mennonite Settlement on Pelee Island, Ontario; A.Koop, Ed; 1999.

Volume Three: Mennonite Peace Perspectives from Essex and Kent; V.Kliewer, Ed; 2001.

Volume Four: Memories of Reesor, The Mennonite Settlement in Northern Ontario; Hedy Lepp Dennis; 2002.

Volume Five: There Was A Boy; Jacob N. Driedger; 2003.

Volume Six: 80 Years: Our Country Canada, Mennonite Life in Essex and Kent Counties; A. Koop, Ed; 2005.

**Cover Photographs**

**Front cover:** Planting tobacco on Peter Enns farm, 1930: father Peter Enns, son George (who married Margaret Taves), and son-in-law John Enns (husband of Agnes Enns). See story page 81.

**Inside front cover:** Map of Essex and Kent Counties indicating locations of the 22 Mennonite congregations.

**Inside back cover:** First worship location of the mainland Mennonites in Essex-Kent - the John and Elizabeth Dick Martens farm, 1925. The Martens farm was owned by Milton Crewe. It was located in Kent County, Coatsworth area, near Lake Erie, where the Robinson Motorcycle business is in 2005. Daughter Betty Martens remembers that Ältester (Bishop) Janzen from Kitchener came to conduct a service there. Services were held in the living room, used as a bedroom by the Martens family. Reverend Jacob D. Janzen was pastor.

**Photo, 1925-1926:** At the far left the three gentlemen are Peter Derksen, John Martens, and just behind him, Jake Martens. In the group of five women in white we recognize Liese Janzen with son David. On the right half of the photo in a large group of people we see Sara Toews, Frank Dick, Rev. Jacob D. Janzen with son Jacob, John Bergen, Jacob Founk Senior, Abe Dick, Mr. Barkovsky, Deacon David H. Unrau, and Dietrich Esau.



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# Foreword

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*Jean Arner Walton*

**I**t is indeed a privilege and an honour to be asked to convey a Canadian viewpoint of the immigrants who passed through their labour experiences on the farms of my father, Alfred L. Arner, Senior.

During the 1920s and 1930s there was a constant flow of hundreds of workers, immigrants from virtually every nation and culture in his employ. But I know that none rated with such high regard and respect with my father, as did the Mennonites.

The first ones I remember were the Peter Sudermans and the Schroeders. Olga Suderman Goertzen has told me how much she enjoyed going to school at SS #1, Gosfield - the school now at Heritage Village. And I remember attending that same school with Rudy and Peter Schroeder. I think their sisters were Mary and Helen.

"On July 20, 1925, John Schroeder commenced work. On December 24, 1925, John went to the Mennonite Christmas Eve", excerpts from Dad's diaries. "April 2, 1928, William Dick moved here today." His last mention is November 20, 1929. But on "March 1, 1934, I moved Bill Dick to the Ford farm (Dad's other farm) today, from Leamington." In 1936, Jacob Dick, Anne and Bill Dick are mentioned, also Peter Kroeker. In 1937 Jacob and Peter Driedger, also Jacob and Nick Driedger, also Driedger and Sons are mentioned. I've tried to list all the Mennonites' names found in the diaries up to 1939. There may have been more.

My father held a deep appreciation and admiration for all the Mennonites with whom he had dealings. Their honesty, integrity, high Christian morals, values and work ethics were truly gratifying.

May I now offer my own wholehearted congratulations to all the Mennonites who with their courage and tenacity have demonstrated how to reach the top in every aspect of life, including the production of this book! The contributions of such dedicated people have greatly enriched Canada's quality of life.

*The writer was born in Arner, Ontario, in 1916. Jean is a member of the Epworth United Church in Kingsville, Ontario. Her paternal ancestor, Jacob Arner and family, moved from their home near Pittsburg, Pennsylvania to Lot 27 of Gosfield South Township in the late 1700s. Jacob Arner was a United Empire Loyalist who had been an artificer with the Butler's Rangers.*



# Acknowledgements

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*Astrid Gossen Koop*

As one reads through these stories, each will appear very different from the next. And that is exactly what our Committee sought when they put this book together. Upon a second look, however, the Essex-Kent Mennonite families and individuals, whether they arrived here in 1925, 2005, or somewhere in between, have many more similarities than differences. All are residents of Essex or Kent Counties today, and all - at one time or another - were immigrants who struggled to get a new start in a new country.

All needed to find work which often involved long hours of menial labour, all needed to learn a new language, and send their children to a school with unfamiliar rules and regulations. Another characteristic we share is our ability to practice thrift: to do without, save our money, pay the travel debt, pay for the farm, the house, the car, the tractor.

And, most importantly, I believe that we all have an inborn longing to congregate with our own people, with those of our background. This takes us to our church, where we have been privileged to worship in freedom. Who of us would have dreamed that, in 80 years' time, the Essex-Kent area would have 22 Mennonite congregations?

The Publications Committee had the opportunity to speak and visit with many people in connection with this book: friends, relatives, neighbours, and all the dear individuals we had previously known by name only. Information was gleaned by way of conversation, via email, from questionnaires placed into church mailboxes, and many telephone calls.

During the time this book was put together, three contributors went to meet their Maker.

Alice Toews died July 19, 2004, in her home.

Erna Enns died September 28, 2004, in the Leamington Hospital.

Helene Sawatzky died August 1, 2005, in the Mennonite Home.

*Ruht Sanft!*

We are grateful to our friends Jake and Margaret Bergen Neufeld for their guidance and counsel. We thank Elsie Unger Willms for producing our appropriate book title. And we thank all contributors for their priceless information, their hospitality, kindness, patience, and especially for the opportunity of getting to know them better!

The book ends with a thought-provoking story. May it inspire every reader!

Essex-Kent Publications Committee:

Astrid Koop, chair

Gisela Schartner

Mary Thiessen

Harold Thiessen





**Barkovsky home on Art Brown farm, Highway #3, 1925**

**Back Row, l to r:** Cornelius Friesen, John Bergen married Mary Esau, Jacob Barkovsky married Mary Friesen, and after her death married Margaret Krueger, Nick Tiessen married Anna Wiens, Dietrich Esau married Helen Janzen.

**Front, l to r:** Tillie Bergen married Jacob Enns, Mary Bergen, Hedy Bergen married Henry Enns, brother of Jacob above, Mika Barkovsky married Henry Neufeld, Agatha Barkovsky married John Krahn.

**Note:** John Bergen's brother, Jacob Bergen and Nellie Siemens were married in Winkler, Manitoba in 1940. They moved to Port Rowan first, then Kitchener, then settled in Leamington in 1945. Their children are Sonja, Charlotte, Loretta, Barbara, Ron and Albert. Jake first worked for Grant Fox, then at H J Heinz until his retirement. Today, Nellie is a resident of the Leamington Mennonite Home. Hedy and Tillie are cousins of John and Henry.



# CHAPTER

# ONE

## *Beginnings*



# 1) from Russia: 1925...

## Introduction

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*Henry Janzen*

Essex and Kent Counties were not originally destinations for Mennonites coming to Canada during the 1920s and 1930s but, for various reasons, this area became home to many families.

On August 8, 1924, my parents Jacob D. and Liese Janzen, with my sister Mary, landed at Quebec City on the CPR Ocean Liner Empress of France. From there, they boarded the train to Manitoba, where they were hosted by the Jasch Wiens family in Winkler. A son, Jacob Junior, was born on August 24 of that year.

Mother's parents, the David H. Unraus with their children Peter Kroeker, Helen Toews, David Junior, and Mary Dirksen had gone to the Waterloo area and had written to my parents, telling them of job opportunities in Essex County. The two families agreed to meet the following spring, at Leamington.

During the first years, our family, like other Mennonite families, moved very often, to better paying jobs or better houses. The birth certificates of our family members all show different places of birth, except for those of Dad and Mary. They were born in the same house in Tiegerweide, Ukraine. Mother was born in Kleefeld, Ukraine; Jake in Winkler, Manitoba; Dave in Harrow, Ontario; George in Coatsworth, I (Henry) in Leamington, Liz in Kingsville, and John in Ruthven.

When one Mennonite family moved out of a place, another Mennonite family often moved in. In the 1930s, the Dick family moved off the Zacharias Wigle farm, on the corner of Highway #3 and Concession 3. Our family moved in, and when we moved out in 1935, the Willms family moved in.

Our family's first work in Southern Ontario was share-cropping a tobacco farm owned by Art Brown, on Highway #3, east of Leamington. We lived and worked there for two years. During that time, the highway was paved.

Travel at first was by train, bicycle, or on foot. Dad once bought a small table at a second hand store in Leamington, and carried it home, about three miles. It became his writing desk. It was from Coatsworth that Dad took the train to Wheatley, where he bought his first car in 1928. He walked from the train station to Jackson's Ford garage, and paid \$200 for the 1924 Model T touring car and a driver's licence. After a few instructions, he drove home. Dad said that this car had better headlights than the next three cars he owned. While driving at night, he could count nine telephone poles ahead of the car. Grandpa Unrau really liked riding in that car.

Flat tires were a common occurrence. People carried one spare tire, but also packed a patching kit and an air pump. After returning from a trip, one of the first questions asked, was "How many flat tires did you have?"

Essex and Kent Counties offered a variety of jobs. Women worked cleaning houses, in the Heinz factory, often performing piece-work such as stuffing pickles into jars or labeling jars, or on farms, hoeing, and picking fruit and vegetables. The tobacco factories, operating mostly in winter, provided work when there was no work on the farms.



Some men worked in Windsor, in the auto plants, etc.. Kingsville and Coatsworth had clay soil which was good for making bricks and drainage tiles. A number of Mennonites worked for tile yards. Our Dad was able to work at Coatsworth in the tile yards and so could pay off his *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) in 1927.

Most people stayed in the area between Harrow and Wheatley. The first years, they worked as labourers, or took farms on shares. In that way, they learned to farm the crops which were suited to this area. After a few years, families bought farms (often run-down, because they were cheaper). With whole families working on farms, they became productive. Farm sizes ranged from about three to 100 acres. The small farms had a greenhouse or two and cold frames for starting tobacco and vegetable plants. Other crops grown were cabbage, lettuce, cauliflower, celery and tomatoes. Families also planted a variety of fruit trees and berries, for their own consumption. Larger farms had dairy cattle and other livestock, corn, grains and processing tomatoes.

One such farming family was the Peter Tiessen family. They came to Leamington in 1925. After working at the Duke's farm on the Concession 5 of Gosfield South Township, they bought a hundred acre farm on Concession 1, southeast of Leamington.

The workweek was busy for the whole family, but Saturday was baking day for the housewives. *Zwieback* (double-decker buns) were a must, in addition to cookies, cake or *Platz* (*Zwieback* dough with a layer of fruit and sugar on top). Because most farms had a cow or two and chickens, they also had flies. In the summer, when baking was being done, the outside of the back screen door would be black with flies.

On Sundays, our family went to church, had chicken dinner, then our parents had their *Mittagschlaf* (afternoon nap) or read *Der Bote* (The Messenger), our Mennonite Conference newspaper. After a respite, we had visitors, or we would go visiting friends or relatives. The day would end about 6 PM, when it was time to milk cows and do chores.

Although homes and jobs have changed, the cycle of work, worship, socialization, and rest is one that has continued among the Mennonites of Essex and Kent Counties.

*The writer was born in Leamington and is a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Henry speaks English, High German, and Low German fluently.*

## Early Church and Sunday School Locations

When the Mennonites from Russia began arriving in the Essex-Kent area they were without means of transportation, and in need of venues for holding worship services. Various locations were used for this purpose.

In Leamington, Sunday School classes were taught by **Mary Dyck**, daughter of Gerhard Dyck, in the home of **Abram and Helena Barg**. **Frank P. Tiessen** taught Sunday School in the **Nicholai N. Tiessen** home on Sunday afternoons in 1928. An upstairs room in Brown's Hotel was used for services. Upstairs rooms at the present Dixie Lawn and Cycle on Erie North's west side, and Bowman and Carson on the north side of Talbot East were also used. The Ruthven United Church was used for special occasions, such as baptism, and the Olinda United Church was another location for services.



In Kingsville, the town hall was used by **Isaac Tiessen** and **Henry Thielmann** for Sunday School classes. The **John and Anna Warkentin Berg** home on Division Road, north of Kingsville, was used for worship. John was a brother to **David Baerg** and **Abram Barg**.

In Cottam, **Isaac Tiessen** and **Henry Thielmann** taught about 20 students in the **John J. Dick** living room. In Coatsworth, to the east, the home of **John Martens Senior**, as well as the **Cornelius P. and Aganetha Neufeld** home, served as gathering places for worship.

In Windsor, several locations were used over the years, including the **Heinrich C. Huebert** home, the Lutheran Church on Sunday afternoons, **Henry and Mary Janzen's** home on Belleperche Avenue, and the Trinity United Church.

The Harrow settlement, with approximately 20 families and individuals, first met in the **Gerhard Papke** home. Worship services were conducted there for a number of years until the first Harrow Mennonite Church was built in 1953.

On Pelee Island, the Mennonites first met at **Widow Anna Wiebe's** house on Henderson Road. Soon they were invited to use the Mission Hall next door. Here **Reverend Johann Dick**, ordained in the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia, became their first pastor. The Methodist Church building and a vacant house on the East and West Road were used at times. **Jacob and Leila Willms** and **Henry and Anna Cornies**, both on Center Dyke Road, opened their homes for worship. The **Reverend Isaac and Agnetha Klassen** home on Parson Road was sometimes used, Reverend Klassen had been ordained in Russia. Services were held intermittently for 19 years in the living room of a house on Parson Road. Here **Bernhard and Helene Konrad** first lived, then **Johann and Maria Willms**, followed by **Jacob and Leila Willms**, and lastly, **John Wiebe** lived there.

## Births and deaths

In a new country, firsts in birth and death, the life cycle events, are memorable occasions.

**Baby Lohrenz:** The daughter of Jacob and Helena Tiessen Lohrenz was born in 1924, and died shortly after her birth. She was buried on their farm in Kingsville. Jacob and Helena came to the Essex-Kent area when Jacob was commissioned by an immigration delegation in 1924, to act as liason for other Mennonites wishing to settle here. Helena Lohrenz was a sister to John Tiessen, and aunt to Elsie Tiessen Dick, Art, Vic, and Ron Tiessen.

**Heinrich Schmidt:** A second baby, Heinrich Schmidt, son of Reverend Nicholai and Helen Martens Schmidt, died June 20, 1925. One year old Heinrich was buried in Erie Memorial Gardens Cemetery on Erie Street South of Leamington. He was a brother of Nick, Henry, David, John, Mary, Jake, Katie and Anne.

**Peter P. Tiessen:** The Mennonite community remembers the death of Peter P. Tiessen, son of Peter Jacob and Elizabeth Fast Tiessen. Peter was 28 when, after an illness of several months, he died of tuberculosis on January 10, 1926. He was a half-brother to Jacob and Elvira Tiessen and is buried west of Leamington in the Olinda Cemetery.

## Christmas of 1925

**Agatha Enns Peters Schellenberg** remembers her first Christmas in Canada. The service was held at the John Martens home on Highway #3. About 24 adults traveled by horse and wagon; the children ran behind. An evergreen tree had been set up and decorated with real candles. Verses were recited, and Agatha remembers it as her best Christmas ever!



## **F**irst baby: Helen Neufeld Founk, April 18, 1925

The arrival of Helen Neufeld Founk, daughter of Cornelius and Anna Kornelsen Neufeld, was a happy occasion. She was born in Port Crewe, Ontario, on April 18, 1925. Dr. Walker of Wheatley came to the Milton Crewe home, where the Neufeld family lived, to deliver the baby. The house was located across the road from where Robinson Motorcycle is today. Helen enjoys good health today, and lives in the family home on Talbot Street East of Leamington. Helen and George had six children; George died in 1996. The Founk family worships at Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington, Ontario.



**Mother Anna with Helen**



**Helen Neufeld Founk**



## **F**irst wedding: Henry Tiessen and Susa Enns, August 1, 1926

The first Mennonite wedding to take place in Essex-Kent was that of Henry Tiessen and Susa Enns in 1926. Bishop Jacob H. Janzen of Waterloo, Ontario officiated. The service took place on August 1, a



Henry and Susa Enns Tiessen

Sunday afternoon, in an upstairs room of Arthur Brown's hotel on Erie Street South of Leamington, where church services were held. Everyone worked a six-day week; Sunday was the only free day. During the service, rain dripped through a hole in the roof, and Bishop Janzen needed to stop speaking for a moment, move to a dry spot, wipe his face, and continue with the service.

Everyone was invited to the Enns home for *Zwieback* (double buns), *Stritzel* (raisin bread), cookies, and coffee.

The newlyweds' first residence was in Coatsworth, near where Robinson Motorcycle is located today. They soon moved to the Albuna Townline, where Henry worked for the Jeffery family who lived between Concessions 5 and 6. The Jeffery's lived in the large red brick home, the Tiessen's in the small white house.

Henry and Susa's third home was near Blytheswood, on Highway 77, between Concessions 7 and 8. Here they purchased a two acre farm for \$200, and built a house for \$200. Henry worked for Stewart Bowman; today the Kotulaks live there. In 1952, Henry and Susa had a house built by Dietrich Dick on Concession 8, east of Highway 77. Peter Siemens worked with Dietrich Dick at the time.

## **Transportation**

Getting to the workplace, to worship services and for purchases in town presented problems for the immigrants. Those with vehicles provided rides for others.

When **Jacob Gossen** arrived in Kingsville on the streetcar in 1930, following his trip across the ocean from Russia, **Abram and Elizabeth Heidebrecht Mathies** directed him to his cousins, the home of **David and Anna Wiens Reimer**. Several days later, **Nick Wiens** and Captain Hooper came from Pelee Island on a small boat - it was in March, just before the regular shipping season - and Jake traveled across the lake with them to his Island destination.



**Abraham and Sarah Boldt Willms**, grandparents of John and Bill, lived on Marlborough Street West, just across the street from **Reverend David and Louise Dyck Derksen's** home. Abraham was a talented handyman: if it was broken, he could fix it. He was called upon regularly by the cottage people at Point Pelee, and put many miles on his bicycle. Abraham responded by resting his toolbox on the handlebars of his bicycle, placing his step ladder on a leather pad on his shoulder, and going on his way. He also mowed many lawns, and trimmed hedges in the town of Leamington. In 1966, when Abraham was 86 years of age, he and Sarah moved into the Leamington Mennonite Home. Here he cared for the flowers and shrubs. Once in the Home, they accepted their government pension; until that time they had refused, saying that the Canadian government owed them nothing.

**The Kornelsen brothers, Jake and Henry**, bought a car together in 1925. They worked at Jaspersons Brickyard in Coatsworth, Ontario. The following year, **John and Anna Warkentin Berg** of Kingsville, bought a car. **Peter and Amelia Hamm** purchased a used car in 1927 with celluloid windows. Then in 1929, they bought a car with glass windows for Peter to drive to work at Alexander (Sandy) Wilkinson's farm. **Heinrich and Lena Janzen** bought a used McLaughlin Buick with celluloid windows. In 1927, **John A. and Agatha Driedger Dick** bought a 1922 Chevrolet for \$450 with glass windows, from Ray A. Young. **Cornelius P. and Aganetha Neufeld** bought a car in 1928 to haul pickles to the Heinz Company.

Trucks proved to be practical vehicles. Half-brothers **Jacob Thiessen and Walodja Unger** bought a truck in 1930. They picked up farmers' sugar beets, and hauled them to the sugar factory in Chatham, Ontario.

In the fall of 1936, **John J. and Maria Mathies Dick** bought a 1936 Plymouth. And in 1937, **Alex and Anna Friesen Fischer** bought a new Dodge.

Women soon learned to drive, as well. For instance, **Elizabeth Heidebrecht Mathies**, mother of **Eleanor, Peter, and John**, began driving rather unexpectedly in 1926. A Mr. Curry of Cedar Beach asked her to drive his car to Kingsville. And she did. Elizabeth got her driver's licence shortly after this incident.

**Agatha Unger**, mother of **Elsie, Martha, Lorene, Pastor Wilbert, and Wilma**, learned to drive before 1930. When the family moved to Essex County, Agatha was one of few Mennonite woman drivers in Leamington. This had proved to be a lifesaver for her husband Nick several years earlier in Western Canada. When his appendix ruptured, Agatha was able to take Nick from Killarney to a Winnipeg hospital, a two-hour drive.

**Mary Hildebrand Janzen** got her driver's licence when she began working at Ludlam Lumber in Leamington in 1934. Acquiring a driver's licence in 1941 was fairly easy, **Eleanor Mathies** explains: When she turned 16, her father Abram took her to a Kingsville home, and a man there simply wrote out a licence for Eleanor.

**Alexander and son Bill Fischer** had an airplane ride in the early thirties. Wheatley, Ontario was celebrating a milestone and a farm owner with an old airplane made use of the occasion to sell rides. Alex Fischer had a field nearby and he and son Bill were offered a free ride if that hayfield could become a landing field for a few days. As it turned out, Bill and his dad were probably the first Essex-Kent County area Mennonites to get that high off the ground. Years later, **Alf Fischer** remembers his father talking about that old plane with its vibrations, loud noises, and loose, floppy wings. He and Bill never ever flew in any kind of airplane again. Alf said: "For Dad, that ride was probably more scary than leading 120 soldiers on horseback against the Bolsheviks in Russia!"



**Henry and Mika Barkovsky Neufeld** went on a trip to St. Catharines, Ontario in 1935 to visit their friends Peter and Liese Tiessen Janzen. They drove a 1927 Chrysler. Their preschool sons **Edward** and **Alfred** stood in the back for a good view of the road ahead. The trip took the better part of a day.

**Jacob and Anna Wiebe Gossen**, who lived on Pelee Island, were married in 1935 and in the summer of 1936, went on a honeymoon trip to Niagara Falls. The first day was spent crossing the lake on the SS Pelee to Leamington.

**John J. and Maria Mathies Dick** (parents of **John, Henry, Peter** and **Bill**) in 1937, went to visit relatives in Manitoba in their 1936 Plymouth. Passengers were **Peter Driedger** (father of John P.) and **Mrs. Jacob Mathies** (mother of Elizabeth Neufeld). Their friends, relatives, and acquaintances were impressed that Mr. Dick had found his way to and from Manitoba, a long trip in those days.

## High School Education

Few Essex-Kent Mennonites attended high school in the 1920s and 1930s. Exceptions were **Vera Hamm**, who attended Leamington High School's commercial class in 1927 with teacher Miss Mallory. Her brother **Nicholas Hamm** went to Leamington High from 1929-1934. **Jacob Hamm**, son of Peter and Amelia, graduated from Leamington High in 1943. **Mary Janzen Hildebrand** attended the same school from 1930 to 1934.

In 1937, **Reverend Jacob C. Neufeld** attended Gretna Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Manitoba where he took grades 9 and 10 in one year. In 1938, he took grade 11 and part of grade 12 in Wheatley Continuation School. The following year he returned, intending to finish, but stopped when he was needed on the home farm.

**Johanna Founk Schellenburg**, **John Willms** (uncle of John and Bill), **Hedy Klassen** (sister of Paul), **Peter Wiens** (brother of Mary Derksen), and **Jake Founk** (brother of George), all attended Leamington High School in the 1930s.

### Russian language nicknames and terms of endearment

Russian/Ukrainian nicknames continued to be used by the Mennonite people after they had immigrated to Canada, and some are used to this day. Thus Alexander became Sascha, Jacob: Jascha, John: Vanya, Nicholai: Kolya, Ben: Boris, Walter: Wolodja, Gerhard: Jahorka or Griesch, Peter: Petja, Katie: Katja, Anna: Annuschka or Nunya, Alexandra: Shura, Mary: Manya or Mascha, and so on.



## First University graduates: 1934 ... \*



**A**bram David Froese †  
son of David and Elizabeth, graduated from Medical School in Toronto in 1934. He first practiced upstairs on the corner of Talbot and Erie Streets, then moved to John Street in Leamington. Dr. Froese married Dr. Katharina Koch; their daughter Carol is a medical doctor in Hawaii.



**N**icholas Hamm  
son of Peter A. and Margarete, studied Mechanical Engineering in night classes at the Detroit Institute of Technology, USA. To earn tuition money, he worked at the Ford Motor Company in Windsor, Ontario. Nick graduated in 1947 and held a position at Canadian Bridge for many years.



**V**ictor Dyck  
son of Jacob and Katharina, received his degree from the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in Toronto in 1950. He practiced for 39 years, first at the corner of Erie and Foundry streets and later on Erie Street South. Victor married Barbara Moreland, they have four children.



**E**dgar Dyck †  
son of Jacob and Katharina, graduated from the University of Toronto in 1950, and continued his studies at Osgood Hall. Edgar was asked to join Harold Wilsons' practice in Leamington; later he had two lawyers join him in his own practice. Edgar married Marion Sharp, they have three children.



**J**acob Hamm  
son of Peter and Amelia, graduated from John Brown University in Arkansas in 1954. Several years later, Jacob was awarded a Doctor of Musical Arts degree, and taught at Western Washington University in Washington, DC. Jacob married Mildred Loewen; they have five sons.

\*Other individuals may have graduated during this time; we apologize for omissions.



## First farms and farming

Mennonite families, with some exceptions, either rented a farm or share-cropped in the 1920s and 1930s. This provided them with housing, and they could raise chickens, cows, pigs, and grow a garden. Several Essex-Kent Mennonite families, mentioned below, were able to purchase a farm as early as 1925.

Farms were often purchased from large land owners such as Dolph and Art Brown, a local family; Francis Gregory, who had come to this area when he was a young man; and George Cruikshank, from Ohio, USA. When the depression ended, and the travel debt was paid, and loved ones from Russia/Germany had been aided and sponsored, many Mennonite families were able to buy farms.

**John and Anna Warkentin Berg** bought a 20 acre farm with a nice house on Division Road near Concession 4 for \$4,500 in 1925. John worked at McCord Radiator in Windsor. They were particular people and it was said that their dairy barn was cleaner than most homes.

The **Reverend Nicholai and Helene Martens Schmidt** and **Warkentin** families together bought a 40 acre farm in 1926 for \$4,500; no down payment. Within three weeks' time, they had built a house on the property. Twelve year old Nicholas Hamm and eleven year old Jacob Janzen, with his sisters, got work there pulling weeds in the onion field for 10 cents per hour. **Johann and Anna Dick Martens** bought a farm on Concession 6 in 1926, where Jake and Darlene live today.

**Bill and Johanna Founk Schellenberg**, Highway #3, Leamington, bought a 50 acre farm for \$10,000 from Art and Dolph Brown. The Brown family owned Brown's Hotel and other property. The **Schellenberg** and **Jacob Thiessen** families bought land from the Brown family, as well.

Early in 1927, **Jacob and Klara Kornelsen** bought a farm on Concession 7 of Mersea Township. In Fall of that year, **Cornelius P. and Aganetha Neufeld** also bought a farm on Concession 7 of Mersea Township.

**Heinrich and Lena Warkentin Janzen**, parents of Mary Janzen Hildebrand, bought a 45 acre farm on Concession 6, Gosfield North, in March of 1928 from Russell Hickmott. The farm cost approximately \$3,400, plus they needed to pay the 1925-1928 tax arrears totaling \$119.44. They had first lived in a house with many mice on Concession 3. Father, mother, and children all worked and saved their wages from the time of their arrival in Leamington in 1926.

**Jacob and Maria Dick Koop** bought a 50 acre farm on Concession 6, Gosfield North Township in 1928. It cost \$7,500. **Peter and Agatha Neufeld Enns** bought a 98 acre farm in 1928 on the corner of Concession B where grandchildren Harold and Beverly now live. **Jacob and Mary Krahn Thiessen** bought the Morgan Brown farm on Highway #3, between Wheatley and Leamington in 1933. It already had electricity. A wood burning stove heated the living room. **Jake and Helen Thiessen Founk** bought a yellow sand tobacco farm on Highway #3 in the early 1930s, which was later purchased by son George and Helen.

Prior to their move to Eagle, Ontario, **John and Helen Dick Warkentin** lived on Concession 8, north of Leamington near Highway 77. They sold their farm to **John and Margaret Friesen Tiessen**. When the Warkentin family moved back to Essex County, they purchased the Coghill house on Kingsville's main street, across from where the Zehrs store stands today. Just behind the Warkentin home a large bear could be seen in a cage, which became a tourist attraction in the 1940s. Apparently the Coghills brought the cub home from the north many years earlier. House and bear are gone in 2005.



## Tractors and farm implements

Horses were used on farms until after WWII, when tractors came into use. For one- row cultivating however, horses were still used in the 1950s.

**Jacob Hamm Senior**, father of Herb and Jake, farmed on Oak Street East, Leamington. In 1936, he purchased a Farmall A tractor with rubber tires. **Jacob Thiessen** bought a rubber tired W12 International tractor in 1937. By the 1940s, the Thiessens had several tractors and did custom farm work. **Art Epp and Nick Schmidt**, among others, worked for them. **John P. Driedger, Senior**, bought an Allis Chalmers tractor with rubber tires in 1938 when they sharecropped at Art Browns. **John and George Krueger** bought an International Harvester C F12 in 1938. **Reverend Abram Rempel** bought a Farmall H in 1939 for \$800.

**Alexander Fischer and Nick Hildebrand** had used tractors provided by American Relief Aid, the pre-MCC organization, after the Revolution in Russia. These future brothers-in-law knew first hand what a difference a tractor made. And so it was that the Fischer's Wheatley farm soon had a used Fordson taking away some of the heavier jobs from the horses. That tractor was followed by a new 1935 IH McCormick F-12 and the first tractor mounted corn picker in the Essex-Kent area. Alex Fischer bought a thresher in approximately 1938. Many teenaged boys, including **Jake Flaming** and Joe Hickson, worked for him.

**Jacob and Agnes Dick Driedger** bought an Allis Chalmers tractor in 1937. **Jacob and Mary Krahn Thiessen** bought a W12 International in 1937. **Peter Tiessen**, father of Jake and Elvira, bought a disk, two furrow plough, and steel wheeled F12 International tractor all for \$1,000 in 1938. **Henry and Margaret Wiens Brown** bought a Farmall A in 1939. Crops and prices were good on Pelee Island in 1939, and as a result, **Ewald and Elizabeth Braun Wiebe** bought two Farmall Ms.

In 1941, **Jacob Gossen** of Pelee Island, expressed an interest in buying a Case two-row corn picker. The Leamington Case dealer sent a telegram to the Case Company in Racine, Wisconsin, USA, asking if he and a couple of farmers could tour their plant. The reply read: "Come to Wisconsin, we will entertain". Jacob accepted the invitation and took his brother-in-law **Ewald Wiebe** and the Leamington Case dealer to Racine in his 1941 Dodge. The following year, Jake planted and harvested 300 acres of corn on Pelee Island with his Case tractor, planter and corn picker. In order to work during the night, he installed lights from an old truck on his tractor.

**Jacob and Anna Toews Konrad** lived on a Gregory farm on the Albuna Townline, between Concessions 10 and 11, in the early 1940s. This farm was originally owned by a McCormick family. The grown Konrad children were Jake, John, Abe, George, Mary Konrad Janzen, and Cornelius. In 1947 **Jacob and Anna Wiebe Gossen** bought the farm.

A second Gregory farm, around the corner and about two miles west down Concession 11, on the north side of the road, had two houses. **Henry and Mary Barkovsky Neufeld**, with young children **Ed, Alf and Hilda**, lived in the small house. Later, **Herman and Helen Reimer with children John, Wanda, Lydia and Vern** moved into this house. Newly-weds **Henry and Tina Taves Enns** lived on the main floor of the large house. Newly-weds **Dick and Erna Driedger Enns** lived upstairs in the large house. These two couples each had one little child, namely **Vern** and **Rita**. In 1941 the farms' owner Francis Gregory bought a Massey Harris tractor to be shared by the Konrad, Neufeld and Enns families. Mr. Gregory owned shares in the Massey Harris factory in Brantford, Ontario.

**Alex Fischer**, in about 1939, purchased a new Farmall H on rubber tires and a two-row mounted cultivator. The F-12 was sold to the **Peter Derksen** family. Equipment at the Fischers' Chatham farm included a threshing machine and an Oliver 70 tractor and a two-row pull type corn picker. Custom harvesting for other farmers increased. Nevertheless, the idea of husking corn with a machine produced some skeptics. In order to prove that hand husking was not perfect either, Alex would pull into a field that had been done by hand and would soon have some corn that had been missed, in his wagon.



During the following years the Fischers continued to buy and exchange farm machinery. The 8 1/2 foot Massey Harris self-propelled combine arrived in 1948. Some years previously, a new Farmall M and a two-row mounted picker was purchased. In 1967 a new dryer and grain handling system was set up. A new Gleaner combine with a 4-20 inch corn header replaced the six year old IH with a 2-40 inch head.

## **Tobacco farming and tobacco factory work**

Before the 1930s, Essex County was known as the Tobacco Belt. Later, the Delhi area became known for its large tobacco acreage. The Essex and Kent area had many tobacco farms in the early years of Mennonite presence here. Three varieties of tobacco were grown, namely Flu, used for cigarettes, Burley, used for cigars, and Black, a heavy variety, also used for cigars. In the 1920s, the flu tobacco plant was split in two in the field, and cut off at the bottom leaf where the stalk was still intact. These plants were about three feet high. About six plants were hung upside down on each tobacco stick. The sticks were hung in kilns and cured for five days. The kilns were heated with gas, coal, or wood, depending on what was available to the farmer, up to 220 degrees fahrenheit. Steel barrels were used to make stoves. Regular tobacco was cured for four days, at 180 degrees. The Everett Jones farm, which **Ralph and Margaret Froese Tiessen** bought later, grew five acres of tobacco. Many Mennonite people worked there. It had two skating rinks in winter.

There were as many as 17 tobacco factories, which employed a large number of Mennonite immigrant men and women from December through May of each year.

The Kingsville area had a total of 15 tobacco factories, including **Canadian Tobacco Growers** in the 1920s, **Consolidated Leaf** which closed in 1966, **Erie Tobacco** closed in 1916, **Essex County Flue-Cured Tobacco** closed in the 1930s, **Hodge Tobacco** 1925-1969, **Inter-County Tobacco** in the 1930s, **Macdonald Leaf** from 1919-1973, **McLean Tobacco** in the 1930s, **Ontario Flue-cured Tobacco** 1957-1966, **Ontario Leaf** from 1926-1930s, **Pitts Wagle** 1904, **Ross** 1922-1942, and **Wilson and Bailey** in 1899.

Leamington's tobacco factories were **Imperial Tobacco** on Oak Street and the **Rock City Tobacco Factory** on Ivan Street.

**Agatha Enns Peters Schellenberg** remembers when her brothers worked at Hodges in Kingsville. They boarded with a Kingsville Mennonite family and slept four in a bed.

Smoking was not considered unusual or sinful by the Mennonites during their early years in Canada. After a Sunday morning church service, for instance, men would light up while they visited outside. Women did not smoke.

## **Poultry, cows, pigs**

**Alfred Fischer** remembers how turkeys were prepared in an assembly line way for a wholesaler from Chatham. "A huge, overweight man came to pick up his first order from us. He had arrived too early and decided that he should get something to eat. Father told him that Leamington, Kingsville, and Essex were all about the same distance away. He replied that he would like to see Kingsville, provided that it was a wet area". At the time Alf couldn't imagine why that mattered. He thought that the big guy was very hungry and extremely thirsty. When he returned, they piled the former back seat area and the car trunk high with turkeys. Some cash changed hands and he was on his way.



"For some time an incubator was kept in the house which was used for the hatching of various eggs. Dad thought of a way to make waterers for poultry using pails or barrels. The best customers in need of fresh eggs, milk, poultry, etc. were the American cottagers".

One day, Alf Fischer went along with his dad to deliver a strange order to the nicest place along the lake. It was owned by a Mr. Gross, a patent lawyer for General Motors. The large crowd present was there to celebrate their Thanksgiving. The main course was to be roasted whole pig, with the insides removed. After the container that Dad brought was placed on the large table, he removed the cover and there was the 50 plus pound porker. It looked quite natural with it's feet tucked under and a large apple showing between the teeth. That apple probably made for a worthwhile tip.

## Crops

**Herman Tiessen**, a graduate of the University of Guelph, developed what became known as the Guelph Tiessen strain of asparagus. Herman was the youngest child in the Gerhard Tiessen family. His siblings were Henry, Nick, George, Agatha, Mary, Margaret, Anna, Elizabeth, Helen, Jake, Peter, and Agnes.

James Grant of Cottam became an associate producer for the Funk Seed Company of Illinois. This corn proved to be far superior to the open pollinated corn that was grown previously.

Due to increased demand, the acreage of seed corn contracted to the James Grant and Son Seed Company also increased. In the early 1950s, a new Oliver 77 diesel tractor with a two row mounted corn picker was purchased by **Alex Fischer**. This tractor ran quietly and smoothly.

**Reverend Abram and Margaretha Rempel** were among the first to grow soy beans. **Peter and Maria Warkentin** and **Abram and Helena Barg** were the first families to grow celery.

**Margaret Driedger Braun** recalls that tobacco sold for 2 cents per pound when her family lived on Pelee Island in 1931. **Alf Fischer** remembers that corn sold for \$3 per bushel in 1941. This price was much the same as was offered for a very much larger crop in 2003. The big change was the huge rise in the cost of inputs during the ensuing 62 years.

## Greenhouses

**Abram and Helena Neufeld Barg** built their first 12 feet by 40 feet greenhouse in 1932. When the street-car track between Windsor and Leamington was torn up, Abram used the railroad ties to build his greenhouse foundation. Abram's first greenhouse crop was lettuce.

**Sigmund and Olga Goertzen Nickels**, who lived across from today's water tower in Leamington, pulled out the orchard on their 3 1/2 acre farm in 1938 and built two greenhouses. More were built a few years later until they had a total of 12 greenhouses.

**Jake and Anna Nickels Neufeld** built Lord and Burnham greenhouses in 1944 on their farm on the north side of Talbot West, near Fraser Road, Leamington. The Baergs, Nickels, and Neufelds all lived on the Ridge, Highway #3 to the west of Leamington. At that time, greenhouse seedlings were planted directly into the existing soil; good drainage was of utmost importance.



## **New buildings, telephones, indoor bathrooms, television**

**Abram and Helena Neufeld Barg** built a 24 by 26 foot home in 1928, located at the bottom of the ridge hill near Highway #3 on the Albuna Townline. The road went down the ridge hill at an angle, east of today's intersection, to accommodate horse-drawn vehicles.

When **Peter and Katharina Warkentin** moved from Reesor, Ontario, to Leamington in 1938, they lived on Erie Street South. Their daughter **Susie** married **Jake Hildebrand** in 1942; the young couple first lived in an apartment upstairs at the **Henry and Tina Fast Dick** home on Erie South. Here Susie babysat children **Walter and Peter Dick**. Susie remembers the January 1, 1944 snowstorm when a Greyhound bus got stuck near there, just across from the cemetery on Erie Street. When the Hildebrands moved to Hodgins Street in Leamington, they had **Jake Dick**, husband of **Anna Taves Dick**, install a bathroom in their home in 1949.

**Walodja and Annie Willms Unger** bought a nice house on a large lot in 1931 for \$1,200. They needed to pay \$100 annually plus 6% interest. It was paid for in five years. **Jacob and Anna Nickels Neufeld** had a white frame home built by Art Truax on Talbot West near Fraser Road of Leamington in 1943. Daughter **Eleanor Willms** remembers how the family moved into the garage first, and when Eleanor came down with measles, they quickly finished her new bedroom. **Jacob and Maria Dick Koop** built a white frame house next door to their original farm home on Concession 6, Gosfield North in 1947, 1 1/2 miles west of the Albuna townline. The builder was **Dietrich Dick**, their brother-in-law. **Gerhard and Mary Koop Thiessen** had a white frame home built on 209 Erie Street North in 1948 by Mary's Uncle Dietrich Dick. **John A. Dick**, of Dick's Grain, dug the basement with a regular tractor and scoop.

**The John Schroeder** family lived on Division Street South of Kingsville, Ontario, across the street from Sykes Funeral Home. In 1925 they already had an indoor bathroom, and a year later, they had a telephone installed. Because John Schroeder was a friend of **Reverend David Toews** of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, he had an opportunity to meet and converse with Prime Minister Mackenzie King. The Schroeder family later moved to Windsor.

**Henry Lepp** remembers that his parents, **Reverend Herman and Gertrude Unger Lepp**, had Peter Baerg of Leamington install a bathroom in their Harrow home in 1947. **Jacob and Mary Krahn Thiessen** hired **Peter Baerg and Sons** to install a bathroom in 1938.

**The telephone:** During the first years in Essex-Kent, not every Mennonite family had a telephone. In the event of an emergency, a neighbour's phone was used. A so-called party line consisted of five, six, or even more households. Each household had a special ring. For instance: one long ring, followed by one short ring, or perhaps one long, two short, and two long rings. Every individual on the party line heard and recognized these rings, and "listening in" was commonplace.

**John H. Dick** bought a radio in 1937 for \$16. The Dick family listened to many programs including gospel singer Ed McKeough who sang "Dear Lord forgive...", and "There were ninety and nine". **Abe and Mary Boschman Wiebe**, **Jacob and Mary Krahn Thiessen**, **Peter and Susie Koop Enns**, **John A. and Agatha Driedger Dick** were among the the first to buy TVs. **Reverend Jacob P. and Katharina Winter Penner** had a TV set installed by son Bruno in 1952. The **Ernie Neuman** family, who lived on McDonald Street of Kingsville, Ontario, bought a TV which had a seven inch screen.



## Are the Mennonite people farmers?

When a farming question was asked during the time this book was put together, often the son or daughter would say, "My dad was not a farmer at heart", or "Dad and Mom made a good living at farming, but they were not farmers by choice".

Historically, the **Flemish** Mennonites who lived in Flanders, located in the south of Holland, were craftspeople. The **Friesian** Mennonites, who lived in Friesland, the northern part of Holland, were farmers.

## Non-farmers

Sunday School teacher **Henry Thielman** and **Reverend David Derksen** operated a grocery store on Erie Street North in Leamington. They also had a traveling grocery business in about 1936, driving a pickup truck loaded with groceries from home to home. When the Henry Thielman family left Leamington, Reverend Derksen ran the grocery store alone.

**Jacob Dyck** - father of Victor and Edgar - owned and operated a grocery store on Erie Street North (near the Leamington Town Hall). Later a store was opened by Jacob Dyck on Mill Street, in the Wigle block, west of Erie Street. **Daniel Boschman** operated a second-hand store on Erie Street South, and later in the Wigle block on Mill Street. **Sigmund and Olga Goertzen Nickels** bought a small gas station across from today's water tower, shortly after their marriage in 1932. A few years later they built a larger gas station from a tobacco kiln. The station was sold to their relative Mike Miller in the 1940s.

**Henry Dick** opened Dixie Autoland on Talbot Street East in Wheatley in 1947, where he sold tools and auto accessories. **John Mathies** and **Jack Schellenberg** - brothers in law - operated M & S Cartage during the 1950s. They had two stake trucks and hauled gravel and manure locally. Later they trucked produce to Kirkland Lake, Sudbury and North Bay. Jack moved to PEI and then to Western Canada. **Peter Hildebrand** established a Volkswagon dealership next door to their home on Talbot Street West of Leamington, directly across from the Leamington Hospital in the 1950s.

## Wages and prices

In the 1920s, \$2.50 daily was the going wage for farmwork. Two years later, in 1926, **Jake Founk and Walodja Unger** earned between \$3 and \$4 daily at the H J Heinz Company in Leamington. In 1927, **Nick Hamm** and **Jake Janzen**, with siblings **Katie** and **Mary**, got 10 cents per hour weeding onions. In 1928, \$3 was paid for a 10 hour day on a tobacco farm.

The stock market crashed in 1929, and 25 cents would buy enough hamburger for a family meal. Cement construction workers got 80 cents per hour. Workers on early vegetable farms got \$2.50 per day, or 25 cents per hour. **Peter Riediger**, father of Harry, worked on a farm for \$3 per day. **Cornelius and Maria Wiebe Taves** share-cropped a Cruikshank farm on Pelee Island. They grew 35 acres of tobacco. The first four tons of tobacco sold for four cents per pound; the balance sold for two cents per pound. The oldest son, Neil, was sent to McCormick's store to pay the previous year's hardware and grocery bill. The tobacco money didn't quite cover the bill, so McCormick's said that they'd extend the charge for yet another year.



In the 1930s, 3 cents per basket was paid for picking tomatoes. High school students had Saturday jobs at grocery stores, working from 8 a m to 1 a m, a total of 17 hours. Two one- hour breaks were allowed; for this they received \$3. Farm work paid 10 cents per hour. Wedding rings could be purchased for \$6 apiece. In 1931 wages were \$2 per day.

In 1936, little rain fell, and flu tobacco dried up in the fields on the ridge area of Leamington. **John J. Dick** (father of John H) had sandy land on Concession 5, and their tobacco crop brought them an unheard of price of 36 cents per pound. In 1937 **John H. Dick** earned \$1 per day picking tomatoes in wire baskets at the Burns Wilkinson farm. By 1938, farm workers earned between \$25 and \$30 annually, including room and board. In 1940, farm work paid \$3 per day. **Peter Bartel** worked on the Morris farm when he was 16 and received \$4 per day. When he got older, his wages increased.

## **Bedbugs and mice: the plight of renters and sharecroppers**

Bedbugs are wingless, bloodsucking insects. Every renter and sharecropper in the early years needed to master the art of getting rid of these vile bugs. Sulfur fumes will kill bedbugs. This, however, was not very practical when there was a baby in the house. A temporary method was setting the bedposts into metal cans filled with kerosene. If a bedbug crawled up the can, it fell into the contents and drowned.

In spring of 1938, **Jacob and Anna Wiebe Gossen** had an opportunity to rent the Thomas McKee farm on Center Dyke Road of Pelee Island. They knew in advance that the house was infested with bedbugs. Jake and Anna's friends and relatives gave them helpful advice on how to rid the house of this common pest. Firstly, every leftover item from the previous occupants needed to be removed, after which the house was scoured. Then every room was wallpapered. In the 1930s, wallpaper was not pre-pasted. One mixed a pail of paste, laid the wallpaper strip back-side up, dipped a large brush into the paste pail, and spread the strip with paste. One started with the ceiling, overlapping the strips an inch or so, and extended them down onto the wall an inch or more. Then the walls were covered with wallpaper, again overlapping each strip. It was very important to cut the strips long enough to extend onto the tops of the baseboards. In this fashion, Jake and Anna won their battle with the bedbugs.

Getting rid of mice was easier, but come fall, a new crop would return. Every household had a good supply of mouse-traps. Setting up mousetraps baited with cheese or bacon in the evenings was standard procedure. Next morning before breakfast, children ran to check the traps. Sometimes one of the cats (house pets were unheard of) was called into the house to take care of the problem.

The **Reverend Gerhard and Katharina Enns Thiessen** household had a mouse trap with four openings, one on each side, where mice could be captured on a grand scale. Some mornings all four openings were occupied.





**Young friends from 1925/1926:** Agatha Barkovsky Krahm, Lydia, who lived with the Martens family, Mika Barkovsky Neufeld, Helene Unruh Toews, and Anna Toews Tiessen wearing a new wrist watch.

This photo was taken in a park near Wheatley at a Sunday afternoon *Jugendtreffen* (youth gathering).



**John and Anna Berg's first car on Kingsville's Main Street West in 1926.**

The photo above also offers a view of Abram A. and Elizabeth Heidebrecht Mathies' Kingsville apartment. Their second story living quarters consisted of two rooms, no running water, and no bathroom. The Mathies lived here from February 1926, until 1930. This apartment became daughter Eleanor's birthplace when Dr. McKenzie came for the delivery.





**The John Schroeders of Kingsville (later of Windsor), already had a car in 1926. Here they are visiting with their relatives, the Papkes (later of Harrow), at the Papke home at Point Pelee. Mrs. Schroeder can be seen in the black dress; their car is parked beside the house.**



**A group of little relatives get together at Broadwells Brickyard, Kingsville, Ontario: 1928**

On Abram A. Mathies' car running board we see Mary Berg Hildebrand with Irene Berg Langeman on her lap, Erna Mathies Klassen, Eleanor Mathies, Elizabeth Mathies Neufeld, Jake Mathies.

**Note:** car door opens from car front.





**1927 or 1928, Leamington:** The Peter Riedigers spudding tobacco. They are loading the horse-drawn wagon in the background.



**The Peter Riediger Harrow home, 1929:** Erna Hamm Willms, front; father Peter Riediger is chasing little Harry in the background.





**Priming tobacco on the Jacob Hamm farm:** The horse is pulling the tobacco boat. The bottom leaves ripen first and need to be picked first.



**Priming Tobacco on Jacob Hamm farm, 1930s.** Here we see Jacob Hamm, Olga Hamm, daughter Gertrude, and Agnes Dick Driedger.





**1930: Guests on back porch of John and Anna Warkentin Berg home.**

**Back, l to r:** Little Bernie Mathies with parents Aganetha Koop Mathies and David Mathies;

Abram and Helen Neufeld Barg, parents of Melita, Ernie, Wanda, and Selma;

Maria Mathies Janzen; hosts Anna Warkentin Berg and John Berg; Annie and Peter Zehr of Shakespeare, Ontario, who hosted the Bergs in 1924; Zehr's little daughter is standing in front of Annie; Abram A. Mathies; David Berg, brother of John and Abram; Jacob Mathies, father of Erna Klassen, Jake, Elizabeth Neufeld, and Hazel Adina Tiessen.

In front of Mr. Zehr is Elizabeth Warkentin Mathies, wife of Jacob A. Mathies

**Five children seated on top ledge, l to r:** Hazel Adina Mathies Tiessen; Angela Barg Schroeder;

Dr. Helmut Mathies, son of David and Anna, New Hamburg, Ontario; Wanda Barg; Peter and Annie Zehr's son.

**Left front on lower ledge:** Helen Janzen Goslin; Erika Mathies Dyck; Melita Barg Toews; Mary Berg Hildebrand; Grandmother Elizabeth Driedger Mathies: mother of Abram A., David and Jacob; Katherina Thiessen Berg, wife of David; Anna Mathies, wife of David; Grandmother Mathies.

**Front row:** Virginia Hamilton (visitor from Detroit); Elizabeth Heidebrecht Mathies, wife of Abram A; Eleanor Mathies; Elizabeth Mathies Neufeld.

**Two children sitting on lower right ledge:** Irene Berg Langeman; Selma Barg Bicum.

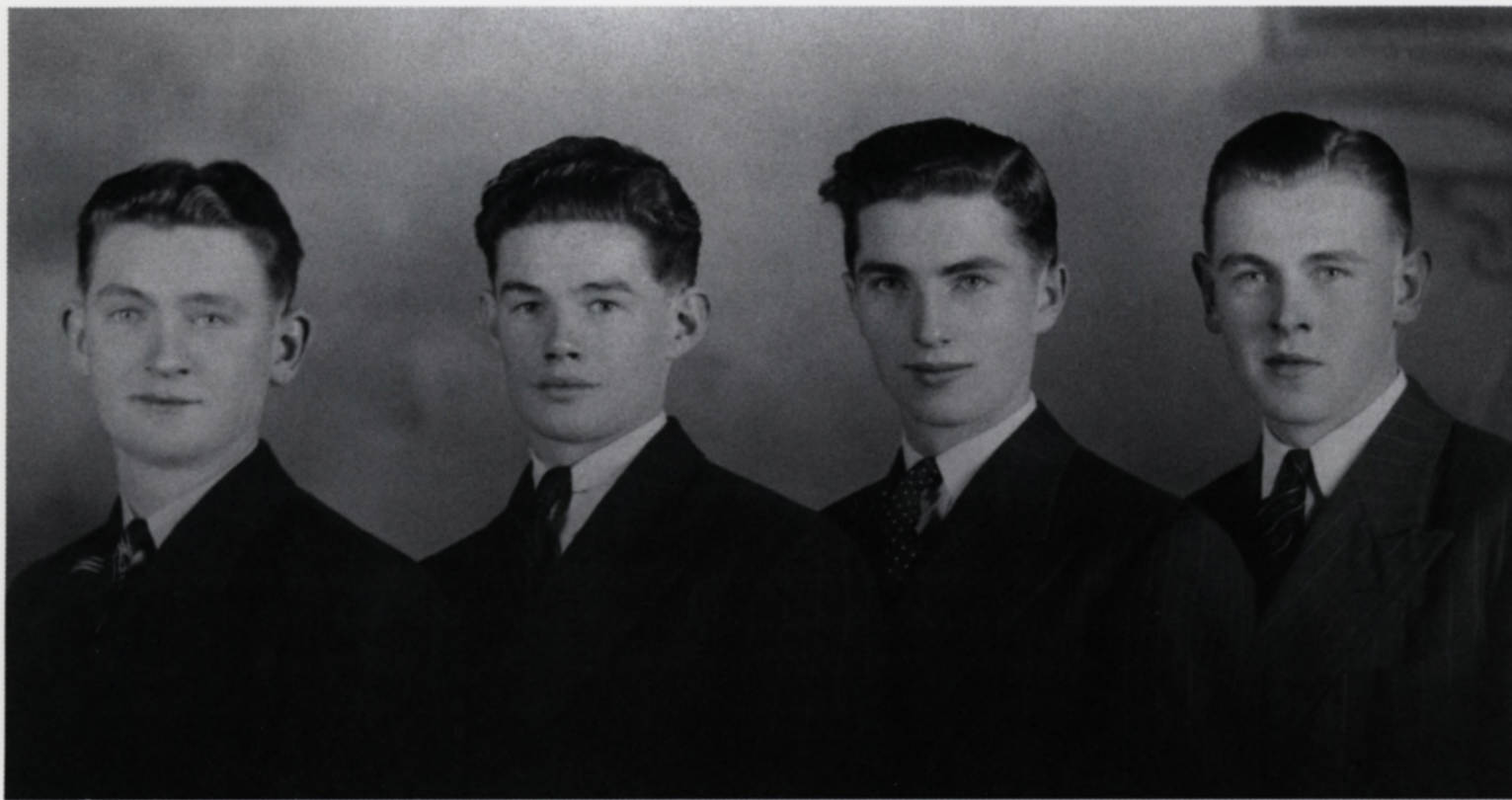
**Note:** Several Berg/Barg/Baerg family members keep in touch with their Zehr hosting family to this day.





**Present day Walter and Elfrieda Konrad Brown farm as it appeared in 1933:** one of many properties originally owned by Art and Dolph Brown, located on Highway #3 between Leamington and Wheatley. The Brown family originally lived on 13 Russell Street, Leamington, and had Leamington's first indoor bathroom installed shortly before 1900.





**Four good friends: 1941 photo.**

**L to r: Henry Dick**, born 1924 in Alexanderkrone, Russia. Worked on farms in summer, and in cities during the winter. Opened Community Auto Supply in Wheatley, and married Hilda Kornelsen in 1947. Opened Dixie Autoland in Leamington in 1959. After Hilda's death, Henry married Stephanie Koestler.

†**John Brown**, born 1923 in New York, Russia. Worked on farms during summers, and at Ernie Ducketts, Toronto Cannery and other factories in winter months. John married Dorothy Upcott and worked for Paul Klassen in sales. Later, he owned and operated the Oak Street Shell gas station.

†**George Founk**, born 1924 in New York, Russia, grew up on parents' farm on Highway #3. George, along with Jake Janzen, spent the WWII years in Alternative Service, planting trees on Vancouver Island. George married Helen Neufeld and they eventually bought the family farm.

†**Ernie Barg**, born 1923 in Schönfeld, Russia, was raised on his parents' farm at the bottom of the Ridge in Leamington. He operated the gas station on the Ridge and trucked. Ernie married Louise Neuman, worked for Ontario Hydro locally, then on the St. Lawrence Seaway, and in Corunna, Ontario.





**Alfred Arner, Senior, 1940:** Truck and wagon are loaded with hand-picked tomatoes for the Heinz Company. Alfred Arner, Senior, at the wheel, Nick, Peter and John Driedger on wagon behind. The Driedger siblings consisted of Jake, Peter, Nick, John, Abe, and Henry.





**Alfred Arner, Senior, farm house, Arner, Ontario, 1940: Home of Jacob N. and Maria Epp Driedger.**

**Youth gathering. Front, l to r: Agatha Driedger Dick with violin, Kaethe Driedger Warkentin with guitar, Jake J. Driedger.**

**Row 2: Mary Toews Regehr, Margaret Driedger Braun, Gertrude Enns Driedger, Margaret Cornies Walde, Anne Enns Driedger, Dick Walde, Pete Wiens, Henry Warkentin, Dave Cornies.**

**Row 3: Sally Cornies Epp, Kaethe Dick Warkentin, Anne Unrau Lypps, Agatha Dick, Agatha Driedger Neufeld, Cornie Driedger, Art Epp, John A. Dick, Jake Dick.**

**Row 4: Ruth Epp Wiens, John P. Driedger, George Konrad, Nick J. Driedger, John H. Dick, Pete Konrad.**

**The Arner House still stands in 2005 - about 1/2 mile east of Arner Post Office, on Highway #20.**





**Greenhouse glass repair, 1941:** Jacob Hamm Senior, Herb Hamm, Frank Toews



**1950s:** Hildebrand Motors Limited, one of early businesses owned and operated by a Leamington Mennonite. The Hildebrand home can be seen directly to the right on Talbot Street West.



## 2) from Prussia and Russia: 1947...

### Introduction

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*Reverend Henry Winter*

With the Dutch liner Volendam we 278 Mennonites, along with 1,800 other emigrants, left Rotterdam for Canada. On June 22, 1948, we arrived in Quebec. The Mennonites then traveled by train to relatives all over Canada. Our goal was father's brother David Winter in Hochstadt, near Altona, Manitoba. Because sister Lena with her husband Rudy had already arrived in Leamington in Christmas 1947, we detoured to visit them. We traveled by train from Toronto to Leamington for a week's stay before going on to Altona. We liked Leamington. Since we wanted to be together as a family we returned to Leamington already in November of 1948 and lived and worked on the farm of Frank Klassen. We also worked on other farms.

We were very poor when we arrived in Canada with few possessions and a travel debt of \$212 per person. In order to get entry permits the relatives first had to send sponsorship documents. When these were okayed by the officials, the relatives then had to prepay the travel costs. So we owed the travel debt to our relatives. Since my parents, my sister Kaethe and I were able to find work we were able to pay off our debts in the first year. Immigrants usually worked on farms or in households. Over time that changed. Some were able to buy farms or homes and get work in factories or other occupations.

We were pleasantly surprised to find out that it was possible to buy whatever groceries one wanted. A 100 pound bag of white flour cost \$5. Sugar, rice, oil, lard, sausage, meat, fruits and vegetables, everything was available. In Germany at that time food was still rationed and clothes and shoes were not available at all. This was also the case in the starvation years in Russia. Now here one could buy everything. For the first time in my life I was able to buy a new suit and new shoes here in Leamington.

Every time new immigrants arrived, they were warmly welcomed by Reverend N.N. Driedger and the whole congregation sang a song of welcome. Very soon the newcomers asked for membership in the congregation and after a short time were then kindly accepted as members. We arrived in November of 1948 and were accepted into the congregation on January 8, 1949. The language in the worship service and in Sunday School was German. So it was easy to fit in. Young people soon joined the choirs, went to baptismal classes and then were baptized. The children went to Sunday School. Very soon the newcomers were working as teachers in Sunday School and in German School. I was happy when Reverend J. C. Neufeld asked me to become a Sunday School teacher. For a time the two groups were "we" and "they", which was understandable. However, by the second generation, that of our children, there is only a "we". Church life was harmonious. We were very grateful for this congregation.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1951, the new Mennonite immigrants of Ontario celebrated with a big service of thanksgiving in the Niagara United Mennonite Church. "Let us come before God's presence with thanksgiving" was printed on the large banner, which we could see above the main entrance. A large number of us thanked God for His merciful guidance, thanked Canada for allowing us entry and our fellow Mennonites for their various acts of aid. The program and the sermons and speeches at this celebration were published in a memorial booklet by Reverend Peter Dirks. Among other issues, it also addressed the question of separated marriage partners, "When and where will I meet you again?". Locally we also had several celebrations of thanksgiving. There were the 10<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. At these events we always had prayers of petition for our fellow Mennonites in Russia, who had to endure great hardships.



Among us were a number of mothers who had come with their children; the men had been disenfranchised and taken prisoner in 1937-38 and had disappeared without any word from them. After fifty years it became known that they had been killed by the NKWD (political branch of the secret police) shortly after they were taken away. This was divulged after most of the women had died. Among these were Maria Berg, Katharina Unruh, Sara Bergman, Helene Mathies, Sara Gossen, Lena Klassen, Liese Harder, and others. Then there were those who had been separated during the war. John Janzen's family was in Russia. Then there were Sara Schmidt, Lena Froese, Maria Berg and others whose husbands were in Russia. For a long time prayers and efforts went into attempts to reunite them. Finally, after many years there was a reunion for Sara Schmidt and her children with husband and father, Jacob Schmidt. John Janzen's wife and son Jacob came shortly before he died, but son John and family came after his death. Eventually communication with Russia improved, so we were able to hear of the great needs there. Many packages were sent, especially by John Janzen, Justa Broll, and Marie Huebert. Food and clothing were a prime need.

When the English language started to infiltrate into the church services and Sunday School, we were not always in agreement. In Russia we had remained German for 150 years and some wanted the same here. However, conditions were different here. There we lived in closed villages with our own schools, but here we are in the midst of others. So the change to the English language came about because it was a necessity. We older ones are grateful that on Sundays there is still a German service.

In Russia we had the experience of having the Communists close our churches. As we fled from Russia, we had worship services in various locations. Here in Leamington there was already an established church and we were happy to attend it. In 1954 we built a second church on Concession 6. We all participated in this project, although we newcomers were still weak financially. In 1983-84 we built a new church building in Leamington. This was a labour of love, dedication and generosity. There were tensions that had also arisen in our congregation, but during this project we again became one heart and one soul. Today we are still grateful to God for this place of worship.

After Stalin's death the situation in Russia changed. In time, many of our fellow Mennonites were reunited with their families, under the unification policy, and were able to emigrate to Germany. Germany received them well and supported them generously. Now they have established large congregations there. In Russia, many of the Mennonites had joined Baptist congregations and so now our relatives are in both Baptist and Mennonite congregations in Germany. Many have visited their relatives, some have also come to visit us here. So we have gained some understanding of the difficult time during their banishment. We are amazed how they were able to survive on so little nourishment, but the bigger miracle is that their faith was not shipwrecked. Truly God answers prayer; yes, our God performs miracles!

In 1980 Communism collapsed in Russia. Now it is possible to visit our original villages, and many of our people have made this journey. They report that many villages were burned down and those that survived are very neglected. When we look at the pictures, we are doubly grateful that we here in Leamington, Canada, are able to celebrate our 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation. We thank God that He brought us to Canada like on wings of an eagle. It is a country where milk and honey flow. We give our Lord glory, praise, thanks and honour.

*Reverend Henry Winter, the writer, has served the Leamington United Mennonite Church as lay minister since 1955. He was elected by the congregation in May of 1955 and ordained in 1956. At the same time, he held the position of Sunday School superintendent for ten years from 1956 to 1966.*



*He was our leading minister for three years in the early 1980s. It has been a lifetime of total commitment to God's work and Henry gives God the glory for endowing him with the ability to do this. We, the congregation, in turn are very grateful for his dedication and longtime service.*

German - English translation by Gisela Schartner

## **F**irst arrival: Marie Reimer - not "Leaving on a jet plane..."

*The first Mennonite to arrive in Essex-Kent after WWII was Marie Reimer, who came on June 14, 1947. Following is an account of Marie's life, written by John Reimer, a loving nephew who lives in Cambridge, Ontario.*

Maria Reimer, our *Tante Mimi* (Aunt Mimi), is believed to be the first Mennonite refugee to arrive in Essex-Kent following World War II. I wonder if she would have embarked on this 8,000 km journey from Tiege, Russia, to Wheatley, Ontario, Canada had she realized what experiences lay ahead. Like so many other immigrants to the area, she left her homeland with very few belongings but with an abundance of faith and hope. Walking, riding, horse-drawn wagon, ox-cart, cattle train, steamship, passenger train and car took years, not hours, to reach her destination, and involved unimaginable difficulties and hardships.

Maria Reimer was born in Tiege, South Russia, on March 27, 1898. She was second eldest of four surviving children of Peter and Maria Thiessen Reimer. Maria was seven when her mother died. Her step-mother, Cornelia Huebert, cared for the four siblings, but also had an additional eight children with Peter. Maria spent much of her time helping raise the large family as they moved from Tiege to Schönau to Kleefeld to Neukirch and finally back to Schönau again.

Two of her siblings emigrated to Canada in the 1920s. Sister Margareta (Mrs. Herman Enns), arrived in Waterloo in 1924 and then moved to Buehler, Kansas, while her brother David and his wife Anna Wiensz Reimer settled in Kingsville in 1926. Hans, Maria's half-brother, married Liese (Elizabeth) Epp on October 30, 1937. His mother and the two unmarried siblings, Abe and Maria, moved in with the newlyweds. Between September 1941, and September 1943, the Russian government arrested most of the adult men remaining in the villages. Hans too, was sent to Siberia leaving Liese with a son and expecting their second child. Maria assumed the role of co-caretaker of the family in addition to milking eight cows, three to four times daily, on the collective farm.

In September 1943, Maria and Liese's extended family, along with thousands of other Mennonites, left Russia under the protection of the retreating German army. Using open cattle cars and horse-drawn wagons, they tried desperately to stay ahead of the advancing Russian army. With stops along the way in Alesandrovsk, Poland, Yugoslavia and refugee camps in Oelnitz, Warthegau and Muehlenberg (Germany), Maria finally reached safety in May 1945. Canada soon opened its border to various classes of immigrants, first to immediate family members and later to widowed families with young children. Under these Orders-in-Council, David Reimer, Maria's brother in Kingsville, was able to sponsor her and she arrived in Canada on June 14, 1947, joining her brother's family on a farm owned by Wilbur Wagle on Concession 4 of Gosfield Township. Distance and lack of transportation prevented frequent trips to the Leamington Mennonite church, therefore the family attended the Kingsville Baptist Church.

October 17, 1947, Liese and her family also arrived in Canada. In the spring of 1948, Liese purchased a small house and had it moved to the farm of her uncle Jacob Epp on Highway #3 between Leamington and Wheatley. Maria moved in to help with the two children. In addition to working on farms owned by Frank Klassen and George Konrad, she did the majority of cooking, baking and housework while Liese worked night shifts at Omstead Fisheries. Her stories of life in Russia, her recital of long German poems, her sense of humour, keen insight and hearty but questionably nutritious meals will long be remembered.



Maria was a very religious person in a quiet, private way. Although she periodically attended the Leamington United Mennonite Church, she never became a member. Her earthly journey ended on December 7, 1984, at age 85. Her final resting place was at the Evergreen Memorial Park Cemetery in Leamington, Ontario, a long way from Tiege, South Russia.

## **F**irst baby: Henry Jacob Dyck, born October 31, 1948



Henry Dyck was born October 31, 1948, in Hopewell Hospital, Russell Street, Leamington, Ontario, and weighed seven pounds at birth. His parents, Helen and Rudy, had been sponsored by their cousins, the Founks, and lived on the Wolodja and Anna Unger farm. When Baby Henry contracted whooping cough shortly after his birth, Mother Helen and he needed to spend two weeks in the hospital.

Today, Henry and his wife Sandra Woelk Dyck live in Kingsville. They have three sons: twins Rudy and Richard, and Henry Junior, who are all married and have children of their own.

## **F**irst wedding: Ben Dyck and Johanna Peters, November 27, 1948

Ben Dyck and Johanna Peters were married November 27, 1948. Reverend Nicholas N. Driedger officiated in the white frame United Mennonite Church on Oak Street in Leamington. The large west wing expansion was underway at that time. As a result, a tarpaulin covered the opening in the church's west wall.

Johanna had been employed at the Boese Factory in St. Catharines, Ontario. Here she had purchased her wedding gown in the Eaton's Store for \$25.

The young couple first lived on the Marshal Wigle farm in Ruthven. At that time, Cornie and Anne Driedger worked that farm on shares. Ben and Johanna lived in a converted tobacco kiln on Highway #3. After two years, Cornie and Anne moved to Highway 77. Now Ben and Johanna moved into Cornie and Anne's white house and worked the Wigle farm on shares. Four years later, Ben and Johanna purchased a farm on Highway #18 (now Highway 20). Here they operated 1/3 acre of greenhouses on a seven acre farm. On this farm they raised their family and spent 28 happy years.



**Ben and Johanna Dyck**



## First Funeral: Justina Wiens Froese, 1880 - 1950



Justina was born April 14, 1880, in Franzfeld, Russia, and died of breast cancer on May 27, 1950, in Leamington, Ontario. The funeral took place in the Leamington United Mennonite Church on Oak Street. Justina was buried in the Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, just west of Leamington, Ontario.

Jacob and Justina Wiens Froese had arrived in Leamington on December 14, 1947. They were sponsored by Jacob's brother, Dietrich and Maria Froese. Justina and Jacob lived in a house in Dietrich and Maria's back yard on Hodgins Street.

1948 photo of Justina Froese



**Funeral of Justina Wiens Froese, May 27, 1950, surrounded by the immediate family at their residence on Hodgins Street in Leamington. Little Peter Froese at head of coffin.**

**From top left:** Jake Froese, Helene Froese, Katharina and Peter Froese, Abe Froese, Jake Froese, Grandfather Jacob Froese, Harry Friesen, Elsa Friesen, Jessie Froese, Justina Froese, Helen Froese, John Froese, and Henry Froese. Above photo shows black armbands on the men's suit sleeves, a custom of that time. These armbands were worn for several weeks after the death of a family member.



## First University graduates: 1958 ...\*



### **H**enry Gossen

Born in 1929, Henry attended UMEI, after which he studied at Waterloo Lutheran University. Henry graduated in 1958, and taught History in the Preston, Ontario High School. Here he became head of the history department, then vice-principal. In 1982, Henry became principal at the Elmira, Ontario, high school. Henry married Margaret Klassen, they have three children. Henry died in 2004.



### **G**eorge Hildebrandt

Born in 1934, George attended LDSS, followed by the University of Toronto for four years. He graduated with a degree in Engineering in 1959. After working at H J Heinz in Leamington for a short time, then at Ontario Hydro, George taught Electrical Theory at the W.D. Lowe Technical School in Windsor. W.D. Lowe became a High School several years later. George is married to Irma Hildebrandt; they have four children.



### **H**enry Hildebrandt

Born in 1940, Henry attended Leamington District Secondary School, followed by the University of Toronto. He graduated with a degree in Mathematics and Sciences in 1963. Henry taught at the Welland Eastdale high school for two years. After his move to Leamington, he taught mathematics at Leamington District Secondary School. Henry is married to Betty Thiessen; they have three children.



### **I**rwin Schmidt

Born in 1938, Irwin attended Leamington District Secondary School, followed by the University of Guelph. He graduated with a Science in Agriculture degree in 1964. Irwin is employed in London, Ontario at United Agriculture Products in Development and Registration for fertilizer and pesticides. Irwin is married to Joan Mills; they have three children. The Schmidts have lived in London for 28 years.

- Other individuals may well have graduated during this time period; we apologize for any omissions.



# 1948: My First Canadian Christmas

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*Johanna Peters Dyck*

On our first Canadian Christmas my feelings were very mixed, if not mixed up. In one way, I was happy to be with Ben (we had married in November), and after six months of separation from my parents we picked them up in Windsor just a few days before Christmas. My mother had to stay in a six month quarantine because of scars in her eyes and I came here alone. So we had a family Christmas, safely in Canada, and this was a reason to be very thankful!

But, on the other hand, I was very miserable - my first batch of cookies had turned out to be a disaster - instead of baking powder, I had used baking soda. I had gotten the recipe from the Fransen sisters while working at Boese Foods in Port Dalhousie, before coming to Leamington to marry Ben. The cookies were called "Baking powder cookies", so that must have been one of the main ingredients. Coming out of the oven, they looked very nice - yellowish green in colour, but after my first bite, I knew that I had done something terribly wrong. My mouth almost began to foam, and not even Schellenbergs' chickens liked to pick at them. I was an unhappy bride. Everything wasted. I never tried to bake those cookies again, even now, when I understand English.

Now, bread must have been one of the things we "newcomers" could not get enough of, because Ben tells me that when he, his Uncle David and brother Rudy and his family came to Canada shortly before Christmas of 1947, his Uncle Jacob Founk (his sponsor), bought bread by the crate and the breadman had the best time bringing in loaf after loaf after loaf. When Rudy told Uncle Jasch not to buy white bread, that they would be happy even with brown, Uncle Jasch said brown bread was more expensive than white.

With four more mouths to feed in the Founk household that Christmas season of 1947, more than just bread was bought in bulk. Walnuts, for instance, were purchased by the bag.

Yes, it must have been hard for our good sponsors to fill us up; we were so *ausgehungert* (starved) from all the years of being close to starvation. To this day, it is hard for me to throw away anything that can be saved for another meal, even it is something on someone else's plate!

How fortunate for us to live in a land of plenty. Let's not waste any food! Are we thankful enough for what we have?

## Reverend Henry Winter's memories of Christmas, 1948

My memories of my first Christmas in Canada, are of living on the **Frank Klassen** farm. Mr. Klassen brought us a big basket of oranges and **Nikolai Tiessen**, father of Ralph, brought us two large roosters. We went to church in a crowded Model A Ford, and felt very well-to-do.

## Early homes

### 88 Victoria South in Leamington: the Henry Wienses'

The Wienses' original white frame house, and the smaller frame house located at the back of the lot, still stand in 2005. The small home's first tenants were **Maria Janzen Wiebe** with daughter **Elvira**, Maria's sister **Edith Berg**, and mother **Anna Berg**. When Edith's tonsils needed to come out, **Doctor Froese** came to the Wiens home and removed them on the kitchen table. Secondly, **Martha Baer Gossen** with daughters **Elfrieda**, **Emilie** and **Nellie** lived there. Next, **Mrs. Bergman**, her son **Frank**, and her sister **Justa Rempel** rented the home. In 1980, **George and Betty Konrad** bought both homes on the lot to provide residences for two Laotian families.



**Jacob Stua (store) Dyck** owned a piece of property on Oak Street West in the 1940s and 1950s, with three buildings on it. This property was located east of the old HiY building on Oak Street, and behind where McDonalds restaurant is today. The upstairs of the two-story converted kiln was rented by **Elizabeth Harder** and children **Jake** and **Herta**. **Helen Froese** with children **Jake** and **Jessie** lived downstairs, followed by **Mrs. Nass** and her daughter **Sigrid**. A chicken coop just behind the first building was converted into apartments. Here **Frank and Elfriede Neufeld** lived with their children **Elsie, Katie, Adina** and **Betty**. Another house on that property was occupied by **Mary Thun** and her children **Agatha** and **Jake**.

In the 1950s, a nice house could be purchased for \$10,000. **Katharina Loewen**, and her daughters, **Kaethe Cornies** and **Margaret Schachowskoj**, along with her father **Mr. Friesen** and sister-in-law, **Agatha Loewen**, purchased the first house, located on Oak Street. Agatha lived in a small house on the same lot.

In the early 1950s, **Katharina Unruh** and her daughters paid \$5,800 for a house on White Street, Leamington. **Ältester Heinrich** and **Katharina Winter** bought their farm for \$16,000 in 1952.

**Helen Rempel Matthies** and sons **Abe, Edmund** and **Alfred** bought a well-built home on Wilkinson Drive in 1953. The total price was \$9,000; they paid \$3,000 down. At that time they worked part of the Concession 1 **Wolodja Unger** farm on shares. They also worked for **Nick and Margaret Driedger** one year.

The group of **Mennonites** who came to **Essex-Kent** in and after 1947 was received into the established Mennonite Churches when they arrived. As a result, the Harrow Mennonite, the Leamington Mennonite Brethren (now Meadow Brook Fellowship), and the Leamington United Mennonite churches were fortunate to gain many new members. In the next few years, several church building expansions took place, as a result.

## Wages and Prices

### Late 1940s

Ten cents for a loaf of Canada bread. Some bread sold for 11 cents; one loaf per day was often eaten by each person. It was spread with lard which could be purchased at the A&P, located on the corner of Talbot and Queen Streets of Leamington, at 10 cents for two pounds.

### The 1950s

Farmwork in Harrow paid about 50 cents hourly. The Winter family's first places of employment were on the farms of **Frank Klassen, Jacob Founk** and **Henry Epp**. Other places of work included Matiers' sawmill in Wheatley, the farms of Marsh Wigle, **Peter Schroeder**, the CPR and General Motors in Windsor. Workers at Ford in Windsor were paid about \$50 to \$60 weekly.

The **Wallmans** bought a house in Windsor for \$5,000 in 1950. Elementary School teachers were paid about \$2,000 annually. A loaf of bread could be purchased for 12 cents.

**Jake Lehn** was a milkman for Jersey Dairy. During the mid-to-late 1950s, a one-quart glass bottle of homogenized milk, delivered to the house door, sold for 22 cents. Skim milk sold for 12 cents per quart, and chocolate milk for 24 cents.



## Cars

Rudy Dyck paid \$100 for a Model A Ford. Henry Winter paid \$560 for a 1936 Pontiac. The Matthies brothers, Alfred, Edmund and Abe bought a new 1950 Chevrolet at Wigle Motors in Leamington in 1950. They paid \$2,300 and some people said that they would never pay for that car, but they did! Their wages on the farm at that time were 50 cents per hour.

## The 1960s

By 1960 wages had risen to \$3.05 per hour.

## Youth gatherings

The youth group of the new immigrants often gathered at the Loewens for visits and once practiced a play for a theatre production, namely *Der Dornenkranz Einer Mutter* (The Crown of Thorns of a Mother). This play was performed at the UMEI and also for the Niagara congregation. The proceeds from the offering were donated to MCC in Paraguay.



**The Winter family at the home of Ältester Heinrich and Katharina Winter**

On the former Wigle farm. ca 1960

**Back, L to r:** Peter Winter from Winnipeg, Rudy Dyck, Ältester Heinrich Winter, Peter Klassen.

**Row 2:** Luise Dyck Taves, Henry Dyck, Helen Winter Dyck, Annie Unrau Winter, Anna Winter, Katharina Winter, Kathe Winter Klassen, Katharina Unrau.

**Front:** Rudy Dyck, Frank Klassen, Walter Dyck, Frieda Winter Lepp, John Klassen, Victor Winter, Linda Winter Dueck.





**A Sunday afternoon in 1948 on the Wolodja Unger farm.** On the left we see Helen Winter Dyck with little Luise. To the right is Rudy Dyck, and in front is Uncle David Founk.



### 3) from Latin America: 1958...

#### Introduction

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*Marvin Dueck*

**T**he journey of the Low German Mennonites who moved to Essex and Chatham-Kent from Latin America, mainly Mexico, is a story of migrations. In the 1870s, their foreparents moved from Russia to Canada. They settled in Western Canada in an attempt to escape the influence of the secular world on their society. In Canada, they were promised the freedom to operate their own schools as well as exemption from military service. In 1922, approximately 6,000 Mennonites left Manitoba and Saskatchewan, destined for Mexico. They left in response to the gradual erosion of the educational freedoms they had been promised by the federal government when they first immigrated to Canada. In Mexico they once again turned large tracts of land into productive farm land.

Migrations such as the 1870s migration to Canada and 1920s migration to Mexico were **controlled** migrations. They were organized and led by church and community leaders. The migration from Mexico back to Canada has been **uncontrolled**. As a result of drought and poor economic circumstances in Mexico, thousands of Low German Mennonite families decided to return to Canada. This migration shifted from a trickle to stream in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of devaluation of the Mexican peso, the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the broader impact of globalization on the Mexican farm economy.

Low German Mennonites are entitled to Canadian citizenship through their foreparents. They began moving to Essex and Chatham-Kent in the late 1950s where they found ready work as agricultural workers needed to harvest the summer vegetable crop.

*The writer was born in Leamington and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church. Marvin speaks Low German, High German, English and Spanish.*

#### **Spanish nicknames or terms of endearment**

The Low German Mennonites, whose ancestors would have had Russian nicknames, replaced them with their Spanish equivalents when they moved from Canada to Latin America. For example, Peter became Pedro, Frank: Pancho, Wilhelm: Guillermo, Henry: Enrique, Dietrich: Isidro, and so on.

#### **F**irst arrivals: the Fehrs and Friesens in 1958

a) **Jacob and Margaret Boese Fehr family** moved from Mexico to Leamington in 1958. They were both Canadian born: Jacob in Regina, Saskatchewan, and Margaret in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. The Boese and Fehr families had moved to Mexico when their children were young. Here Jacob Fehr and Margaret Boese met and married. They moved to Leamington, Ontario, where Jacob worked in greenhouses on a Neufeld farm.

Jacob and Margaret Boese Fehr have both died. Their daughter Anna Fehr Neufeld, who was born in 1961, remembers when their family lived on the **Abe and Helga Driedger** farm on Concession 7 of Mersea Township in the mid 1960s. The Fehrs had nine children, the youngest four were born in Leamington. Anna and her husband Wilhelm are members of the Kingsville Old Colony Church.



**b) George and Nettie Friesen Friesen family** came to the Leamington area in 1958. George was born in Saskatchewan, and later moved to Mexico with his parents. When he and Nettie, along with their children, came to Leamington, George worked on the **Wolodja and Anna Willms Unger** farm on Concession 1 of Mersea Township. George died in 1976. The funeral was held from the United Mennonite Church on Oak Street of Leamington. Their EMMC church building was then not large enough to accommodate the guests.

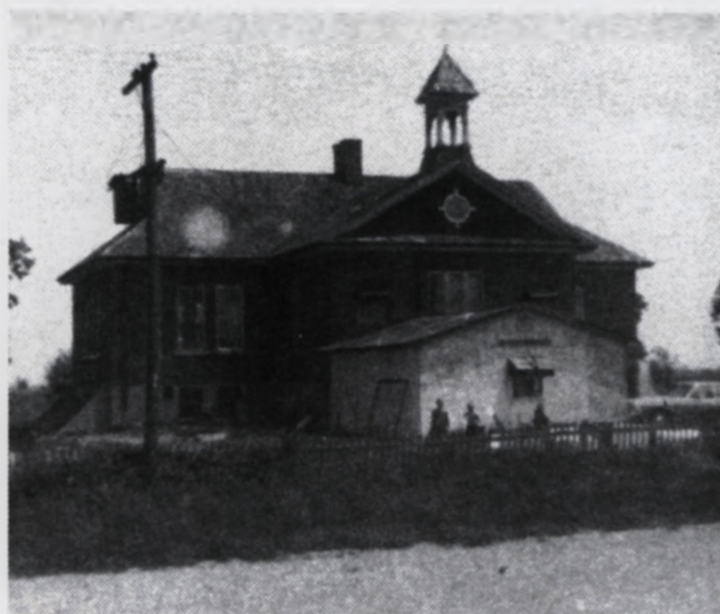
Nettie Friesen was born in Mexico; her parents were both born in Saskatchewan. While in Saskatchewan, they were able to live very comfortably. When they moved to Mexico, however, the family had difficulty making ends meet. George and Nettie had 11 children: six in the Essex-Kent area, two in Manitoba, and one in Texas. Eight grandchildren and 27 great grandchildren complete the family.

Nettie is a member of the Meadow Brook Fellowship in Leamington, Ontario.

## **F**irst funeral: Heinrich Teichroeb, June 25, 1966

Heinrich Teichroeb was born November 30, 1965 and died the following year on June 25, 1966. The funeral was held at the Gillies funeral home in Wheatley, Ontario.

## **F**irst Wedding: Aganetha Klassen and Henry Neudorf: 1967



The first Old Colony Church building in Essex-Kent

The wedding service, according to Old Colony custom, took place directly following the Sunday morning worship service on July 23, 1967. Early in 1967, the Old Colony congregation had renovated a vacant public school near Coatsworth, Ontario in which they worshipped and where the wedding was held. **Reverend Peter Driedger** of Aylmer, Ontario, officiated. The wedding meal was held at the Klassen home on Concession 8, near Blytheswood. The Neudorfs now live in the state of Texas, USA. Some time later, **John and Tina Wiebe** bought this property, built a new house next door, and tore the schoolhouse down.

## **F**irst baby: Abram Fehr, born February 15, 1959

Abe Fehr was born February 15, 1959, in Chatham Hospital. He is a son of the late Jacob and Margaret Fehr. Abe lives in Western Canada today.





**October, 1959: Jacob and Margaret Fehr with little Abe and their first car, a 1949 Dodge panel.**



**1960: L to r: Frank, David, Jacob, Henry, Margaret holding one-year old Abe, Peter.**



## First University Graduates: 1996 ... \*



### **A**gatha Knelsen

was born in 1969 in Leamington, Ontario and attended Tilbury High School. After several years of study at the University of Ottawa, Agatha taught at the Wheatley Old Colony School. Agatha resumed her studies at the University of Windsor, graduating in 1996. Today she is head of Costume Design at the University of Windsor. Agatha is a member of Reinland Mennonite Church in Coatsworth, Ontario.



### **S**usan Fehr

attended Leamington District Secondary School followed by the University of Windsor. She graduated with an Honours Bachelor of Commerce degree in 1999. Susan accepted a position at Windsor Cypher Systems Group where she works in Accounts Payable. She is a daughter of the late Isaac and Helena Fehr of Leamington. Susan, a member of Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington, has two sisters and eight brothers.



### **H**elen Hiebert Bergen

was born in Leamington, Ontario in 1973. She attended Leamington District Secondary School, followed by the University of Guelph and graduated in 1999 with a degree in Plant Management. In 2004, Helen returned to school and graduated from the University of Windsor with a degree in Nursing. George and Helen are the parents of two children. They are members of Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington.

\* Other individuals may well have graduated during this time; we apologize for any omissions.



## First locations of worship: Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church

We had no church in this area when we came, but we held prayer meetings in a white frame house. It was located on Highway #3 beside Coulter's garage. Five or six families met there. Our services took place on Sunday evenings or during the week, depending when **Pastor Jacob Wiebe** from Aylmer could come.

In 1966 **Cornelius Giesbrecht** bought the public school building on the Coatsworth Side Road. The Giesbrecht family lived in half of it and we renovated the other half into a church. By this time, there were two pastors who came from Aylmer to preach in Wheatley.

In 1967, we bought property from a Claus family north of Wheatley on the Wheatley-Tilbury Townline. The house had burned down, but there was a garage still standing. We fixed up the garage for our meeting place. By this time, about 30 families came to the services. By 1970, the number of Mennonite people in the Wheatley area from Latin America had increased greatly. As a result, we built a new white frame church on the same property. In the 1980s we added indoor washrooms. By 1985, the Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church had a regular attendance of 150 families or more.

Today, in 2005, we have between 600 and 700 attending the Sunday morning services. And the garage we met in many years ago is now used for Sunday School classes.

*Excerpts of this article, written by Peter Dyck, WOC pastor, first appeared in Memories. Sixty Years of Mennonite Life in Essex and Kent Counties, 1925-1985.*

## The Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church

The story of the Leamington EMMC begins in 1967, when **Reverend I. P. Friesen and Henry Peters** were invited by **Peter Harder** to conduct revival meetings in Leamington. The spiritual hunger kindled by this event inspired **Reverend Dave Friesen** from Aylmer to begin holding Sunday afternoon services in the homes of those families who were interested.

By the next year, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference realized they would need someone to take on the position of a full-time pastor for the growing congregation. **Reverend Jake Hoepfner** was asked to fill this position, and Sunday morning services were held in the United Mennonite Educational Institute. Two years later, in the summer of 1970, the church held their first baptismal service and gained its first eight members.

In 1971, the congregation was able to build its own church building, with the help of the EMM Conference and some local churches, which is the part of the structure still used today. At that time, the pastorship also changed over to **Gordon and Mary Brown**, and they served for four years. Through the next two decades, a number of couples have taken this role: **John and Tina Driedger, Corney and Helen Martens, John and Helena Bergman, and Dave and Gladys Penner**, consecutively. In 1972 **George Konrad** from the North Leamington United Mennonite Church was invited to direct the choir. He ended up serving the church in the area of music and church board for fourteen years. As the church grew, the need for deacons developed, and in 1980 **John and Sara Friesen** and **Bill and Tina Giesbrecht** were elected to the position. The following year, five men were elected as pulpit assistants to help deliver messages on Sunday mornings, as the need for messages in two languages grew.



Until 1979 the services were conducted in Low German. As English has played an increasingly important role in the lives of members of the congregation, the church has recognized the need to make gradual additions to meet their changing needs. In order to accommodate both those who profit from a German and an English service, in 1987 the format of Sunday morning services was changed: two separate services were held in the German and English languages, and Sunday School classes were held during the German service.

The church's first ministerial election took place in 1982, when **Bill Wiebe** was elected. He and his wife Tina attended Bible College together and graduated three years later. As the church continued to grow, the need to build on to the structure increased dramatically, and so in 1984 it was doubled in size. A few years later, a Christian Education Board was implemented, and soon after a Mission Board, as well. Now the church was fit to take on the exciting task of dispatching missionaries. **John and Maria Klassen** were the first to take part, and they went to Bolivia in 1987. In 1988, Bill and Tina Wiebe with their two young boys, were sent to Durango, Mexico. Since then, a number of people have had the opportunity to go out into the world to serve: **Mary Dyck** (now Klassen), served in China for two one-year terms, and numerous groups continue to go on short mission projects today. Presently, in 2005, **Isaac and Sara Unger** are serving in Bolivia.

Through the years, the constantly growing congregation has experienced frustrating setbacks, as well as joyous development. In January of 1994, a fire broke out which caused extensive damage to the building, leaving it unfit for activities. While it was being restored, services were held at UMEI. That year, however, the church had grown enough to require hiring its first full-time youth pastor, **Anthony Reimer**. In 2002, three more ministers were elected by the congregation who continue to serve to this day, **Isaac Unger, Jake Bergen, and Willy Janzen**.

That same year, the need for the church to be further expanded was recognized again. This time, more land was purchased, and in 2004 a major building project of 8,792 square feet was completed. The dedication service was held on October 31, 2004. Our vision is to build a new sanctuary in the future.

Today, the church is being served by **Reverend Bill Wiebe** as senior pastor, and **Ike Unger** as youth pastor. Both are going into their seventh year in these positions. The main governing teams are a seven-member Church Council, a seven-member Deacon Team, a six-member Elder Board and a six-member Ministerial Team. The church consists of many young families, allowing there to be many children participating in Sunday School and Boys and Girls Club. The youth ministry consists of a Junior Youth, Senior Youth, and Young Adults group. Sunday worship continues to consist of one Low German and one English service.

In 2004, when the congregation took on its new structure, it also adopted a new constitution. Its mission statement is: "Being a caring community, sharing the gospel, worshipping God and teaching people to be Biblical thinkers and disciples."

*Kathleen Friesen*





**The Leamington EMMC:** 1408 Deer Run Road, Leamington, Ontario, 3.5 km East of the town of Leamington.

## **The New Reinland Mennonite Church**

In July of 1983, **Bishop Cornelius Quiring** left the Old Colony Church to establish what is today known as the New Reinland Mennonite Church. He served two groups, a congregation in the Aylmer area and one near Wheatley. As he was the only minister, he served the Wheatley group on Sunday mornings and the Aylmer group on Sunday afternoons. A deacon and more ministerial personnel were added to this group by an election in July, 1984.

For the first one and a half years the congregation in the Wheatley area gathered in the auditorium of the East Mersea School, and the group in Aylmer met at the Sommers Corner School. The opportunity arose for them to purchase a building on Concession 6 Wheatley, which at that time consisted of a duplex and a classroom for disabled children. On December 6, 1984, they held their first meeting in this building. After remodeling one end of the building, a group of approximately 50 adults gathered for their first worship services in the new facility on December 9, 1984.

After about 10 or 12 years, **Bishop Quiring** was beginning to experience health problems, upon which he requested help from **Bishop Willie Thiessen** from Manitoba. In July, 1996, Willie and Sara Thiessen came to serve this congregation. At that time the attendance had dwindled down to 20 - 30 people. **Jacob and Tina Ketler** were elected to do the work of a deacon couple in 2001. As of January 2005, the membership has risen to 207 baptized members.

The congregation is at this time planning to expand the facilities, namely a new sanctuary with a seating capacity of 500 people.

**“But we preach Christ crucified...” 1 Corinthians 1:23a.**

It is our prayer that souls will come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and find peace and purpose for their lives.

*Sara Thiessen*





**New Reinland Mennonite Church leadership:**

**L to r:** Jake and Tina Ketler, Sara and Bishop Willie Thiessen.



# CHAPTER

## TWO

*1925 - 1945*



# 1) My Memories of John and Anna Berg

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*Irene Berg Langeman*

**M**y uncle and aunt, John and Anna Warkentin Berg, emigrated to Canada from Russia in 1924 arriving in Halifax in July. After spending a cold winter in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, they settled down in the Kingsville area where they bought a farm on Division Road with a down payment of \$100.

Anna was born on September 26, 1897, in Orloff, Taurien, Molotschna, in Southern Russia. Her parents were Jacob and Katherine Enns Warkentin. She was the oldest of eight children, and married John Berg in 1918. They established their first home in Schönbrunn, then moved to Gnadental.

John was born on September 16, 1887 in the village of Schönbrunn. He was the son of John and Elizabeth Mathies Berg. He had two brothers, David and Abram, and two sisters who died in infancy. When his father died at age 47, John took on the responsibilities of caring for his mother and the estate. In 1914 he married his first wife, Anna Dick. That same year, he was sent to Omsk, Siberia where he spent two and one-half difficult years as punishment for speaking in the German language in public - something that had been forbidden. In 1918, his wife died at the age of 26 years. In November of that year, his mother was murdered by a band of rebels under the leadership of Machno. In December, John married Anna Warkentin.

It was while John and his second wife Anna were in Gnadental that the first connection with the Langeman family occurred. Agatha Langeman, my future mother-in-law, asked my Aunt Annie Berg to sew a coat for her son Peter (my future husband), in exchange for some grain. Little did John and Anna know that one day their Peter would marry their niece Irene (me). And to think that Pete would become their Power of Attorney 60 years later! How true that God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.

My parents, David and Katherine Berg, had just moved to Essex County when I was born in March of 1926. We lived with Aunt Annie and Uncle John and I was told that Aunt Annie gave me my first bath. Some of my earliest memories are of accompanying Uncle John down a long path to the woods to bring the cows home. We had to watch for cow pies along the way. Uncle John grew grain on his farm to feed the cows, sold milk, and butchered calves to sell for meat. He also worked for McCord Radiator Plant in Windsor for 21 years. Aunt Annie did housework for others for 11 years, and then took in washing. I remember watching her use a mangle to iron sheets and shirts and then fold them with utmost care for delivery to her customers. They were conscientious in their work and kept everything neat and clean.

Uncle John loved children and I remember an Easter treasure hunt he had prepared for his nieces and nephews. He had hidden the eggs in little hollows he had made in the grass - what fun! I also remember staying overnight and having cold cereal for breakfast, something we didn't get at home. Homemade ice-cream and oranges on occasion were really special.

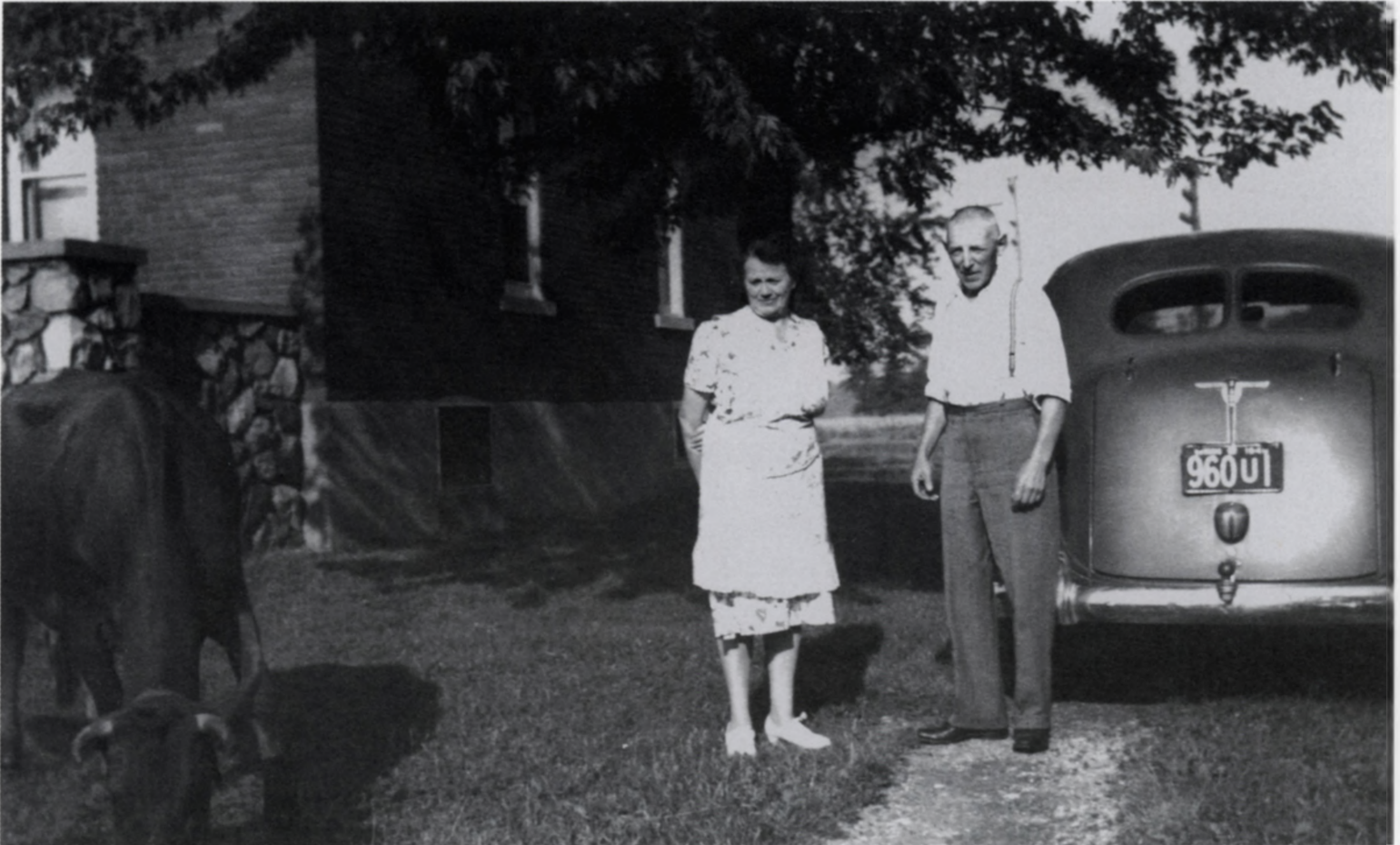
For as long as I can remember, Uncle John shaved his head. We never thought to ask him about it - that was just the way we knew him.

In 1965, they sold their farm and moved to the corner of Sherk Street and Coronation Avenue in Leamington. Uncle John suffered from arthritis and finally moved into the Leamington Mennonite Home in 1972. Here he died in 1974. Aunt Annie lived alone in their home until 1976 when she, too, entered the Mennonite Home. She passed away in 1982 at the age of 85 years.



Aunt Annie willed her estate to the Leamington Mennonite Home where the Berg Lounge was named in memory of Anna and John Berg. They have passed on to claim their inheritance as believers in Jesus Christ. In the words of 1 Peter 1:3 & 4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you".

*The writer was born in Kingsville in 1926, and is a member of the Meadow Brook Fellowship in Leamington, Ontario. Irene speaks English and understands High German and Low German well.*



**1940: John and Anna Warkentin Berg in the back yard of their Division Road home.**

Their car is thought to be a 1936 or 1937 DeSoto. The cow is cutting the grass. The back porch was built from stones gathered on their farm.



## 2) Leamington Life in the 1920s

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*John Braun*

Our family: parents John and Maria, my younger brother Jake, and I moved from Manitoba to the Leamington area in 1926. First we lived in a chicken house on the Mack James farm on Concession 5, east of Highway 77, on the north side of the road. Two years later we moved to the Lewis Jones farm on Highway #3, near what was then the Jones Sideroad, east of Leamington. Brother Henry and sister Mary were born there. I remember that 1928 was a good tobacco year. And Highway #3 was just a gravel road at that time. When it needed repairs, a horse drawn wagon would bring gravel for the purpose.

In those years, Mennonite church services were held in rented facilities: for example, we met above Bowman and Carsons, and upstairs at Brown's Hotel. I distinctly remember the 1929 Christmas Eve Sunday School Program, held in the Shotton Hall above Dixie Autoland (now Dixie lawn and Cycle). John and Gert (George) Braun, and Henry and John Abrams were in my class. Uncle Henry Brown (father of Rudy, Ernie, Edgar, Walt and Anita) our Sunday School teacher, was dressed up like Santa Claus. When our family walked up to him, sister Mary and brother Henry were really scared, but brother Jake and I looked at him and said, "*Onkel Hein!*" (Uncle Henry). He probably felt like spanking us. In those days, before he was married, Uncle Henry often lived with us.

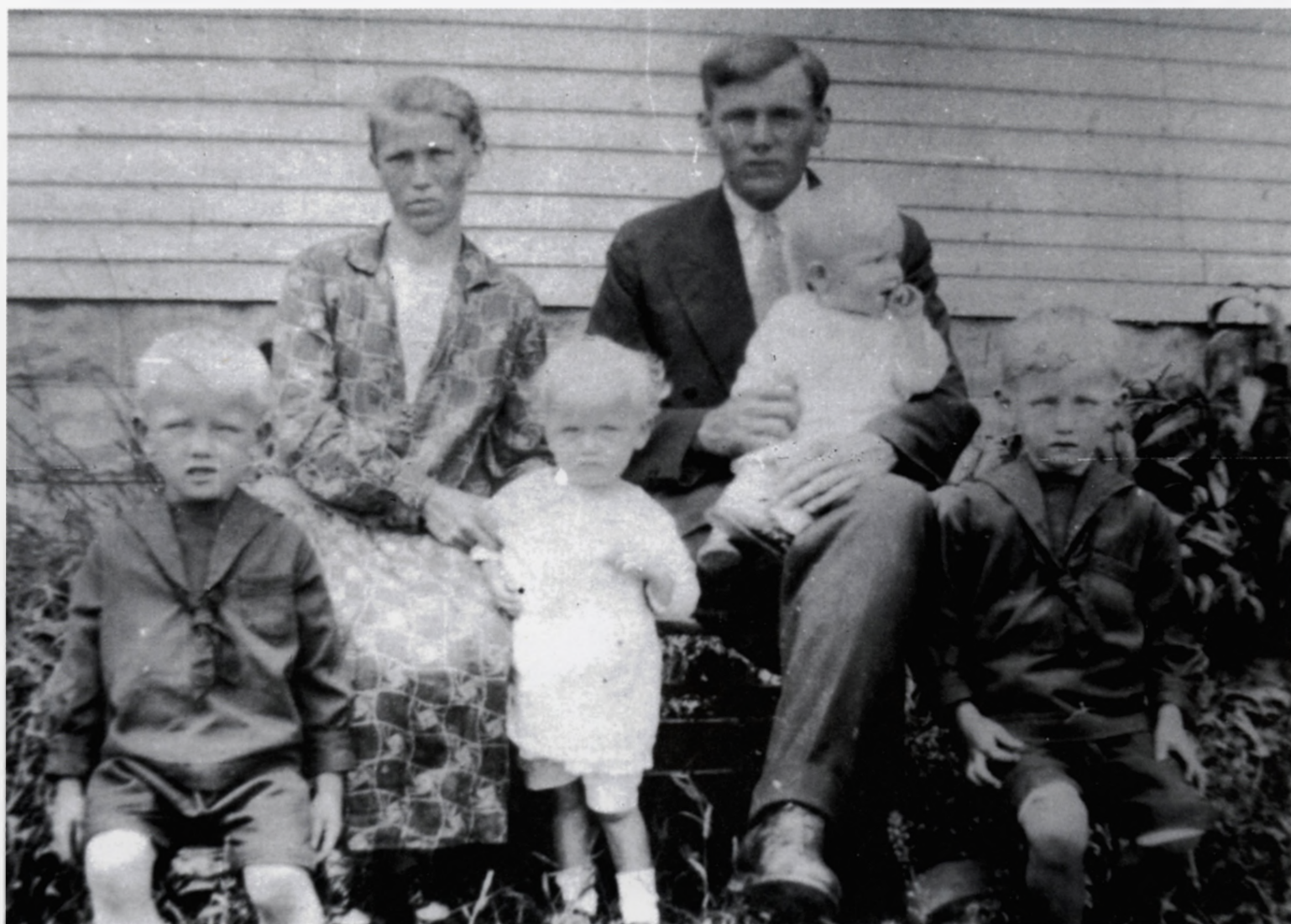
When the program was over we started home in our 1923 touring Chevrolet to McDonalds on Concession 5, where we then lived. We got as far as the hill on the Albuna Townline and couldn't make it because it was slippery and covered with snow. Dad walked back to the McDonald family who lived on Highway #3 next to the cemetery. Mr. McDonald came with his horses and pulled us back to his house. He made us come in for a cup of hot chocolate - mmm - that was good!!!

We drove back to town and stayed for night at our cousins the Abrams; Mrs. Abrams was Dad's sister. The next morning, Christmas Day, we headed for home. The McDonald farm, where we lived, had three houses on it: a large red brick house where the McDonald family lived, Dietrich Brauns lived in the next one, and then ours. When we got home, Dad said we should all stay in the car, he would check to see if Santa Claus had found our place. We hadn't even set our plates out. When Dad came out, he smiled and said, "Yes, Santa was here!"

In 1930 we moved to Everett Jones's, on the Jones Sideroad, off Highway #3. In 1943 my parents bought the 25 acre farm on Concession 2, just a couple of miles from the Oak Street Mennonite Church, on the north side of the road, where brother Henry and Katie live today. The farm cost \$6,000 dollars. Here we grew flu tobacco, burley tobacco, tomatoes, cabbage and potatoes. This kept us, along with seasonal hired help, very busy.

*The writer was born in 1924 in Baschlitscha, Crimea, and speaks English, High German and Low German. John is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church*





**The Braun family in 1929, at their Concession 5, McDonald farm home.**

**L to r: Jake Brown, mother Maria Dick Braun, Mary Braun Driedger, father John J. Braun, Henry Brown, John Braun - writer of story.**



### 3) Pioneering

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*Peter Bartel*

**M**y parents, Franz and Elizabeth Enns Bartel purchased a farm just outside of the town of Leamington in the mid 1930s. It was located on the north side of Concession 3, where Amco greenhouses are today. I had helped him build a house using wood from an old tobacco kiln, and some new wood, as well.

My next job was to help dig a well. A cement crock of about four feet in diameter was placed in a selected place and then I climbed in and began to dig the soil inside the crock out with a short handled spade. Gradually the crock settled and when it had reached ground level, another crock was placed on top. Now a pail was brought into the operation for me to put the soil into. My brothers pulled it up with a rope, emptied it, and returned it to me to continue the process. With the placing of the sixth crock, Dad decided the well was deep enough and a ladder was placed into the new well to let me out. A cover was now placed on the well, and next morning, much to our surprise and delight, there was water in the well.

As was common in those days, farming included the presence of horses that were used in preparation of the soil for planting, cultivating, and harvesting. Financial limits, however, caused Dad to select old horses and it became one of my many chores to brush and comb them every Saturday, as had been commonly done in Russia. One early spring, on a Saturday, Dad decided that I should take one horse into the field and let it graze, and since we had no fences, he put me on the horse's back. Dad had provided a simple bridle using binder-twine, for me to guide the horse.

As the horse was grazing, a dried-up weed stalk penetrated it's nostril, causing the horse to rear up and in so doing, it turned on it's back legs and headed at a gallop for the barn. My mother was in the kitchen and had observed the action that was taking place in the field. She immediately came outside and waved her apron in an attempt to slow down the action. This only added more impetus and speed to the proceedings, which were rapidly developing into an uncontrollable event. So, I decided to abandon ship. With the horse now in full gallop, I slid off, landing on my feet. My dad, hearing the commotion, came out of the barn to see what was happening, and immediately got on his bicycle and headed down the road in pursuit of the horse, which was apparently enjoying his romp into town, and I followed behind, running as fast as I could.

We caught up to the horse, which had stopped at the Leamington Fair grounds to graze on the plush grass. Upon thinking of this event later, I was amazed that no traffic had interfered with this operation. In today's traffic, we may not have been so fortunate. Dad mounted the horse and began the ride home with me on the bike. Dad was quiet about this incident, but I noticed a certain disappointment about my lack of horsemanship. In Russia, the horse played a vital part in the Mennonite community, in agriculture, as well as transportation. Every landowner prided himself on his herd of horses, which were usually divided into two groups consisting of draft horses for working the land and lighter horses used for transportation by *Drosckje* (Russian carriage) or riding. It was every landowner's secret desire that his sons might become accomplished horsemen. The horse also played an important part in the social status of the landowners in the Mennonite colonies, much like the automobile does today.

It has been interesting to relive the past and I trust our great grandchildren will enjoy these stories.

*The writer was born in Rudnerweide, on his grandfather's estate, Molotschna Colony, Russia, in 1924 and is a member of the Meadow Brook Fellowship Church in Leamington, Ontario. Peter is fluent in English, High German and Low German.*





**Peter, Tina and Erna on wagon, John Bartel on tractor, late 1930s.** The Franz Bartel farm was located on Wilkinson Drive where Amco Produce is today.



## 4) Recollections from My First Ten Years of life

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*Ernest Rempel*

**A**lmost coinciding with the 200 year celebration of Mennonites in the Ukraine, we are locally celebrating our 80<sup>th</sup> year anniversary in Essex and Kent Counties.

Upon reflecting on this fact, it came to mind that as a youngster of four years, my parents had been in Canada less than 10 years. An order in council by the then Conservative Government banning any immigration of Mennonites, Doukabors, and Hutterites was lifted by Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who was familiar with the Mennonites in the Waterloo area, and for this reason our parents were allowed to immigrate to Canada.

I first saw the light of day and drew my first breath at Wheatley on the Zion Side Road. Miss Friesen, who later became the wife of Alex Fischer, was the midwife. My parents had moved there after a six year stay on Pelee Island, on a farm owned by an American Land Company (Erie Land Company). They had moved to Pelee from Kitchener in order to fulfil their promise to settle on the land when they were allowed to immigrate to Canada.

Wheatley, in the 30s and 40s, was a booming town with four hardware stores, three chopping mills, a cold storage, numerous grocery stores, and 5 and 10 Cent stores. It had its own version of Major Bowes' Amateur Hour in the summer with its outdoor evening concerts. They consisted of films and many amateur performers. They were usually emceed by Jack Dean, one of the local appliance dealers. Saturday night, the "locals" went to town to do their shopping for the week and swap experiences and local news. Poulter's Creamery sold double dip ice-cream cones for 10 cents and Taits Confectionery was crammed wall to wall with people consuming ice-cream and "Kik", a soft drink of the day.

Our residing at Wheatley brings back memories of the weekly visits with the Janzens, who lived south of Wheatley where the water tower is today. A big foot-bridge spanned the creek beside the road used by the auto traffic. Also of interest was their house with the steps on the outside leading to the second story, and a root cellar which was used for food storage in the winter.

I particularly remember one summer evening when the sky lit up as bright as the noonday sun. A meteorite passed overhead, the remnants of which were later found in Romney Township. Our residing in Wheatley on the Zion Side Road evokes memories of housing that was ice cold in winter and had no screens in summer. The house of a friend of ours had nothing over ours when it came to being cold. He said that the warmest part of his house in the winter, when there was a west wind, was on the east side, OUTSIDE! Brother Nick commented that our house was so drafty and poorly insulated that if a mouth organ were placed on the window sill, it would play a tune all winter! Occasionally a rat was caught in our basement, and the second story was used for a chicken brooder, where chicks were raised for pullets and eggs.

Wheatley brings back memories of trips "Out East", for example, to Niagara, which took all day. We started early in the morning and arrived at Uncle George Neufeld's when the sun went down. The trip was interrupted by several flat tires, which were patched on the side of the road. Tire-patches and a hand pump were standard equipment for the cars of the day. As I remember it, a fellow on a bicycle passed us three times!



On looking back I realize how progressive our fathers were when it came to embracing new machinery and crops. The Taves, Krueger and Rempel families were among the first to farm with tractors. Kruegers - John and George, bought an IHC F12 in 1938. Taves had a BIG F20 which was used for custom shredding in the neighbourhood, a machine used to husk the corn and shred the fodder, which was used for bedding and feed. My father bought a Farmal H in 1939, which had about 24 horse power, which was purchased for \$800 from the local IHC dealer, Bob Lynn.

My father was the first to buy a combine in the area, and also among the first to grow the new crop, soy beans. He used commercial fertilizers sold by a local farmer, Allison Metcalf, who was the local agent for CIL (Canadian Industries Limited). It was delivered in spring in jute bags which weighed 125 pounds.

In 1943 we moved from Wheatley to the Emerson farm, four miles east of Leamington on Highway #3. Our new house was blessed with many amenities we did not have in Wheatley. There was electricity (25 cycle) with it's pulsation, cycles or flickers one could almost count. We had a telephone (party line). I can still hear my father ask the operator to ring "625 ring tree tree", the number of our *Onkel* (Uncle) Epp and *Tante* (Aunt) Lena. Apparently the "th" in three was difficult to pronounce for German-speaking immigrants. The party lines were great pervaders of gossip of the day. Living closer to Leamington meant that we no longer took a lunch to church when visiting in the Leamington area or attending a church function on a Sunday afternoon. The lunch was eaten in the church basement of the original building which ran North and South. Driving from east of Wheatley twice a day was too costly, since gasoline was 25 cents a gallon, and wages were, in some cases, only a dollar a day. Neufelds from Albuna and Janzens from Wheatley sometimes had lunch with us in the church. Also there was no need to heat bricks, which Dad did, to keep Grandma's feet warm when we lived farther away in Wheatley. Highway #3 was paved from Wheatley to Leamington in the late 20s and the speed limit was increased to 35 miles per hour!

As I recall, it was in 1946 that the *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) was finally completely paid to the CPR. This was the guarantee that David Toews had made on behalf of the Mennonites who immigrated in 1924-1930. Apparently there were some among us who, now being safe in Canada, "conveniently" forgot their debt. David Toews could die in peace knowing that the debt had been paid. I can still hear my father say in *Plattdeutsch* (Low German), "*Ditt mott oppjeriemt woare*". (This debt must be paid) ...and so it was. Entertainment for us was not at an organized level as it is today. We spent countless hours with a stick and a spokeless wheel, which we propelled along the ground. Baseball was often played in a pasture field when friends came to visit. Sun-dried cow chips instantly became first, second, and third bases, as well as the pitcher's mound, while either scrub was played, or sides were chosen.

We were children of immigrants, and where this showed up was in our lunch buckets. Saturday's *Zwieback* (double buns) became Monday's lunch, which were often filled with jam or honey or on occasion, with *Griebenschmalz* (crackling-spread). The "English kids" occasionally had an orange or even a banana, real treats for us, which we only received at Christmas.

*Alpenkräuter* was often used by the older people. Little did they know that it had a 50% whiskey content. No wonder they slept so well at night. A home-made remedy which was widely used was liniment, both rubbed on for aches and pains, or taken by mouth. The slogan on the bottle said GOOD FOR MAN OR BEAST. It was taken internally with hot water and sugar, and was still a very vile tasting concoction. I even offered to take this medicine for my sister Helen out of the goodness of my heart! We were always intrigued by the visit of the Watkins Man or the Rawleigh Dealer who came with his suitcase and spread out his wares which were soaps, fragrances, spices or flavors used in cooking and baking. He also had various home remedies. He usually went away after making a sale of some sort. In order to get Vitamin D in winter (we did not go to Florida to lie in the sun), cod liver oil was dispensed by spoon to every sibling. The local mill operator said he gave it to his children during the winter. This came from the same barrel as the oil used in cattle rations. It was also a vile smelly tasting concoction, but apparently it did its job.



Life was seemingly simpler in those days and a feeling of community existed which manifested itself in the threshing and shredding bees where neighbours helped each other in harvesting and threshing. Evenings were spent by lamp light, huddled around a battery-powered radio listening to Amos and Andy with characters such as the King Fish and the secretary, Miss Blue: (Buzz me, Miss Blue); the Lone Ranger and The Shadow: (Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? - The Shadow knows!). With his sinister laugh following. In the comic strips a character in Major Hoople was constantly cursing the weather, and Lil' Abner and Buck Rogers were Saturday paper comic section characters.

Our parents' life in Russia had been a time of great turmoil, however also a time of great progress, with their culture, civilization, education and institutions. For this reason they looked back on their period in Russia with great nostalgia. Seemingly the watermelons were sweeter, the apricots tastier and even the skunks had three stripes! ...and yet they refused to try to raise a family in a godless society and so chose to emigrate to Canada.

For this our generation should be eternally thankful.

*The writer was born in Wheatley, Ontario in 1932 and is a member of Leamington United Mennonite Church. Ernie speaks English, High German and Low German.*



**Ernest Rempel Cinnamon Fern Woodlot**

Ernest Rempel, shown leaning on the stump of an oak tree on the original farm purchased by his father, Abram Rempel, in 1943. The lumber from the tree was used to build a coffin for Ernest's mother, Margaretha Willms Rempel who, in 2001, lived to see her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.



## 5) Our Nine Years on Pelee Island

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*Cornelius Driedger*

In the Spring of 1925 our family, along with the Jacob Driedger family, the N.N.Driedger family, and the Abram Dick family, together with the David and John Cornies families, moved to Newton Siding, Manitoba and bought a huge farm there. Here sister Margaret was born. We farmed for three years, and when the market went *kaput* (crashed) we could not make payments and so we left. We spent one year in Glenlea, Manitoba, the home of Mother's (Friesen) side of the family. Brother Abe was born there. The following year we moved to Pelee Island.

We arrived on Pelee in Spring of 1929. These were very important years for me, especially in building my character. They included my graduation from primary school and one year in Continuation School (High School), and my entry into the world of youth as well as the field of hard labour.

We moved into a small house on Albert Stoltz's place on Middle Island Road. Brother Abe became very sick with the croup here. That fall we moved into a house on the East Beach, just north of Parson's Road. And next spring we moved into a house on Elmer Reh's farm on Victoria Road. Dad worked for Mr. Reh, and as part of his salary, we were allowed to plant one acre of tobacco, with the understanding that Mother and I would take care of it. It was at Reh's that I remember Dad falling off the haymow and hurting his back so badly that he never fully recovered. *Hee wea toonijcht*.

In Spring of 1931, we ventured into the "Cash Rent World". We rented a 35-acre farm from Camille Rowan for \$600. To get to this farm, one turned right at the North Dock, drove for about a mile, then turned left on a very hilly lane, about 1/2 mile in length. My brother John was born here, which completed the family. Our total crop income was just over \$600. I think we sold our tobacco, which had sweated a lot while curing in the barn, to the Consolidated Tobacco Company in Kingsville for 3/4 cents per pound. When we deducted the cost of the fertilizer, it was obvious that we had lost money that we didn't have in the first place. As a result, we had to buy our groceries on credit, and we owe a debt of gratitude to A.M. McCormick's Grocery store for being very generous with us.

It was at this time that the Rempels moved to the mainland and Uncle Jake moved to the Cruikshank farm the Rempels had sharecropped. Dad then hired out to Ed White, where Uncle Jake had lived. This was on the West Side, right by the lake. Here Dad worked for two years, and as a bonus, we were allowed to plant a few acres of corn. I became very much involved and stayed home from school to learn to plough. We had a 1924 Model T Ford by then, but it stayed jacked-up in the barn much of the time because we couldn't afford to pay the 25 cents per gallon for gas. We went the three miles to church in a gravel wagon drawn by horses. When it rained, we used a tarp for cover, and never missed a service. Our preachers were Uncle Reverend Jacob N. Driedger, and Reverend Abram Rempel, followed by Reverend Gerhard Thiessen. Dad did some choir directing, mostly at our home, and we young folks got together often as we walked to wherever things were happening.

In Spring of 1934, we moved onto a Cruikshank farm, a definite turn for the better, financially. This farm was on the Middle Island Road. The deal was that the owner supplied the home, barns, horses and machinery, while we did the work and split the income and fertilizer expenses 50/50.



I remember two tragedies while we lived there. My cousin Katie, 20 years old, fell on the ice at our place, resulting in an aneurysm. She died just before Christmas of 1936. I remember watching spellbound while her Dad preached the sermon at her funeral, his voice quivering and tears in his eyes.

And I remember this same Uncle Jake preaching the Good News of Christmas just a few days later. Again I saw the tears running down his cheeks, and heard his voice quiver as he preached. What a lasting impression he made on me.

The second tragedy was an accident in which my friend John Heinrichs, son of Jacob and Helena, was killed in 1938. He was riding his bicycle along the East-West Road in the evening and collided head-on with a car with one headlight. He was taken across the lake to the Leamington Hospital and died there. Again God spoke very seriously to us in John's death.

In thinking back, I believe that God gave us a chance there to get our feet on the ground, as it served a very definite and positive purpose in my life, and that of my family there.

*The writer, a retired NLUMC Pastor, was born in Tiege, Molotschna, South Russia in 1921. Cornie serves as chaplain at the Mennonite Home in 2005.*



**1931, L to r:** Cornie, father Abram Driedger, Abe, Agatha, Margaret, mother Margaretha Driedger.



## 6) The Great Depression: Making Ends Meet on the Farm

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*Lena Koop Woelk and Henry Koop*

**O**ur parents, Jacob J. and Maria Dick Koop, along with their three oldest children, Mary, Jake and Susie, arrived in Pennsylvania on August 5, 1923. They were sponsored by the Old Order Mennonites and treated like members of the families with whom they lived for five years. Children Henry and Lena were born during this time.

In the meantime, our mother's family had all come to Canada, so the decision was made for us to come here also. Dad bought a farm on Concession 6, Gosfield North Township; 50 acres for \$9,000.

The year 1928 had seemed to be a good time to come here. That however, proved to be untrue; the depression was setting in and the stock market collapsed. The crops were bringing in very little money. The potatoes we had planted rotted in the field and we didn't get as much out of them as the seed potatoes had cost us. Everything seemed to go wrong. My older siblings had to go get jobs that paid little, to put food on the table. Sister Mary had to lie about her age to get work, along with Jake and Susie.

Mom and Dad started butchering pigs and used everything except the squeal. They peddled and sold sausage, hams, cracklings, liver sausage, and head cheese. One of their steady customers were the Brauns who lived in Kingsville and later became the inlaws of Anna Toews Braun who lives on the Albuna Townline today.

All this hard work, however, did not keep Mom and Dad from losing their farm. Their tobacco brought them 1/2 to 3/4 cents per pound. Many farmers just dumped their tobacco in the field and ploughed it down after stripping it in the winter. By about 1934, our family bought the farm back from the government. We had managed to stay on the farm during this time, and by 1936, things were improving and Dad got 6 cents per pound for his tobacco, and the other crop prices were picking up, as well. The depression was coming to an end, and we got hydro in the farmhouse. During this time, brother Ben was born, which completed the family.

In those years, Mom would bake enough *Schnetji* (biscuits) on Saturday for as many siblings and families that wanted to come. In summer months, the *Schnetji* would be served with sugared mulberries from the big tree on the front lawn. During off-season, apple jam from the old orchard trees would be used. Today, a simple phone call to Pizza Hut serves the same purpose. The children all walked to school; no need for busses. The teenagers played baseball in the gravel pits in summer, and skated on the frozen surface of the same area in winter. Now teenagers go to bowling alleys, and take part in other indoor sports. On Sunday nights, large crowds with everybody welcome would gather and completely ruin a lawn with all the fun activities. And it was fun. Now most entertainment takes place outside the home.

Our dad was always very much involved in the church, and along with others, worked hard at getting the church built in the early thirties. He and others were also involved in building the UMEI, a private high school, which is still operating successfully today.

*The writers are siblings, both born in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA; Henry in 1923, a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church, Lena born in 1927, a member of Leamington United Mennonite Church. They speak English, High German and Low German.*





**The Koop family at their Concession 6 farm home in 1940**

**L to r:** Mother Maria Dick Koop, Lena Koop Woelk, father Jacob Koop Senior, Henry Koop. The children in front are grandson Walter Koop, and son Ben Koop.



## 7) Dit Es dochwohl Leamington! (This is likely Leamington!)

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*Harry Riediger*

In late fall of 1926, Russia's National Economic Plan (NEP) was cancelled, leaving very little opportunity for private enterprise. More and more Mennonite men were disappearing to Siberia. This prompted my father, Peter H. Riediger, to travel to Moscow to procure passports and travel documents. Upon arriving home, he found my mother Agatha, nee Unger, in tears. Little Elsa had succumbed to typhoid fever and was in a weakened state, and there was little or no medicine available.

After the funeral, they decided to go to America (Leamington, Ontario). Grandfather Peter H. Unger with his second wife Helene Enns Thiessen and Uncle Wolodja Unger had come to Leamington in the Summer of 1926, and sent letters back to New York, Russia, telling them what a nice place it was.

Shortly before Christmas the decision was made to leave Russia. Two other families, the Dietrich Brauns with their children Gerhard (George), Annie and John (Hans), and the Jacob Thiessens, traveled with my parents. They went to Moscow and from there through the Red Gate to Riga, Latvia. A ship took them to England through the Kiel Canal. Here vendors were selling *Wiener Würstchen* (Vienna sausages), beer and wine. On Boxing Day they arrived in Liverpool, England. This was the dreaded place where everyone's health was checked before leaving for Canada. There were many sad stories where families were split up because of ill health. These family members were left behind until they were judged to be fit to travel, or in some cases, returned to Russia. Our group all passed the health check and boarded the *SS Montcalm* for Canada. In St. John, New Brunswick, they boarded a train headed for St. Thomas, Ontario. Here they stayed overnight at a hotel because they needed to switch to the Pere Marquette Railroad to get to Leamington.

When they arrived in Leamington, there was a big sign advertising Chesterfield cigarettes. Uncle Thiessen said "*Dit es dochwohl Leamington*" (this is likely Leamington), to which *Derk Brun* (Dietrich Braun) said, "*neh, daut het Chesterfield*" (No, this is named Chesterfield). So they traveled on to Kingsville where the conductor realized they had gone too far. So they had to drag all their baggage four blocks north to catch the streetcar back to Leamington. In March of 1927, Harry Thiessen and Elsie Braun were born here.

My parents rented an apartment in a two story house on Oak Street, right across from the Heinz Factory. Two fellows, Peter and Henry Janzen lived upstairs. On May 16, 1927, I, Harry Riediger, was born there at 7 A.M., just as the Heinz whistle blew for the second time - time to start work!

We moved several times in Leamington and then to the Hubert Scott farm east of Kingsville. On April 29, 1929, my brother Peter was born there. Shortly after that we purchased a farm at Harrow.

About 19 individuals and families participated in the Harrow farm purchase. It had 200 acres and the soil was black loam similar to the soil in our old home country. The owner was an American by the name of Heymann. He set the price at \$20,000 with no down payment.

In 1951, after lengthy deliberations the building of our Harrow Church was undertaken. We became an independent congregation two years later with the name of Harrow United Mennonite Church.

*The writer was born in Leamington in 1927, and is a member of Harrow Mennonite Church. Harry speaks English, High German and Low German.*





**1927 photo shows the writer with his father, Peter H. Riediger, in front of their home in Leamington. This house stood on Talbot Street West, Leamington, where the Sun Parlour Motel is located today. The Hamm family lived next door.**



## 8) In Canada He Would Drown in Hay!

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*Harry Tiessen*

**T**he people who came to Canada in my dad's family were his Mother Katharina Fast, one daughter Helena Tiessen and her husband Jacob Lorenz and two sons, Henry and John. They came to Waterloo in early June of 1924, and were hosted by a Bauman family.

My Dad was Henry, the older brother, born in 1900, and that made him the head of the household. It was his responsibility to get to work. The first job that came up was haying. Dad had never seen an old fashioned hay loader before. He was given the job of taking the hay as it came from the loader; the farmer was driving the horses. My dad was fresh from the one month trip from Russia: a stop-over in England, by ship to Quebec, and the train to Waterloo. At any rate, he could not keep up and a fear came over him - after all his experiences - that in Canada he would drown in hay!

At one point early in their life in Canada, Mom and Dad were employed at the J. O. Duke fruit farm in Olinda. This was a large farm and they employed the Peter Tiessen family: Nick, Frank, Jack, parents and sisters. In all, there were 27 employees. The boss (Tom Duke), had a sister who was a school teacher, and since there was no school for these immigrants, she took it upon herself to teach them English. There was a problem with the name Thiessen. She pronounced it TH - IESSEN with the emphasis on the TH. The immigrants insisted that their last name be pronounced TIESEN. "Well", she said, "if that's the case, you will have to spell your name TIESEN". My parents said that all the members of the Peter Tiessen family spelled their last name TIESEN from that time forward. I do not know how much English they learned, but their name was Tiessen after that. And as far as I know, all the Tiessen names in the phone book are derived from this incident.

I was one of four siblings in the Henry and Susa Enns Tiessen family: Harry, Selma, Bill, Helen, who died at one month, and Bertha. I was born in the small white house near Highway #3, on the Heatherington farm at Coatsworth, Ontario. Selma was born two years later in the worker's house on the Jeffery farm on the Olinda Sideroad. The others were born in the Leamington Hospital on Russell Street, in the stone house with the big front porch, across from Reid's Funeral Home.

I recall when my little sister was born in 1936. It was early in January and the weather was very cold. Our Model T Ford would not start in cold weather, so Dad never tried to run it in winter. We kids did not know what was going on but all of a sudden, we needed a doctor. We had no telephone and did not know the neighbours well enough to ask them if we could use theirs, so Dad set off walking to Leamington. We were living just south of Blytheswood on Highway 77 at the time. I can clearly remember watching Dad disappear into the distance. It was one o'clock in the morning. Four hours later, at five o'clock, Dad arrived back home in Doctor Froese's car. I don't remember the details, but Doctor Froese took Mom to Leamington Hospital and we got a baby sister. She was named Helen.

Helen grew normally, but at the age of one month became ill with some blood complications; there was never an accurate diagnosis. She was admitted to the Leamington Hospital and was there about a week. When I returned home one day, my mother was standing in the back kitchen crying and told me that our baby had died. I was startled to see our baby lying in a basket with only a thin cloth covering her, because our kitchen was not heated in the winter. My granddad, Jacob Toews, built a coffin and Mom and my aunts helped to decorate it.



The eulogy was spoken by Reverend J. Janzen in our house, and the coffin was placed in the back seat of Uncle John's car and the interment was in the cemetery on the corner of Highway #3 and the Albuna Townline. It was about two years later that Dad bought a stone for the plot, and I remember that it cost \$2.

Our family lived in the same house until 1944. We then moved east on Concession 8, almost to the Goldsmith corner. We were well-known in the community but our parents still had a continuing lifestyle of not mixing with the larger community. This became evident when my dad, in an effort to advance his employment situation, applied for the job of rural mail carrier. Everything went OK, but Dad needed the signatures from people in the community and was turned down. He did not get the signatures.

*The writer was born in Coatsworth, Ontario in 1927, and speaks High German, English and Low German. Harry is a member of the Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington, Ontario.*



**Henry and Susa Enns Tiessen's first home: The Heatherington farm, Highway # 3, Coatsworth, Ontario.**



## 9) And All the Way, God Has Been Beside Us

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*Erna Driedger Enns*

**O**ur family came in 1923, went clear across Canada to Rosthern, Saskatchewan, where we gathered in a large tent to await our lot. What family would take us in? We were not a promising choice. Father was ill, Mother was a little woman, and Mary, our oldest sister was 15 and immediately accepted by a family for household help. Finally a young widow with three small children took us in.

Mary had the job of sitting outside the tent to watch over our luggage. A gentleman came along and gave her a whole dollar. It was Elder David Toews, that great man who had worked so hard to help these Russian Mennonites immigrate to Canada. He had made contact with the CPR and the government so that our passage was paid with the stipulation that it would be paid back in a certain length of time. Our motto at home, if we ever wanted something - even just an ice cream cone - was always, "But we have to pay back the travel debt (*Reiseschuld*)."

In about a year, we had to move on as our lady was getting married again. Our grandfather and two bachelor brothers of Mother's lived in Blumenort, Manitoba, and wrote us to come there. They lived in a former blacksmith shop, and with our family, there were nine of us in one room. They were happy times; the folks were very good to us.

After several tries at farming we ended up in Winnipeg. Father spent some time in a sanitarium for his lung condition; Mother did housework, mostly for Jewish families where she could communicate in German. Mary had already worked in Winnipeg for several years. Peter and Gertrude were to find jobs to help out financially. I was eight years old and was expected to find my way to school, somewhere down a busy main street. I was so frightened and after asking several policemen for directions I found the huge school. As I was registering, I was asked if any more school-aged children were in our family. I said, "Oh yes, I have a sister yet". So I had Gertrude registered for school.

In 1927 we accepted Mother's family's invitation again and followed them to Ontario. We went by train as far as Windsor. There was a streetcar that went all the way to Leamington. The stop was at the corner of Mill and Erie Streets. The tracks have been long removed. Then it was a several miles' walk to my uncle's home and my father was very tired.

We had to move to town in order to get jobs, and we found a one-room apartment. Dad had permission from the stores to help himself to any materials in the alley. So he could build cupboards, which were the dividers for privacy and such. When jobs were found we could move into a proper house. Mother did housework in various homes. Peter and Gertrude had jobs here and there until they got steady work at Heinz. I did babysitting after school and on weekends.

When Peter got married, we sublet part of the house, but when my sister married, I had only seasonal work at Heinz. My sister-in-law Ruby used to baby-sit for one of the Heinz managers and she spoke to him and I had a job! But Mother and I still had to move to a tiny apartment. Mary stayed in Winnipeg and got married there. In the 1930s, she and her family came to Leamington; then when Germany was preparing for War, they offered German people (Mary's husband was German-born), free passage by freight boats back to Germany. So they moved to Germany, and after the War, they came back to Canada.



At first Sunday services were held in private homes. As the group grew, together with the Mennonite Brethren Church people, local lodge halls were rented. Some who had agreed to lead in worship became ordained Ministers. For special services such as baptism, Elder J. J. Janzen came from Waterloo; those services were held in the Ruthven church.

When Dick and I were married, my mother lived with us for ten years. We had five children and it was a busy life. But as they grew, and we could pick a dozen rows of tomatoes in one round, we were envied! It's a wonderful way to raise children and it was a happy time.

Eventually the Mennonite Brethren built their own church on Elliott Street and we missed our joint Sunday School leader, Daniel Boschman. Our own Oak Street church was built and N.N.Driedger was elected as our Elder. In spite of additions to the church the congregation continued to grow and a second church was built on Concession 6, first under one leadership, and then eventually Jacob Neufeld was elected Elder of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Since then the Oak Street church has built a beautiful sanctuary. Faith Mennonite Church had it's beginning in Margaret D. Bennie school in order to have more English services, and has since built a church on Sherk Street. It is a growing church of young families.

My siblings have all passed away, as has my husband. My Uncles moved on, always inviting us to follow, but we made Leamington our home and have been happy here. There have been glad days and sad days, and all the way, God has been beside us. When I think back to 1923, and before, my heart fills with gratitude for the freedom to worship.

*The writer was born in Alexandrovsk, Russia, in 1918 and died on September 28, 2004 in Leamington District Memorial Hospital. Erna was a member of Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington, Ontario.*



**Erna's mother and grandfather: Maria Janzen Driedger and Heinrich Janzen on the porch of their Leamington home. 1930**



## 10) *Dee Backowe* (the bake stove)

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*Hilda Neufeld Enns*

**T**he Cornelius and Agenetha Enns Neufeld family came to the Essex-Kent County area in 1925. They moved from St. Jacobs in Waterloo County, where they had been hosted by the Frys, to the Jasperson farm in Coatsworth, Kent County. Here their sons found work in the tobacco fields in summer and in a nearby brickyard in the wintertime.

The large farmhouse that the family inhabited became a haven for many relatives and acquaintances, also on their way to seek farm work in the flat fields of Essex County. At one point, thirty-five people were temporarily housed there, some of them ill and quarantined with typhoid fever.

To Agenetha and her young daughter, Anna, fell the task of somehow feeding all these people.

From their work at Jasperson Brickyard, Peter and Henry brought home broken, discarded bricks. With these, they built a large outdoor oven (*Backowe*), similar to those they had left behind in the Ukraine.

For a few dollars per hundred pound bag, they were able to obtain flour that had been damaged by water, at the nearby railway station. With this, the women baked dozens of loaves of bread.

In a local orchard they were permitted to pick up end-of-season apples which had fallen to the ground. From these they cooked large pots of apple butter which was spread on the bread.

And so, in a 1925 version of the loaves and fishes miracle, all were nourished, recovered from their illness, and were able to get on with their new lives in Essex-Kent.

*The writer was born in Leamington, Ontario in 1938 and is a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Hilda is fluent in English, High German, and Low German.*



**Summer of 1926:** A group of Mennonite families gather for worship at the John Martens farm in Coatsworth, Ontario.



# 11) Buying Our First Farm

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*John P. Driedger*

**M**y parents, Peter A. and Maria Driedger, came to Canada in November of 1924 with seven children: four sons and three daughters. They were accompanied by my father's widowed sister, Liese Dick and her three children - two sons and one daughter. They arrived in Quebec, and from there they took a train to Waterloo, Ontario where at the Erb Street Church, Swiss Mennonites were waiting to receive these refugees into their homes. Our hosts were Menno Kipfer and Christian Zehr, from Tavistock. Mr. Zehr had a lumber camp in Northern Ontario and he was able to employ my three brothers, and also my two cousins that winter. The rest of us stayed with these two families. We lived with them and ate at their table, and I am sure that those who were able helped wherever they could.

During that winter, 1924 -1925, an American named George Cruikshank, owner of several farms on Pelee Island, came to Waterloo looking for sharecroppers to work his farms. My father agreed to work one of the farms that had a double house so we could accommodate both families. So in the following April, 1925, as soon as the Pelee boat could run, we moved to Pelee Island. Here farming was much different than in Russia. The main cash crop seemed to be burley tobacco. Growing the seedlings, planting, suckering, and harvesting the crop, then stripping (pulling the leaves from the stalk) in the winter was all very new to us. However, Mr. Cruikshank was very patient and a good teacher, and we were eager to learn. I was only four years old when we moved to the Island, so I probably just got in the way!

Things must have worked out quite well for us, because in three years we had paid off our travel debt, and had saved up \$3,000. Consequently, in the fall of 1927, my father bought a 200-acre dairy farm on the mainland. It was located on Concession 7 of Gosfield North Township. This farm came complete with thirty head of cattle, horses, and machinery, plus two large burley barns. Dad paid down the \$3,000 and the owner, Mr. E. J. Wigle, held the mortgage of \$30,000. Dad figured with the milk contract to the Windsor Dairy and a large burley acreage, there should be no problem.

We were to take possession on March 1, 1928, at which time the sharecroppers on this farm would be leaving. However, the Pelee boat didn't run until April. That would leave one month with the cows unattended, so my brother Jake, the oldest and recently married, agreed to move to our new farm on the last boat in the fall. He and his new wife would move into a small second house on our farm which was vacant. This would give Jake a chance to see how chores were done, and he would be there to take over when the first of March arrived. The rest of us would be coming over at the beginning of April.

The young couple had an interesting experience on the way to the new farm: They were driving an old touring car, and besides their luggage, they had some chickens to supply them with eggs and perhaps some chicken soup during the winter months. While en route from the Kingsville dock to their farm, these chickens somehow escaped and Jake and Agnes were catching chickens along the roadside, which must have been quite a spectacle! In late February, just before Jake would be left alone with the chore of milking between twenty and twenty-five cows, brother Peter crossed Lake Erie in an iceboat to help him.

The first year on the farm went well. Crops were good, prices were good, there should have been no problem paying off the mortgage. And then the Great Depression set in. Prices plummeted. Where burley tobacco had once been around 25 cents per pound, it now dropped as low as 2 cents per pound. Dad realized immediately that it would be impossible to pay off the large mortgage, so he gave it back to the original



owner, Mr. Wigle, and we stayed and rented the farm on a 50-50 basis for the next six years. We got half the income and half of the heifer calves which we raised. We had the beginnings of a dairy herd, so that in 1934 Dad, together with my brother Abe, bought a 100 acre farm on the Graham Side road in Gosfield South Township. We paid \$7,000 for it, with a down payment of \$500. It was quite a rundown place, but it had two houses and a dairy barn. So, with our seven cows, which we brought with us, we could begin shipping milk, a small source of income. Times were still very tough. Farm wages were 10 cents per hour: \$1 for a ten hour day. This farm we were able to pay for, although it took us ten years to pay off the \$6,500 mortgage, keeping in mind that quite a few dollars would have been spent on improvements during this time. All the fieldwork in those days was done with horses, until 1938, when we bought our first Allis Chalmers B tractor.

*The writer, a retired NLUMC Pastor, was born in 1920 in Orloff, Russia, and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. John speaks English, High German and Low German.*



**Peter A. and Maria Driedger's 200 acre dairy farm, Concession 7, Gosfield North Township.**



## 12) Ruthven in the 1930s

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*Jacob N. Driedger*

**I**n the 1930s, Ruthven was a five-star hamlet that included most of the amenities that a vibrant, rural community could ask for.

Overseeing the affairs of the hamlet was the big kahuna, Police Chief Albert Gunning, whose station was located at the east end of Concession 2 where the road meets the north-south Ruthven-Union thoroughfare. The station, really a farmhouse, was the workday destination of my teacher and her horse and buggy. On her arrival, the chief stabled the nag, after which my teacher made her way to Ruthven Public on shank's pony. At the end of the day, the procedure was reversed. The station was also the polling place during elections. Chief Gunning was a drop-dead Liberal and in the federal election of 1935 he came to our farmhouse and attempted to persuade my parents to come out and vote. My parents worked hard on the land attempting to eke out a living for themselves and for their children. I presume the last thought on their mind was going out to vote for candidates and issues they did not know. Finally Dad, in frustration, said to Gunning, "All right, we'll come along and vote, but the only person we will vote for is Mackenzie King." When they returned, Dad looked as if he had been duped. At the supper table, he explained, "He told me where to put the X, but I'm sure the name beside the X was not Mackenzie King's!"

The Chief was an imposing figure in full uniform. He wore a Peter Newman cap, bibbed overalls, and shiny black boots. On his massive chest, he wore a shiny silver badge that we twerps at Ruthven Public thought came from King George V himself.

Equally imposing was the Chief's huge, ferocious dog, which was always on the prowl for school kids. When I walked to school, I turned the corner at the station as quietly as possible, and then quite often met my cousin Bill Cornies. We briefly compared our raw chicken eggs and then hurried onward until we got to the hamlet proper.

To the left was the Harrison Garage where Dad was a regular customer for a car battery charge. The battery in our '28 Chev was below the floorboards on the driver's side, and so getting to it was like opening a grave to inspect the cadaver. From Hughie Harrison, Dad bought us our first tricycle, a prehistoric model that lacked tires on the back wheels.

Having passed the garage on my way to school, I reached the three corners of Ruthven. Before reaching the corners, I could have cast my eyes to the left, but I was forbidden to do so because then I would have seen the IODE hall where lewd dancing allegedly took place.

I could have continued to walk straight north, in which case I would have reached the Wigle store/post office. The post office, I learned in later years, had already been established in the 1860s by Hugh Ruthven, founder of the hamlet and its first postmaster. In any event, the Wigle establishment didn't concern us because Dad believed the store catered to upscale clientele, and furthermore we really had no need to use the post office because our friendly rural mailman would himself mount a stamp on Dad's letters, provided three pennies were placed on top of the missive.

As it was, as soon as I reached the General Store on the three corners, I turned full east and continued walking until I reached the Taylor house, at which point I made a left turn, crossed Highway #3 and walked up the school sidewalk.



Had I not turned at the Taylors', I would have reached the Reinhardt plumbing business, where Mom and Dad took our pots and pans to be soldered when these utensils sprung a leak.

The Ruthven General Store mentioned earlier received some of our business, but even here Dad drew a distinct line of patronage. Most of our groceries had to be bought at Dyck's Grocery in a basement room on Mill Street in Leamington because Dyck was a staunch member of our church, and furthermore, he sold on credit. Nonetheless, there were always things to buy in Ruthven to keep the store bustling with customers.

The store was a two- storey building, the bottom floor housing the business and the top floor accommodating the Scratch family, owners and proprietors of the store.

When I entered the store, I inhaled the pleasant aroma of prosperity coming from the mildly oil-anointed floors. The oil kept the dust bunnies from becoming tumbleweeds. Then if I had a raw egg or two with me, I walked over to the marshmallow-filled chocolate cookies to see if Mr. Scratch was in a bartering mood. If he was, one egg equaled one cookie, provided the egg passed the fertility test. Close to the cookies was the jar that contained lollipops, officially called B-B-Bats, that one could barter for another infertile egg. The B-B-Bats were sticky but delicious rectangles of pure caramel.

Both sides of the store had shelves to the ceiling, but Mr. Scratch had an innovative tool that reached items at the top, such as cereal boxes. This tool looked like a crane with scissor-like prongs at one end and a lever-like device at the bottom end. Mr. Scratch lifted the tool to the top shelf and by manipulating the lever was able to clamp onto a cereal box with the prongs and then gently bring the box down to customer level. Of course, for me it was simply an interesting act to watch, for we never had dry cereal at home, only endless porridge.

Another interesting instrument was Mr. Scratch's baloney slicing machine that could slice a fat tube of baloney into thin slabs, as if one slab was a clone of the other. While slicing, Mr. Scratch sometimes muttered, "This is what the politician does - he makes many inviting promises, but when the slicing is done, the promises are still baloney." The full truth of that muttering hit home years later.

At the back of the store, the Scratches had farm articles that everyone needed from time to time; rasps, pails, halters for cows and horses, etc. One day Dad brought home a neck sweat pad for one of our horses and explained, "They'll have to take turns wearing it". Taking turns had a familiar ring and reminded me that tomorrow was my turn for carrying my lunch in an empty honey pail.

Today, not even a foundation stone remains of the General Store, the wrecking and clean-up crews having done their jobs well.

Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) in his poem, "The Deserted Village", laments:

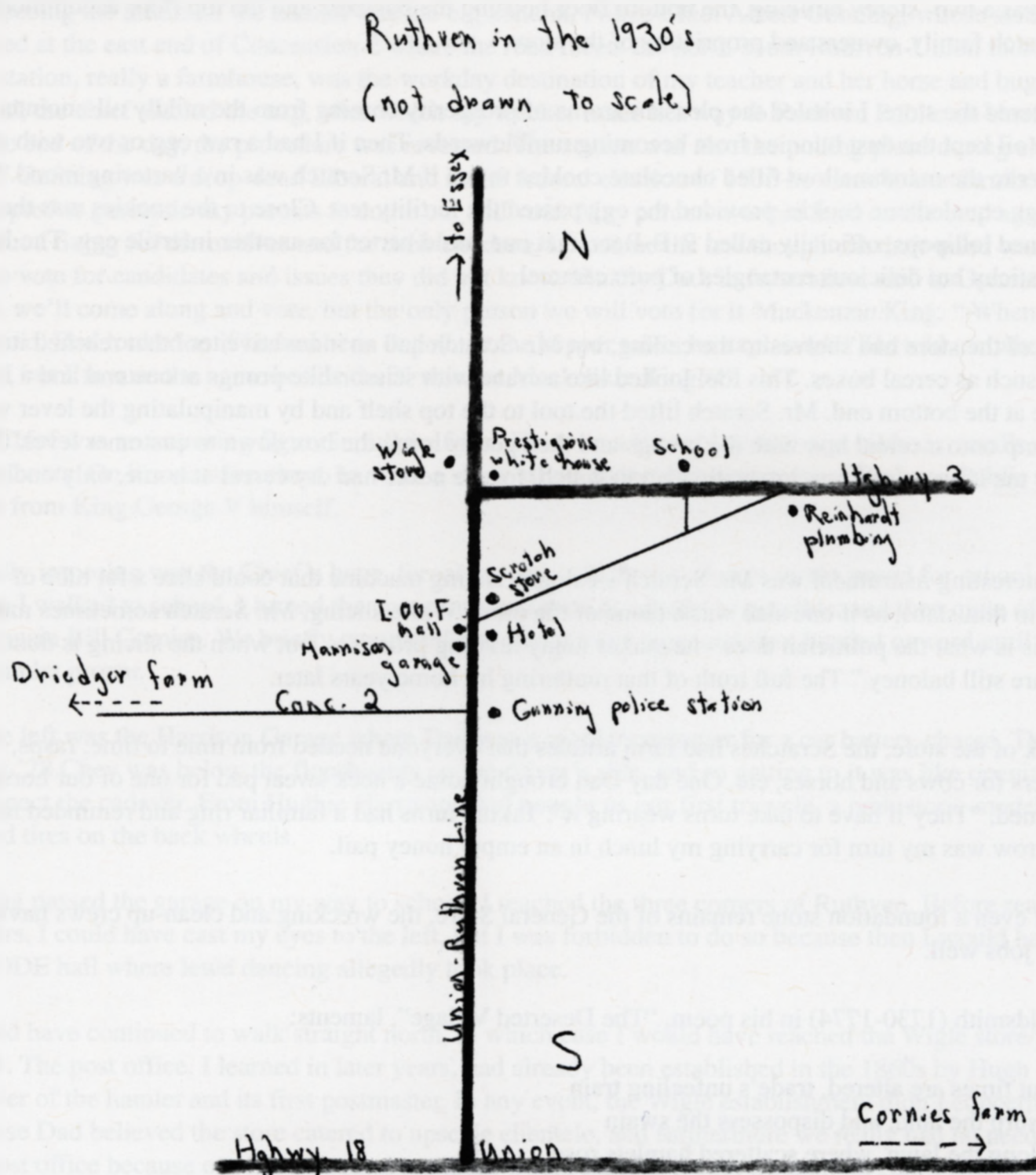
But times are altered, trade's unfeeling train  
Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain  
Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose  
Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose



Actually, even before the wrecking ball arrived, the store had been boarded up and doomed, elbows out by faster automobiles and the new A&P store at the corner of Queen and Talbot West in Leamington.

So far as I know, the only business left in Ruthven today is a nursery establishment, but then I don't travel through Ruthven anymore for fear of old ghosts dancing on the gravel roadway.

The writer was born in Newton Siding, Manitoba in 1927, and is a member of Leamington United Mennonite Church.



Lake Erie  
Ruthven, Ontario, 1930s



## 13) Pelee Island

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*Martha M. Thiessen*

**O**n July 11, 1994, in a circle of family and friends, the ashes of Agnes Mary Hanes were laid to rest here. She was a daughter of Gerhard and Katherina Thiessen and had been born on the island in 1931 during the peak period of Mennonite settlement. She died of leukemia in Beaverton, Oregon on September 12, 1993, and it was her wish to be returned to the community of her birth.

Pelee Island lies in Lake Erie approximately 15 miles south of Leamington, Ontario. Mennonites first arrived in 1925. A Pelee landowner, George Cruikshank, heard of the Russian immigrants in the Waterloo-Kitchener area and, in need of sharecroppers for his tobacco farms, extended an invitation which was accepted by six families.

The first to arrive was 21 year old John Wiebe on April 5, 1925, followed over the next week by the other families. In 1926 eight more families landed and succeeding years saw the arrival of Mennonites from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Reesor, and Port Rowan, Ontario. By the early thirties Mennonites numbered close to 80, one-tenth of the Island population. The first group of families included Reverend John F. Dick, and he was soon joined by Reverend Jacob Epp.

The first settlers considered themselves fortunate to have these ministers in their midst. Services were held in various meeting halls or living rooms. The isolation of island life was not for everyone, however, and many who came stayed only a year or two. As ministers left, the small congregation elected replacements from their own circle. Ministerial experience gained in the small living-room setting was later put to use in the larger setting of the mainland Leamington Mennonite Church.

In addition to John Dick and Jacob Epp, the Reverends Nicholas N. Driedger, Isaak Klassen, Abram Rempel, Jacob N. Driedger, Senior, and Gerhard Thiessen served on Pelee Island. For marriages, baptisms, and funerals they relied on the Elders from Leamington and Waterloo. Visits from the mainland were not a casual event. Because of ferry schedules, three days were required for a weekend visit, but the Elders came willingly.

The congregation was self-reliant too in establishing a choir, Sunday School classes and German language lessons.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the population began to dwindle as Mennonites took advantage of opportunities to purchase or share-crop on the mainland. The last Mennonite ceremony on the island was the wedding of John Wiebe and Sigrid Wagner in 1950, and in 1953, he and his family were the last Mennonites to leave the island.

Bonds of friendship and community formed there remained strong through the years. A reunion in 1961 drew about 100 former residents back to the island. Today groups both large and small of former residents or their descendants, return periodically for a day of nostalgia.

Agnes Mary Hanes was able to spend a day on Pelee Island a few months before her death, revisiting the old homesteads and landmarks. She was proud of her heritage and took pains to preserve it for her children. In 1996 her husband Virgil and son Brian joined other family members on the Mennonite Heritage Cruise on the Dnieper River - a trip Agnes would have enjoyed immensely.



When Virgil died of colon cancer on October 23, 1998, the children determined that his ashes, too, would be brought to Pelee Island. In the summer of 1999, friends and family gathered there once again to say farewell.

Virgil and Agnes are survived by two sons, Richard (Deanna), and Brian and two grandchildren, Andrew and Kristina.

*The writer was born on Pelee Island, Ontario in 1939, and is a member of Leamington United Mennonite Church.*

*Note: a portion of this article appeared in the Mennonite Reporter in 1994.*



**Virgil and Agnes Thiessen Hanes with sons Richard and Brian**



# 14) My First Years Here

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*Agatha Enns Peters Schellenberg*

Thank the Lord for memories  
For they are so dear  
Some bring us laughter  
Others a tear  
Some bring us peace  
Some bring us strife  
But each one is part  
Of our earthly life

**M**y family was among those who had to flee from their Schönfeld estate to Gnadenfeld where we lived for seven years. Then Dad heard about Canada, so on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 1925, my parents Peter and Agatha Enns and children, Uncle Heinrich Enns, and my *Tante* (Aunt) Greta and my sister and husband and their family left Russia together.

We traveled out of Russia on wooden cattle cars. Our first boat was the Melita - not the cleanest boat, but we children were so happy because there, on the tables, were sugar bowls. So we could put a lot of sugar into our coffee cups. That coffee really tasted so good!

There were many with sea sickness: a Mr. and Mrs. Warkentin had an 18 year old daughter who they thought was sea sick. The nurse thought that fresh air would do her good, so they bundled her up and took her outside. This was in October and it was cold; that night she died. Mrs. Warkentin begged them not to put her into the ocean, but Cornelius Tiessen, along with my dad and another person, conducted a service. Cornelius Tiessen had a prayer and after 10 minutes the boat stopped and let her into the water. In Riga, the 10 year old son of the Warkentins got sick and died. So Mr. and Mrs. Warkentin lost both their children on their trip to Canada.

We arrived in Quebec on the beautiful ship Minnedosa and before we boarded the train we were given some hot chocolate and a piece of sweet bun, and also a Testament of St. John, which I was very happy to get. We came to our Uncle Cornelius Neufelds on the October 17, 1925. We had traveled one month.

We were 24 people that arrived on a Monday at the Coatsworth train station. The household consisted of Cornelius and Aganeta Neufeld with their children Cornelius, George, Peter, Annie, Henry, John, and Jake. Then there was our family: Peter and Agatha Enns with children Annie and George Schroeder, Peter and Johanna, Margaret, George, Henry, Agnes and me - Agatha. Brother Peter stayed in Russia. Next was Heinrich and Gertrude Enns with children Peter, Henry, John, Dietrich (Dick), Gertrude and Annie. Agnes was born in Canada. Lastly there was Widow Greta Dick with John, Margaret, Agnes and Annie. All these relatives lived in the Neufeld house from October 17, 1925, until after Christmas, early in 1926.

It didn't take long for us children to go to Coatsworth School. Jake Neufeld was our age and was so good to his girl cousins. John was a little older and could speak a little English. We girls were very shy. When it came time to eat our lunch, we would sit behind the furnace on the woodpile. You see, all our sandwiches were very thick, made with homemade bread and apple jam. There was one girl who would follow us around and make us feel very uncomfortable.



Christmas came before we knew it, but in the meantime, the older sisters and brothers went to work at the tobacco factory in Kingsville to make some Christmas money. My dear sister Margaret, who took care of us younger ones, told us stories in the evenings, and sometimes she'd use our names in a story.

Christmas came, and we all went to the John Martens on Highway #3. The older people sat on the wagon with lots of straw and we younger ones ran or walked behind the wagon. Of course, we had learned our poems and we were so thankful to our God for how He had led His people to a beautiful land. For Christmas my brother Henry bought me a Eaton's Beauty doll. Henry was about 18 years old.

After Christmas the families, one by one, left. Some got work at Grant Fox's, others at Cora Duke's, and other places. Our family moved to Orval Fox's where my dad and brothers worked for Jim Hicks, who was the first sharecropper for Mr. Fox. The house we were moving to had many bed bugs, but Dad soon fixed that. And from the flour bags, my sister washed them when they were empty, and made the most beautiful cottage curtains, embroidered with daffodils and gingham sashes. Since my dad and mother were so well known, we had lots of company. Our first church was the Ruthven Town hall, not much of a building, then we went to the Ruthven United Church for a short while. When more and more people came to Leamington, we met upstairs at the Brown's Hotel on Erie Street South, and they had to set many pots around the sanctuary to catch the water when it rained. I can remember my cousins John and Dick Enns, with a one-horse buggy, picking me up from home and then we went to Sunday School, which was in the afternoon at Brown's Hotel. Later we decided to rent the IOOF Hall upstairs where now the Et Cetera Shoppe is. I think after four years, more and more people came and we decided to build a place of worship. But we had no money - it was depression time and numerous families had not yet been able to pay their *Reiseschuld* (travel debt). With many prayers our first church on Oak Street was built.

*The writer was born in Schönfeld, Molotschna Colony, Ukraine in 1917, and is a member of the Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington. Agatha speaks English, High German and Low German.*



**Planting tobacco on the Peter Enns farm, 1930:** father Peter Enns, son George, and son-in-law John Enns (husband of Agnes Enns). This 100 acre farm is located southeast of Leamington on the Noble Sideroad. Grandson Harold and Beverly Enns live there in 2005.



# 15) My First Experiences as a Teenager in Essex County

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*Helen Bergen Dick*

**M**y Bergen family immigrated to Canada in 1926. We first lived in Saskatchewan, then Manitoba, and in 1936, we moved to Ontario.

Moving to Ontario was a big step in my life. I was 12 years old and we experienced many things that first year. To start with, we had our first train ride; it took two days to get to Leamington. Prior to that, we had lived in the country, rather isolated, and attended the one-room Barkfield school, where everyone spoke Low German at recess time. We had never gone to a city or a store; our extended world was the Eaton's catalogue.

Now we lived in the town of Leamington, in a big house at the corner of Erie and Hazelton Streets, together with two other families. Within walking distance was the Dime Store, along with many other shops; we were overwhelmed with all the things we saw in the windows and shops. I will never forget the night we moved in; there was a long string hanging from the ceiling with a ball at the end. Father pushed a little button on the wall and the whole room lit up, and we saw our first electric light.

On Monday morning, my parents said, "Helen, you are now responsible for taking your three siblings to school; make sure they get into the right grade! I had always relied on sister Anna, but she did not have to go to school anymore. About two blocks away was Selkirk Public School, a big school. How would I know where to go or what to say; I was scared. We walked holding hands, had stood only a few minutes at the door when a friendly teacher came by. She took Bill and John to their classrooms, then came back and showed Mary and me where to go. All day I felt lonely and lost, wondering how my two little brothers were doing.

After about a week at school, the teacher said, "Helen, I want you to stay in after four". My heart skipped a beat. What had I done wrong, what would my parents say if I did not come home with the others? When class was dismissed, the teacher said, "Stay right here, I'll be right back." My head went down, my stomach churned; with hands clasped together I sat there, when suddenly a paper airplane came flying past. I looked back. There sat a young fellow. "Don't look so gloomy", he said, "We have done nothing wrong, my name is Herman". Just then the teacher came back. "Both of you", she said, "I want you to get a certain text book, if you don't have it by Monday, you need not come back to school". I don't know where Father got the book, but come Monday, Herman and I were both back at school. (Herman Tiessen later became a professor).

Summer came and we girls took turns going along with Mother to work at various places on the farms, mostly picking berries or hoeing weeds. One day, while we were picking yellow beans, Mother encouraged me to keep my hands moving and do a good job. I noticed a fellow in the next row. He'd pick a few beans, eat one, then pick a few more. He looked at me and asked, "How do you get your basket full so quick? This job is boring, there has to be something better to do than picking beans". The boy was Edgar Dyck, who later became a lawyer.

Come September I was back in school; it was not unusual for me to stay home a week or two at a time to work or baby sit someplace. This meant missing school, and I got to the point where I didn't know which was better, school or work.



In spring we moved to Peter Tiessens' near Kingsville, where we attended the one-room Albertville School. I made new friends and enjoyed it. On my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, Father said, "Helen, today you can bring your books home, you don't have to go to school anymore". I was glad to be through school, at the same time, I had mixed feelings because I would miss my friends. But we were made to feel grown up when we worked, and our family needed the money.

Instruction may end in the classroom, but education ends only at the end of life. I thank my parents that they taught me at an early age that work is important.

Let us be content in our work, do the things we can, and not fret because we think our contribution is insignificant.

*The writer was born in Michaelsberg, Chortitza, Russia in 1924 and is a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Helen is fluent in English, High German and Low German.*



**1938: Albertville School, located between Leamington and Kingsville, with teacher Miss Atkinson.**

The writer is sitting in Row 5, second from back. Her sister Mary Bergen Driedger is seated in Row 4, second from front. Her brother John is seated in Row 2 (sign with #13) and brother Bill is directly behind him - beside the boy in striped sweater.



## 16) Early Memories of Leamington

*Gertrude Hamm Toews*

I recall coming to Canada on a rainy night in October, 1926. Sitting on two wicker suitcases on a street corner, my family waited while Dad went to call relatives who were taking us in. We stayed in Kitchener that first winter. Dad worked in a furniture upholstery factory but couldn't tolerate the dust, so the next spring we came to Leamington and lived in a log house where Concession 2 splits into a V, where the red brick house stands today. Soon we moved to Concession 4, east of Highway 77, where Dad worked for Mr. Sinasac. My Uncle Peter Hamm worked there also, but lived on the yard.

One of my earliest memories is of brother Herb, who was just one and a half years old at the time. Mother was weeding onions in the farmer's field. I stayed home while Herb had an afternoon nap after which I was

to take him to the farmyard. Pulling him in a little red wagon and accompanied by cousins Cornie, Rudy, and Peter Hamm, I had to cross a cement bridge over a fast-running creek. Much to my horror, Herb toppled over the abutment! My cousins ran to the field to tell my mother while I plunged into the creek and hauled Herb out, all the while terribly afraid that I would encounter snakes like those in the Dnjepr River in Russia. By the time Mother came screaming to the yard, we were there to meet her, Herb dripping wet but otherwise unharmed.

After a time, my father worked on a farm on Highway 18, and I went to Ridge School for two years. Then we lived next to the Imperial Tobacco Factory on Oak Street of Leamington.



**The Hamm family in 1925: Jacob and Olga with children Gertrude and baby Herb.**



During this time, when I was about 12 years old, I recall having junior choir practice in our house with Mr. John Janzen. We later moved from this house to the farm now owned by Walt Brown. While living there, I attended Public School #22 and then started high school. Until this time, my parents had always share-cropped, but they then bought a farm, at the present KUS property on Oak Street East. I had three years of high school up to that point, but as the eldest, had to stay home to help work the land. My father was troubled with stomach ulcers and thought he might die. At fifteen years of age, I learned how to plough and harrow with horses, helping my dad who was never a farmer at heart. Thankfully, not long after this, Dad bought a Farmall A tractor.

The years passed. At age twenty, on October 4, 1941, I married Frank Toews. We lived in town until spring when we purchased a farm on Concession 6. Life for me now began in earnest!

My father, Jacob Hamm, who had been choir director in Russia, directed the first church choir in Leamington. He was *Vorsänger* (song leader) and often served on church council. When he died in June, 1957, he was treasurer of the UMEI School Board. He served his community well!

My life in Leamington has spanned 77 years as wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. I have seen many changes and have forgotten many things, but I still treasure some of my earliest memories, daughter of Olga and Jacob Hamm, immigrant girl from Russia.

*The writer was born in 1921 in Shostack, near the Sea of Azov, Russia, and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church. Gertrude is fluent in English, High German and Low German.*



**Jake and Mary Krahn Thiessen's living room, Highway #3, Leamington, Ontario, 1930s.**

**L to r: Jake and Mary Thiessen, Jake and Olga Hamm - the writer's parents, Mrs. Unger (Wolodja's mom), Nick and Agatha Dick. In front we see Harry Thiessen, Jake Hamm, Victor Thiessen, Herb Hamm.**



# 17) August 15, 1927 Letter Describes Life in Essex-Kent

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*submitted by grandson Nicholas Hamm*

*Written by Peter H. Unger to his son in Western Canada.*

**D**ear children!  
We have received the letter to Marieche. Thank God we are all well, and wish you the same.

Yesterday, Sunday, we were all at Jakob Hamm's place for J. Hamm's birthday. Almost all the New Yorkers from the area were there. The P.A. Hamms had walked to J. Hamm's. Also many others, but P. Riedigers had come by car. They, the Riedigers, own a truck (two seater) with 1 1/2 ton capacity. He bought the truck for 100 Dollars to be paid off in 10 Dollar monthly installments. Sometimes one can buy a used car very cheaply here, for 5 Dollars and up.

The birthday party was quite fun. After coffee, songs were sung, folk songs, hymns, religious and Ukrainians songs. In winter it will not be possible for so many people to get together because of lack of space.

Peter K. Hamm from the West arrived Saturday at Jak. Hamm's. Today he is supposed to get work on the farm.

The Peter A. Hamms live in Leamington, and except for Petja, they all work on the farm on which the Jasch Founks work as well. They, the Hamm's have contracted to clean a whole acreage of tobacco by piece work. Vera is the fastest. Erna does house work near town. They are doing well.

Today Mama is at Johann Berg's. Dueck's Mariechen from Kitchener is a guest there today. She was also at the party.

Jasch's car is kept busy on Sundays. Without a car it's almost impossible. The prospects for tobacco are not the best. The early plantings are very good, the later plantings apparently not good. Vegetables were very good and grain also good. There is no shortage of workers, many are looking for work. It seems that Russian Mennonites are preferred. Before too many years, the Mennonites will all be owners. The Canadians believe that too.

Last Sunday we were in Leamington to buy a small house. The price was reasonable, 1,500 Dollars, but the terms of payment were unacceptable. Now we are negotiating for a small farm next to a busy paved road near Kingsville, the neighbour to Johann Berg. They are asking 3,000 Dollars, to be paid in 10 years. Terms of payment 1) 300 Dollars down payment. 2) 700 Dollars to be paid in 10 years and the remaining 2000 Dollars to be paid with 6% interest in 5 to 10 years. The farm has 15 acres with a small house and a small barn. With these terms we will not buy. For Marieche and Wolodja living on a farm is not very convenient, because they will still be working out.

Won't you describe your work on the farm - how much did you sow, how high are the grain prices now, or likely to be? I read in the paper that the pool announced one dollar per bushel - that is for wheat. The other grain varieties are even cheaper. Such prices are too low, aren't they? How much do you pay your workers in wages?



There are still Russian Mennonites coming from the West. The land out West must be at least 50% cheaper.

From Russia we are still not getting better news but worse. Unrau's Peter has been conscripted. He is working on the railroad near Kijen.

Peter Thiessen wrote to Founks and asked if there is work here, if he moved here. In case it did not work out there. Whoever has a farm out West and can make a reasonable go of it, should stay there. By November or December we will already know how well farmers have done.

Many want to buy farms in the area around here. We hear that 50 families want to come to Essex County from the US, because there is too little communal life there. How much truth there is in that is debatable.

I am of the opinion that the Russian Mennonites will do well if there are no disruptive circumstances ahead. One is already somewhat familiar with country and people. There seem to be no feelings of superiority on the part of the Canadians.

*Nicholas Hamm, born 1914, New York\*, Ekaterinoslav, Russia, is a member of Leamington United Mennonite Church. He speaks English, High German and Low German fluently.*

\* New York: village in the Ignatyevka Mennonite settlement in the province of Ekaterinoslav, South Russia. The Chortitza settlement bought an estate here in 1888 for its landless members, and founded six villages in the following year, of which one was New York. It's 1913 population was 926.

Mennonite Encyclopedia vol. III, pg. 865

Gothic-Latin translation: Nicholas Hamm

German-English translation: Gisela Schartner



Identification numbers for photo on page 89.





**Jakob K. Hamm (cousin of Nick Hamm's father) birthday, Sunday, August 14, 1927 held at Kovinsky tobacco farm, Leamington, Ontario, where Jakob was a hired man.**

**Back, L to R:** (1)Jakob Kornelius Hamm - birthday celebrant; (2)Johann Berg - donor of Berg Lounge, LMH, lived on Division Road; (3)Nicholas P. Dick - brother of Jake and Johanna Schroeder Dyck; (4)Dietrich Braun - father of John, Jake, George, Anne, Elsie, Mary; (5)Jakob P. Dyck - father of Nick, Henry, Ernie, Peter, Gerhard; (6)Peter Janzen - Walt Koop's great uncle; (7)Peter K. Hamm - Amalia's husband; (8)Jakob Peter Thiessen - father of Harry, Mary, Vic, Peter; (9)Heinrich Janzen - brother of Peter above; (10)Agatha Nickel - lived on east side of Princess Street in Leamington; (11)Anna Krahm Braun; (12)Amalia Wekkesser Hamm - wife of Peter K; (13)Olga Nickel Hamm - wife of Jakob; (14)Mary Thiessen Krahm - sister of Jacob Thiessen; (15)Mary Dyck of Kitchener - later taught Sunday School in Leamington for many years; (16)Helene Thiessen Founk - sister of Mary Thiessen; (17)Peter A. Hamm (1882-1962) Nick's father; (18)Heinrich Janzen - father of Peter and Henry above, Walt Koop's greatgrandfather; (19)Mary Krahm Thiessen - Jacob's wife; (20)Peter H. Riediger - Harry's father; (21)Nicholas Hamm - 12 years old, who submitted this article; his new outfit was purchased in Riga on their way out of Russia, (22)Helena Enns Thiessen Unger (1864-1944), (23); (24)Anna Warkentin Berg, (25)Peter H. Unger (1857-1933); (26) Margarethe Unger Hamm (1885-1972); (27)Agatha Unger Riediger, (28)Katharina Unger Klassen; (29) Herbert J. Hamm, (30)Hedy Klassen, (31), (32), (33)Gertrude Hamm Toews, (34) Schroeder Dyck; (35)Baby Henry Dyck, (36)Cornie P. Hamm, (37)George Braun, (38),(39),(40).



## 18) Working in the Tobacco Factory in the 1930s

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*Agatha Driedger Dick*

**D**uring the Depression in the Thirties, money was scarce and jobs hard to get. Many Mennonite girls, some quite young, worked as maids in the more affluent "English" households. In the winter months, there were jobs to be had in the tobacco factories, if one was fortunate enough to get hired.

Much tobacco was grown in Essex and Kent counties, especially flu tobacco. This was harvested in late summer and early fall. The leaves were stripped from the stalks and dried in kilns. The dry leaves were packed into bales, ready to be sold to the tobacco companies.

There were two tobacco factories in Leamington, the Rock City and the Imperial. Kingsville had three: Hodge, Consolidated, and Intercounty. The factories began hiring help in the late fall. Men and women came to the factory early in the morning, waited outside, hoping to be hired. When the boss came out, he looked the crowd over and picked someone at random. More often the boss already had a list of names given to him by a friend or relative that already worked in the factory. He would call out the people with these names to come in. They were the lucky ones. By noon most of the people outside had gone home, only to be back next morning to try again.

The fall after I graduated from Ruthven Public School, and with our tomatoes and burley tobacco already harvested, my parents thought I too, should try for a job in the tobacco factory. The David Cornies' family lived on Concession 1 (now County Road 20) not too far from our home near Ruthven. Mary and Agatha Cornies already worked in the Rock City tobacco factory in Leamington, so there was an opportunity for me to ride along.

The morning I went, not many people were waiting to be hired, so we were allowed to wait in the hallway. By afternoon I was the only one left still standing there. Finally the boss from Room #3, Floyd Wilkinson, took pity on me, and told me to follow him. I followed him to a large room with long rows of tables, which had slots on one side, similar to mailbox slots, only bigger. I was put in a space at one end of those tables. A man dropped a bale of tobacco beside me on the floor, and I was told to get to work. I was terrified. I had never graded flu tobacco. How could plain tobacco leaves, which nearly all looked the same, have seventeen different grades? ! I breathed a prayer, "Oh God, help me."

There were more Mennonite girls working in the Rock City at this time. I was the only one in Room #3. Recently, I talked to Susie Warkentin Hildebrand and Katie Dick Warkentin about our first winter in the tobacco factory. We agreed that we had not made much over three dollars a week, but it helped to get our family through the winter.

Two years later, through the help of Mr. Dietrich Neuman, a close friend of my parents, quite a few Mennonites got jobs in the Hodge tobacco factory in Kingsville. Mr. Neuman worked for Mr. Lockwood, the top boss of the Hodge Tobacco Factory. He also maintained the car for the other bosses in the factory.

The first winter we worked in Hodges, five of us girls, Margaret Wiens Krueger, Sara Wiens, Susie Warkentin Hildebrand, Katie Dick Warkentin and I rented a room from the John J. Tiessens, who lived just a few blocks from the factory. We brought enough food along from home to last until the weekend, when we went home. (The evenings were spent doing needle-work while someone read a good book out-loud).



In the factory, Elisabeth Braun Wiebe joined us at one of the long tables which had spaces for six graders. Sometimes news or jokes were passed down the line, which helped brighten the day.

The bale of tobacco was weighed before it was brought to the grader, and the weight written on the grader's card which hung from one of the slots in front of her. We always hoped for a good bale. Often the tobacco leaves were stuck or frozen together and had to be pulled apart. If working too fast, this could be missed and found by the fore-lady when she inspected our work. This was an even greater humiliation than making a mistake in grading. In both cases the whole pile was brought back and had to be done over. The fear of this happening to me caused me great anxiety and I never got to enjoy working in the tobacco factory, even though I had good friends to work with.

When, a few years later my sister Kathe joined us at the factory, she felt the same fear and anxiety of making a mistake. She maintains today, "I would have married any man that had asked me just to get out of the factory!" Well, she didn't have to marry just any man; she married the man she loved.

The following years we joined car pools, and we could go home every day. We had fun and exciting times with our different drivers. Some were old, some young, some slow, others fast. We have memories of taking the old sharp corner at Albertville on two wheels, and the time driving between some trees and onto the sidewalk on Elliott Street to miss an obstacle in the way. Once we girls in the back seat had trouble controlling our laughter as we watched our slow driver's eyes getting bigger and bigger and his hands gripping the steering wheel tighter when his car had run out of gas and was being pushed to the gas station by a much faster driver.

The men often started work an hour earlier in the morning than the women, and worked an hour later in the evening. This caused the girls to wait for the men many hours, often in cold cars.

Were those the good, old days? Thinking back today, I believe in many ways, they were the good ol' days.

Times were hard but God protected us through all of them. His Name be praised.

*The writer was born in 1918 in Schönfeld, Russia, and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Agatha speaks English, High German and Low German fluently.*





**Hodge Tobacco Factory Employees, Kingsville, Ontario, 1930s.**

**4<sup>th</sup> row from bottom Right to Left:**

Unknown, Sara Wiens, Mary Cornies Krueger, Agatha Driedger Dick, Kathe Dick Warkentin

**5<sup>th</sup> row from bottom Right to Left:**

Margaret Wiens Krueger, Susie Warkentin Hildebrand, Elizabeth Braun Wiebe, Agatha Cornies Konrad, Justa Braun Petker.

**Note:** Many more Mennonites began working at Hodges after 1936.



# 19) Our Move to Essex County

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John H. Dick

Our family arrived in Essex County in March of 1926. We came from the Waterloo area, traveled by train to Windsor, then by streetcar to a few miles north of Kingsville at Division Road. Our family consisted of my parents - John J. and Maria Dick, me - a five year old, brother Henry, and one-month old Bill.

We trudged along for about a mile, carrying our few belongings to a big, white house on the Inman Sideroad; this was to be our home. Father had traveled down earlier to make arrangements; our rent was \$6 per month. It was cold and dark when we arrived. Father set up a stove and soon had a fire going. Mother unpacked, set the table with a plate of *reeschi Tweeback* (roasted buns), boiled water and made hot chocolate. I have never tasted anything so wonderful as that hot chocolate!

We slept on the floor until our parents managed to scrounge a few boxes and crates and some furniture. Father began working in a tile-yard digging clay with a shovel. Because our house was large, we shared it with other immigrant families including the Peter Warkentins, John Tiessens, Abram Mathieses, and the Cornelius Ennses. Some lived with us a few weeks, others a few months.

Our house also became the meeting place for Sunday School and worship for about a year, then we met at the Kingsville town hall for about five years. To the Mennonites, no doubt ever existed but that they should worship together weekly. I especially remember my Sunday School teachers Mr. Thielman and Mr. Isaac Tiessen, and the singing.

After the services, visiting would often last into the evening. I just loved to sneak in and find a place in the corner where I could listen, unobserved. They would talk about this new land and the strange customs, how little respect was shown for older people, and how children would address older people by their first names. How they had to scrub the shacks they lived in, and how they scrimped and saved and made clothing out of used flour bags. The problems they had getting time off on religious holidays, and especially the confusion and embarrassment they often experienced with the new language, was all discussed regularly.

I want to mention how often they talked about the aid they received from America during the famine in Russia. Many testified that if it had not been for this aid, they would not be alive today. They considered it a miracle from God to be able to emigrate to Canada. I need to mention one individual, Bishop David Toews of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, who signed for the travel debt with the CPR which eventually grew to over a million dollars. When one person asked him how he could sleep knowing that he had signed for this huge amount, Bishop Toews had said, "I know how desperate a situation it is for these people and I sleep well, but I doubt that I would be able to sleep if I had not signed". Bishop Toews spent most of his life traveling around trying to collect that money. Because of the Depression and other reasons, it took over 20 years to liquidate the debt. It was in 1946, and Bishop Toews was on his deathbed when he finally could be told that the debt had been cleared.

When, after 16 years, Father was able to buy a small farm near Ruthven, brother Henry happened to be in the Post Office where he overheard one of the local people say, "A Dick family bought that old Dawson farm, they have four boys and they will starve on that place for sure". Times were difficult and progress was slow. I remember when we bought our first cow; when we saw Dad coming down the road leading that cow, the whole family went to the road to welcome them, how we cheered that now we would have all the milk and butter we needed!



A story goes that an immigrant came to this country. At first he worked on a farm, then he bought a little restaurant. The family worked together and gradually enlarged the business. The children grew up and went off to school. The boy went to university and took accounting. When he graduated, he came home saying, "Father, I want to go into business with you." Father was delighted. Soon after, the son was somewhat puzzled and said, "Father, your records are terrible, how do you know if you're making any profit, the way you keep your books?" "Son", said the father, "When I came to this country, I had nothing except the pants I was wearing. Now, we have a home, a car, a cottage and boat, your sister is a nurse, you have a degree, and we have countless friends. To me it is very clear and simple: you deduct the pants, and the rest is profit!"

That's exactly the way I feel. We came here with nothing, in fact, less than nothing. So everything we have and all that we have experienced is profit.

*The writer was born in Alexanderkrone, Ukraine in 1921 and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. John speaks English, High German and Low German.*



**Sunday School classes at Kingsville Town Hall in 1931**

**Back, L to r:** Teacher Peter P. Driedger, Ernie Neumann, John H. Dick, John P. Driedger, Alfred Klassen

**Row 3:** Erica Matthies Dyck, Mary Neumann Griffin, Erna Matthies Klassen, Erna Cornies, Sally Cornies Epp, Agatha Driedger Dick, Annie Driedger, Lydia Koop Wichert.

**Row 2:** David Cornies, Henry Driedger, Henry Dueckman, Henry Dick, unknown, Bill Dick, Teacher Greta Koop, Mary Berg Hildebrand, Kathe Driedger Warkentin, Margaret Cornies Walde, Louise Neuman Barg Tiessen, Helen Cornies Unger.

**Front:** Harry Mathies, Bill Mathies, Jake Mathies in front of Bill, Teacher Kathe Klassen Driedger, John Klassen, unknown, Helmut Dueckman, Lizzie Mathies Neufeld, Eleanor Mathies, Irma Tiessen, Talida Tiessen, Annie Mathies Krause.



## 20) Immigration Memoir

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*Walter Enns*

**D**ue to a disease of the eyes, my mother, Margaret Dück/Dick Enns had to undergo treatments before she could leave Russia. These began in Moscow in 1924, when she was 14, and continued in Riga, Latvia and Southampton, England until June 1930 when she was 20. During these six years, she was largely on her own since her parents and most of her siblings had emigrated from 1923 to 1925.

She spent the winter of 1924-1925 in Moscow along with her brother Henry and sister Jessie. They survived on funds that had been sent by older siblings in the USA, and from the meager earnings Henry could earn by doing odd jobs. They shared an apartment with 50 others, mainly women and children.

Each day she had to go for a treatment which had to be paid for on the spot. These were extremely painful both during and after treatment. Unfortunately, upon re-examination by the Canadian medical officer, there was no improvement and since their funds were exhausted, they were forced to return to Mariawohl in the Molotschna colony. Here her uncle, Johann Andres, took them in.

In August 1925, the Canadian medical officer examined her eyes again and they passed. In spite of a severe case of malaria she was permitted to leave Russia. She, along with her siblings Henry and Jessie, arrived in Riga, Latvia in September. Here further medical treatments were required. Since she was out of Russia, it was decided that she would stay on alone while her brother and sister traveled on. During her eight and a half month stay in Riga she had daily medical treatments while living in an emigrant transit camp.

In May 1926, she sailed to Southampton, England. Upon arrival, she failed her physical examination and had to remain in the Atlantic Park refugee camp for four years while undergoing further treatment of her eyes. Her sister Jessie, who had also been detained for health reasons, was with her until 1928.

In June 1930, she was given permission to sail for Canada. She had to continue eye treatment on board ship during the crossing, plus she suffered mightily from seasickness. She prayed for God's support and protection since she was very afraid of being refused entry to Canada.

Upon arrival in Quebec City in June 1930, a five-doctor medical team examined her. Their decision was that she would have to return to England. She was distraught over this and told them that she had not seen her parents in six years and if they sent her back she would not see England either because she would jump overboard into the ocean.

The doctors had another lengthy discussion when one of the other doctors suggested they let her into Canada. They all agreed and stamped her passport to that effect. She was in Canada! She credited the intervention of God for this positive turn of events. Since she spoke neither English nor French, she was dependent on the kindness of strangers to help her while on board the ship as well as to get her on the correct train for Windsor, Ontario.

She arrived in Windsor on Sunday, June 8, 1930. Alas, there was no one there to meet her since her family thought she would be arriving on Monday. Again, it was the kind intervention of a stranger that got her safely onto the streetcar bound for Leamington: The Windsor, Essex and Lake Shore Rapid Railway Company operated from 1907 until 1932.



The journey seemed endless. At the Ruthven stop she noticed a lot of people who appeared to be Mennonite. A young man wearing dark glasses boarded and she approached him to ask how much further Leamington was, but she was unable to utter a word. All at once he said, "*Gredel, bist Du das?*" (Greta, is that you?). It was brother Peter who had grown a great deal in the intervening six years. They greeted each other warmly and she was overjoyed and thankful to God for allowing her to be with her family once more.

Mother's home, until her marriage to my father, was 310 Erie Street South, in Leamington. The house, now (2004) boarded up, still stands directly south of the Burger King.

*The writer, born in Leamington in 1935, is a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Margaret Dick Enns died in March of 2005.*



**Atlantic Park Refugee Camp, Southampton, England, ca 1927**  
Front: Jessie Dick Unger, back: sister Margaret Dick Enns, age 17



# 21) Memories of the Early Years

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*Cornelius Hamm*

I vaguely recall the ship landing in Quebec, Canada, and the long train ride. I do remember Reinland village, Manitoba, where we spent the winter. In early spring we, with two other families, moved to a large farm in Marquette, further north.

In 1926, Aunt Anna Hamm came from Russia, so Mother invited her to stay with us in our one bedroom house. Her son Jake was my age and we had many fun hours together.

One day we had a letter from my Uncle Jakob Hamm saying he had arrived in Canada. He lived in Leamington, Ontario where there was much work available. Things weren't going that well with us, and so we left the West. In Ontario, Mom and Dad found work through the summer and early fall. Not much was found to do in the winter months. In the meantime, Dad had bought a car so they could drive to work. In spring Dad found work with Alexander (Sandy) Wilkinson, a somewhat prosperous farmer. He worked there for two years; they were busy year round. I was also drawn in to pick up potatoes, so I was able, at ten years of age, to contribute a little.

The recession was having it's effects on the workplace, and people offered to work for room and board. So Dad was out of a job. The only option available was sharecropping. Dad found a place, but there was no house on the farm, so he helped build a house and barn. We stayed for two years and grew tomatoes, corn and grain. I helped plant while brother Rudy babysat the younger boys.

In the fall, Rudy and I had to go to school; I had already started in Manitoba. When Mom and Dad worked on Concession 4, near Highway #77, which was then called the Leamington Sideroad, we walked with others to old Mount Carmel School. Our teacher was Miss Cox. We were regimented into a marching group with the usual turns, starts and stops. It was in preparation for the Leamington fair competition. It was all very new to us, and we didn't know what to expect.

We needed to move to town when the work ended and the weather got cold because we lived in a garage with dirt floors and batten doors. We moved into a one-room apartment upstairs at the streetcar station, on the corner of Mill and Erie Streets. Others living next to us were Mary and Henrietta Warkentin and two Dyck brothers. We went to the Mill Street school only two blocks away. My classroom was on the second floor and my teacher's last name was Clonis. We stayed five months.

In March we moved to Concession 6 where Dad was working and we went to a school on the same road. When the boss's son got married, we had to move to the Jones Sideroad at Concession 4. We went to school at SS #22 on Highway #3, and again I had Miss Cox as teacher. During the second school term, a young teacher named Miss Foster, later Miriam Saunders, began her teaching career. From there we moved to Concession B; the school was on Concession C, where we went for a short time. In fall we were transferred to SS #21, where we went for a year and a half. Our income was meager; we raised about 50 chickens and a pig. We lived across the road from a blacksmith shop; this was of interest to us five boys. At this time we also had German language classes. We walked across the fields to Concession 1 where Mr. Gerhard Reimer was our teacher. He was father-in-law to Brother Henry Thielman.



About two houses west of us lived a Schellenberg family. Also we got acquainted with the Nick Tiessen family. I would often go to Nick Tiessen's to play on Sunday. They were sharecropping for Ian Harris and his brother Tom. Ian was crippled and couldn't work. He had a hobby of woodcarving. He'd cut the wood into small pieces about 3/8 inches square, then glue the pieces together and make violins, etc. He could play a tune on them.

From Concession B we moved to the Leamington Side road near Concession 7, the Enos Windsor farm. The house was a log cabin. Here I stayed home and my brothers Rudy, Peter, Jakob, John and Ed went to Blytheswood school on the west corner of Concession 8 and the Side road. I had come down with Scarlet Fever and as a result, I needed to cover my ears at the slightest chill for the rest of my life. So, at 13 years of age, my school days were over. While living on the Windsor farm, we did mostly hourly work, and I began harvesting flue-cured tobacco. Here again our income was marginal. Dad would buy a bag of oats, take it to a mill to have it ground. Some of the hulls were blown off, but some would show up in our porridge.



When we needed meat in fall, Dad went to a farmer and bought a large 600 pound sow for nine dollars. We had lots of lard, lots of cracklings and crackling spread for our bread. Dad would also buy wheat, have it milled, perhaps along with some rye, for whole wheat bread. We lived there only one year. In the winter Dad and I cut wood for a farmer who had a bush, and made a few dollars. Dad was handy around engines and I learned a lot when he fixed the old Chevy.

Cornie ends his story here. After several more moves from place to place, his parents were able to buy a farm on Concession 2 of Kingsville in 1942.

*The writer is the late husband of Erna Hamm, who submitted his story. Cornie was born in 1918 in New York, Russia, and died March 12, 1994 in Leamington, Ontario. He was a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church, now Meadow Brook Fellowship in Leamington, where Erna worships to this day.*

**The Hamm family:** Cornie, Rudy, Peter, Jake, John with parents Amalia and Peter. Their son Edward was born later.



**Note:** Cornie's parents spoke Low German to the oldest three children, namely Cornie, Rudy and Peter. To Jake, John and Edward, the younger three, they spoke High German. This was not unusual at that time. During the 1930s it occurred to Mennonite parents that the High German would be of better use to their children than the Low German dialect.



**Kolya (Nick) and Agatha Hamm Dyck in their Windsor home: 1930s photo.**

Kolya, born 1899, and Agatha, moved from Windsor to Germany in 1938 where Kolya, who spoke German, Russian and English, became an interpreter in the German army. When the Dycks had difficulty returning to Canada after the war, Kolya's brother Jacob P. Dyck spoke to Murray Clark of Harrow. Clark was a member of parliament, and in one week's time, Kolya and Agatha were back in Canada. Kolya had worked for Clark earlier. The couple later moved to St. Catharines where Agatha had family members. Kolya got work there sanding floors. Kolya and Jacob were sons of Peter P. and Anna Schapansky Dyck from Neuenberg, Ukraine.



## 22) A Funeral: October 1941

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*Louise Driedger Mulcaster*

When I was four years old, my *Oma* (grandmother) Driedger died, and the circumstances surrounding her death and funeral are indelibly etched in my memory.

Leading up to this event, I had attended a house funeral for our neighbour, Mr. Katy, Senior. He had been part of the farmer group that shredded corn together. The big corn stalk shredder came to each farmer in turn and when it came to a specific farm the other farmers came along to help run the machine as part of the group's commitment to each other. I remembered Mr. Katy especially because he had false teeth which he would stick out over his top lip and try to get a reaction out of us children. We, of course, ran away screaming hysterically, which is what he had hoped we would do. He did this every time we came and we came to expect it. I remember the farmers boisterously washing up in the kitchen. Seeing all those men in their overalls, with varying stages of beard growth, bringing with them loud talk and different smells, was quite an experience. There were some neighbourhood women who came over as well, to help cook for sometimes up to 6-8 farmers. Mr. Katy's funeral was held at his house. I remember distinctly, feeling the rightness of the song the soloist sang, "We'll say goodnight here, but good morning up there".

Another time, my father took me along to our neighbour's house, after our neighbour, Mr. Bruner died. His body was laid out in the living room of their big farmhouse, across from our home. I remember feeling rather awed at going into the inner sanctum of this house, where we had never been invited to go before. The coffin stood along one wall, flanked by rows of flowers and everything was very still.

Mennonite funerals were similar to the ones mentioned above that were held in houses, but we also had church services after the service in the house. When I was four years old, my *Oma* died. She was my father's mother, the one who had strongly encouraged the Driedger family to emigrate from Russia to Canada, when the murders and looting began in their part of Russia in the 1920s. She was the main reason that this Driedger family could enjoy peace and prosperity in a new country.

She was the same *Oma* who rescued me from a small whirlwind that blew sand into my eyes as I was riding my tricycle in the yard. I ran to her, crying, and she comforted me by taking me on her lap and telling me a story.

*Oma* lived with my *Opa* (grandfather) Driedger in the "white house" on our farm. She had been ailing with a liver problem, probably cancer, for some time. I remember her being frail and having to sit on a cushion at the table at mealtimes. Then she became bedridden and lay in a little room off the dining room. On a night table at her bed, there was a little bell that she would tap if she needed something. I was allowed to bring her her food on a tray, which I did proudly. One day she was gone. I stood by her bed with *Opa*, and the rest of the family. As a four year old child, I took in the gravity of the situation; the purple hue of my grandmother's hand in death; the date on the calendar, October 02, 1941. Immediately after her death, my *Opa* called us into the dining room. He read from the Bible and we knelt by our chairs, as we did every night at prayers before bedtime. And *Opa* prayed. And so my *Oma* was dressed in her black Sunday dress with the lace collar, and laid in the standard gray, cloth-covered model, used by all the Mennonites at that time. The coffin stood in our living room with flowers all around. Friends and relatives came to pay respects.



The funeral was held at the United Mennonite Church on Oak Street in Leamington. It was held in the original building, facing north and south. What I remember most was the sad German hymn we sang during the service. As a four year old, I did not understand the meaning of the words: "*Nein, nein, nein, nein, hier ist Sie (the soul) nicht*". I understood the words to mean, "No, no, no, no, my grandmother is not here". The song goes on with the words, "*Die Heimat der Seele ist droben im Licht*", (the home of the soul is above in the light (God's)). We buried our *Oma* in the cemetery between Leamington and Ruthven, which we go by every time we take old Highway #3 to Leamington.

*The writer was born near Kingsville in 1937 and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church*



**The Driedger family:** Abe and Helen Driedger, the writer's parents; Jake and Agatha Derksen, Neil and Mary Regehr, Opa Driedger, Oma Driedger in coffin, **John Driedger**, **Peter** and Katie Driedger, **Jake** and Agnes Driedger. 1941.



## 23) The Alexander Fischer Family

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*Alfred Fischer*

At the time of his arrival in Quebec in 1924, my father Alexander Fischer volunteered to act as French-German translator for their group. But when he was offered a paid position as translator he refused, saying he had come to Canada to become his own boss.

Our parents, Alexander and Margaretha Fischer began market garden farming in the Elmira, Ontario area. After two years of loneliness expressed in letters between sisters Maria Hildebrand (Nick) and Margaretha (our mother), plus the lure of the West, they moved to St. Anne, Manitoba. Here a nearby dairy farm was taken over. It included a log house near the banks of the Seine River.

During the next four years, various hardships were experienced. One was a rush to Winnipeg to have Dad's appendix removed. And after weeks of complaining on Dad's part, a second operation was performed in order to remove some metal equipment that was previously forgotten. The hospital staff expressed great relief when they realized that Dad was not going to sue.

My parents had to endure the pain of losing Alfred, their two year old second son, by drowning. This tragedy occurred shortly before I was born.

Around this time, word had it that the Essex and Kent County area in Ontario was the place to be. The promise was there for a warmer climate, better land, and a longer list of crops from which to choose. So the decision was made to sell out, travel by train to Wheatley, Ontario and take over a rental farm that was available. The buildings and most of the land was just south of Wheatley. This farm soon became home to a growing number of chickens, ducks, turkeys, sheep, cows and horses. The Fischer family also continued to grow with Mary's arrival in 1932 and Harry in 1934.

Not long after Harry was born, Mother became ill and passed away. Left behind was a grief stricken husband, a father, four young children, as well as relatives and friends. Help and compassion soon followed. *Oma* and *Opa* Wiens from Victoria Avenue in Leamington offered to take care of baby Harry. Neighbours *Tante* Mariechen and *Onkel* Peter Derksen senior, offered to take Mary. My care was divided between *Tante* Justa and *Onkel* Jake Riediger and the Glen Tuffins who operated the Wheatley egg station. They had three girls and were anxious to adopt this boy. At about five years of age, my only recollection was not of the girls, but of a nice house with an inside toilet. I'm certain that all of us were loved and treated as one of their own. Brother Bill stayed home and helped Dad with various chores and kept him company. Much of what I'm writing has been gleaned from stories told and related by my parents and others.

In 1935 a new Ford V8 car was purchased. In 1936 a proposal to a professional midwife was accepted. The subsequent marriage to Anna Friesen made our scattered family become whole and together once more. Joy and happiness was expressed and shown by all of us. We children felt that our father had made a good choice in selecting our second mother.

Early in their marriage, Dad decided that it would be good if Mom learned to drive the car and get her driver's licence. Reluctantly, she agreed to a trial lesson in a large pasture field. In short order our mom was able to put the car into the ditch at the end of the field. That marked the beginning and end of her driving career. This was a minor setback when compared to her many good and positive accomplishments.



Some of Father's early success in Canada was due, in part, to his command of the English language, adding it to the list he had mastered in Russia. He claimed that studying the funny papers (comics) helped a great deal. As children, we were asked always to talk to him in English, and also share some of our school lessons with him. Our mom helped to keep up the German language. I remember going to the Saturday German School classes held in the Oak Street Church basement. My ride was usually with the Jacob Janzens or the Abram Rempels. Later on, we were strongly encouraged to get a secondary school education. At one point during my three years at Leamington High School, I had taken all my books home and told classmates that I was quitting. The next morning, I was back in school again.

During the early years of WWII, anti-German Mennonite sentiment was followed by vandalism in our Oak Street church and ugly rumors about our church and its members. This prompted our father to write a somewhat lengthy letter to the editor of the Wheatley Journal.

I recall hearing Dad remark to someone that Mary was his sunshine. Not wanting to be upstaged by my younger sister, I claimed to be his moonshine!

Through the years employment was available for teenagers to help harvest hay and other jobs. Father believed that youngsters learned quickly and so we were taught tractor driving at a young age. One story concerned someone who had seen the Fordson tractor seemingly working in a field without a driver. His remark to Father was that he knew Dad was capable of many things, but how could he possibly make that tractor work without a driver? Our parents believed that work didn't hurt anyone.

There was also time for leisure activities. In nearby Lake Erie we were taught how to swim by a strong swimmer and a dad who amazed us by walking up and down the beach on his hands. We were treated to outings to the Detroit Zoo, Greenfield Village and Niagara Falls. One exciting trip had our overloaded car leave our little public school to go to Windsor to see our King and Queen.

In late winter our father would make use of some of his slack time by hiring out his horses and himself to McLean Brothers Fishery for the annual ice harvest. Hand sawn fifty pound blocks of clear ice were floated to shore and eventually piled in sawdust lined ice shanties. This ice would be used later for packing and shipping fish. Gord Omstead related some years ago that as a 15 year old, he remembered delivering ice to our place and putting the blocks into our ice box. We may have had electricity, but a refrigerator for us was still years away. Part of the reward for helping with the ice harvest had something to do with the coining of the term "all the fish you can eat".

Approximately once a week throughout most of the fishing season, I'd take a pail and walk to McLeans Fishery to get some fish. The routine rarely changed. When I arrived I would usually meet up with one or both of the brothers: Nick and George. They would ask what the pail was for, and when I said it was for some fish the next move was for me to put the pail down and fight for them. After the boxing lesson, my opponent would pretend to be tired and the other brother would then fill up the pail and I'd head for home.

For a few summers in the late 1930s we were helped by Alf, Rudy, and Art Derksen. In return, they got room and board, swimming, horseback riding, etc, including a way of getting away from the city life. Their father, baker Derksen had worked for Jackson's Bakery in Leamington until he was transferred to Chatham. He felt that his boys needed to know what work was all about. It must have been too much for brother Bill and Alf, the oldest, so they decided to run away. With a few belongings and some change they walked and hitchhiked to Leamington, where they were found many hours later, watching a movie. They were never to do that again.



After two years in Chatham, and some money in the bank, it was decided to purchase a 200 acre farm available on Concession 7 of Gosfield North Township. The lure of Essex County had been strong again. Distance and frequency of visits with relatives, friends, and church were the prime reasons. During this time, due to some confusion, I ended up in a lower class in Sunday School than previously. I was probably the only Sunday School student of the Oak Street Church ever to be demoted.

On one occasion, when we were short of help, Lena, a longtime tractor driver was given the choice of shelling corn, or hauling corn and operating the dryer. She chose the Gleaner and learned how to do a good job in short order. And I don't recall her going into the ditch or anything like that. People told us that we worked well together. Of course, we knew that we were a good team since Fall of 1952 when we were married. We soon became sharecroppers on 250 acres. Dad did quite well as a machinery salesman in Essex, selling Oliver and other equipment.

In 1957 Lena and I purchased the 200 acre home farm, and Father graduated into the small group that was taking care of the realty needs of the Leamington area, having passed the exam on his first attempt. At this time Dad taught himself to use a typewriter. His first sale was a 1,000 acre parcel of tough clay in Colchester North Township for the asking price of \$100,000. The vendor was a former machinery customer as was the seller who had recently sold his 100 acre farm for the Windsor airport expansion.

Dad was one of the early promoters of building a Mennonite Home. Eventually he was able to set up a good land deal with Warren Danforth, along with a personal guarantee that there would be a room available for him if and when needed.

Our parents spent and enjoyed part of many summers at their cottage near North Bay and some months of ten consecutive winters in Florida. I do recall one regret Dad expressed, that if he could do it over again, he would have slowed down and taken it much easier much sooner. As it turned out, Mr. Danforth and our parents were able to spend their final years in one of the better rest homes in Essex County!



*The writer was born in 1930 in St. Anne, Manitoba and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church.*

**To the left: Alexander Fischer on tractor, 1934, operating the first corn picker in Essex County.**



## 24) From Reesor to Essex County

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*Hedy Lepp Dennis, Irene Lepp Rempel and Herman Lepp*

**T**he Reesor settlement was born on June 15, 1925, when Mennonite immigrants from the Ukraine took up homesteads at mile 103 in the vast forests of Northern Ontario. By 1936, the population had grown to about 500 settlers - mostly of Mennonite, French, Finnish and Ukrainian descent.

As the pulpwood, which was their main income, became depleted, and in order to maintain their Mennonite traditions, many Mennonites gradually left for greener fields - mainly Southern Ontario. Our father, H.P. Lepp, as minister of the church, felt it was his duty to stay and serve the congregation there. After about 80% of the Mennonite settlers had left and with encouragement from Nicolai Isaak and others, he too decided to pack up our belongings and head South.

Consequently, in the month of May, 1943, all our modest possessions, including a cow named "*die Rose*" (the rose), and a slatted crate of laying hens were loaded into a small rented railway boxcar - destined for Kingsville, Ontario. This boxcar was shared with the John Loewen family. Since livestock was included, Rudy, at the age of 16, and the oldest of the Lepp children, was permitted to accompany this shipment. Loose hay provided fodder as well as comfortable sleeping accommodations. A milk pail and a manure shovel were also vital necessities. At various railway stations, water had to be secured for the animals.

While traveling through Kent County, Rudy gladly accepted the invitation to ride inside the smoke belching steam locomotive. On the third day, leaning on the manure shovel and sucking on a straw, he arrived in Kingsville - pondering his future life in Essex County.

In the meantime, the rest of our family, the parents and five children all squeezed into our small 1930 model A Ford. The parents and the youngest sat in front while the remaining four were in the back - sharing the limited space with a bald spare tire that had been removed to accommodate a box for food. Four new wartime synthetic rubber tires and tubes had been acquired for the trip, along with an extra book of gasoline coupons.

Even though the wartime speed limit was 40 mph, we traveled well below 30, due to loose gravel and winding roads. Suddenly, a groundhog was spotted along the roadway. Within seconds, Dad and the boys were in full pursuit of the animal. The trophy was then carefully laid out on the floor in the back, beside the spare tire and the four occupants, who were already packed in like sardines. And we were on our merry way once more.

It was late at night when we finally arrived at North Bay. Dad entered the local hotel lobby and an animated negotiation with the night clerk was launched. Dad felt that the going rate of \$2 per room was exorbitant. Eventually, a more favourable agreement was reached - possibly three rooms for the price of two. The parents occupied one room, the two girls another, while the three boys shared a bed by sleeping crossways on it. Prior to retiring in this firetrap, Dad made everyone aware of the exact location of the fire escape.

It was well after midnight when Henry was desperately searching the dimly lit hallway for the familiar outhouse. He finally noticed a bathroom - the first one he'd ever seen - but it served its purpose. As he was about to crawl back into bed, he inadvertently became aware of a strange woman, sound asleep. Still in a daze, he looked around the room - the wrong room.



We started again early the next morning. When we reached the Queen Elizabeth Highway we were overawed. Here was an all concrete highway with overpasses and all. How impressive! Amidst all this sophistication and aware that our next stop was at *Ältester* (Bishop) Koop's at Vineland, we now sensed that the lowly groundhog must go. So, with everyone's consent, the woodchuck was unceremoniously tossed out the window onto the shoulder of the "Queen E." Sadly, but with it, we also threw out the last traces of our northern way of life which we had loved so well.

We were still some distance from our intended stopover at Vineland when it began to rain. As darkness set in we had a flat tire. With the aid of tire irons, Dad removed the tire and tube and applied a patch - all in the dark. After pumping up the tire with a hand pump, a loud hiss indicated that the whole procedure would have to be repeated. By now Dad was all soaked and cold. We finally arrived at the Koops' at 2 A.M.

After recuperating for a day we left for Kingsville once more. On one occasion, when Dad pulled off the road to consult a road map, a policeman suddenly appeared and curtly advised him that he was illegally parked. When we arrived in Kingsville our furniture had not yet been set up in the small house we were renting and so we spent the night at our relatives, Peter and Johanna Lepp Thiessen. Years later, the Thiessens mentioned to us that when we arrived from Reesor we all smelled like moss.

Mother tallied up our gasoline expenses for the 900 mile trip. We had used 45 gallons of fuel at the total cost of \$17.25.

About a year after arriving in Kingsville from Reesor, Dad (Rev. Herman P. Lepp) bought a farm near Harrow, our home for many years to come.

*The writers were born in Reesor, Ontario: Hedy in 1928, Irene in 1930, and Herman in 1931. Hedy is a member of Valleyview Mennonite Church in London, Ontario; Irene and Herman are members of Harrow Mennonite Church in Harrow, Ontario.*



**Planting cabbage on our Harrow farm in 1944**

**L to r: Rudy, Henry, Mother (Gertrude Lepp), Peter, Herman, Hedy and Irene**



## 25) John Jacob Enns

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Louise Enns Cornies

My father, John J. Enns, was born December 24, 1901 on his grandfather's estate, Tiegenhof, north of Zaporozhye, Ukraine, Russia. He was the son of Jakob J. Enns Jr., and Katharina Fast. He lived and attended school in several villages before settling in Neu-Halbstadt, Molotschna, in 1914. Here he attended secondary school and then the college of commerce. But times became very difficult - the Machno bandits and the communists made life unbearable and father joined the *Selbstschutz*, a group of young Mennonite men who patrolled the villages. In 1919, to save their lives, some of these young men joined the White army, which was fighting the bandits as well as the communists. However, the White army was forced south to the Crimea and defeated. Father and his friends fled by boat to Constantinople (now Istanbul), Turkey. Thus it was that, as an eighteen year old, he became a fugitive and never again saw his family.

In Turkey, the American Mennonite Near East Relief (now MCC) helped the Mennonite men leave the army and go to the USA or Germany. Father went to Sofia, Bulgaria, then Danzig, Germany and finally, on the advice of Benjamin Unruh, to Canada. He arrived in Herbert, Saskatchewan (near Swift Current) in October, 1923 where he worked for three years until he moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba. There he met and in 1928 married my mother, Agnes Peters. They had both been baptized in Winnipeg by *Ältester* (Bishop) J. P. Klassen. Shortly thereafter they moved to Leamington, Ontario, where they lived the rest of their lives, raising a family and attending the Leamington United Mennonite Church.

John and Agnes Enns were active members of this church until their deaths. My father, in particular, held a variety of positions in the church and did so with much love and dedication, always supported in his endeavors by his family. Music was one of his great loves and he began using this gift to serve the church immediately upon his arrival in Leamington. He and my mother sang in Peter Willms' church choir for several years. He directed the youth choir for three years during WWII. He sang in the male choirs of the church for forty years. In 1978 he organized the Opportunity Choir, a choir of seniors, which he directed for approximately ten years. Also during these many years he transcribed and collated much of the music for all the church choirs. For over twenty years, Father was a *Vorsänger* (song leader), and assisted in obtaining pianists and organists for the church services.

Writing was another of my father's gifts. During the forties and fifties he wrote, directed and produced several plays in both High and Low German. He also wrote songs, prose and poetry. He used his writing skills further to serve on church council in the 1940s and 1950s as secretary. He then became secretary-treasurer for the Ontario Mennonite Conference for five years. He served as secretary on the UMEI Board for three years and on the Mennonite Home Building Committee for its first three phases of construction. In the early fifties, Father was asked to help church members purchase cemetery lots at Evergreen Cemetery and for many years he also collected charitable donations at the funeral home.

In John Enns' senior years, his desire and abilities to serve God and his church never lessened. For approximately twenty years he was the caretaker of the Homeview Apartments and led the morning devotions in the Mennonite Home (in German and English). He also volunteered his time in driving patients for medical appointments and in doing landscaping work. He was chairman of the committee of male seniors of the church who received a grant from the government to establish a workshop, complete with machinery and tools - located behind the Home. This group became known as "The Woodpeckers". He and many others built articles for sale to raise money for the Home. He was thrilled to be able to help during the building of the "new" Leamington United Mennonite Church in 1984, the oldest church member to do so.



On April 21, 1990, a plaque with the following inscription was presented to my father:

**PRESENTED BY  
THE ESSEX-KENT MENNONITE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
TO  
JOHN J. ENNS  
IN RECOGNITION  
OF HIS  
CONTRIBUTIONS TO  
THE MENNONITE COMMUNITY**



**John J. Enns**

He was very humbled by this honour and accepted it with his usual gracious, unselfish manner. John Enns was a wonderful man, a kind and gentle husband, father, grandfather and friend. He loved his God, his family and friends, his church, his community and his country Canada; serving them all to the best of his ability until his death in June, 1996. The verses he chose for his obituary were Psalm 13: 5, 6 - But I will always trust in You and Your mercy and shall rejoice in Your salvation. I shall sing to the Lord because He has blessed me so richly.

*The writer, a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church, was born in Leamington in 1942. Louise is fluent in English and German.*



# CHAPTER

## THREE

*1945-1965*



# 1) Our New Beginning

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*Elfriede Dyck*

I was born in Altmüsterberg, *Kreis* (County) Gr. Werder, Prussia. Our forefathers had worked hard and left us a rich fertile piece of land, in what was known as the bread basket of Germany. There I spent a happy, carefree childhood, secure in my parents' love, and in a Christian home. I remember every Sunday afternoon was visiting time. And every time the men would inspect the fields and the women would inspect the gardens. My mother spent many hours in her vegetable and flower garden. It was a showpiece and admired by many visitors and passers-by. Life was good and I hoped it would stay that way.

But it all came to an end on a cold winter night in January of 1945. The Russian army had advanced and we were ordered to leave. My dad had prepared four wagons, similar to the conestoga wagons. The call came. We packed food and people and joined the trek in our quest to escape the Russian army. It was slow going. The roads were crowded and so the Russian army beat us to the Baltic Sea. We were cut off and had to turn back. After two months, we happened to be in Neufahrwasser (in Prussia on the Baltic Sea), at the right time. A freighter was leaving and we managed to get on it. We left on March 22, 1945, and reached Kiel (in Schleswig Holstein, West Germany), six days later. From there we took a train to Innien and were greeted by our sister and brother. We had not heard from them since we left home. My dad had to stay behind in Danzig, but three days later he came and we were together and safe in West Germany.

Now that we were reunited, we had a lot of adjusting to do. Thousands of homeless people were looking for food and a place to stay. Both were in short supply. It was like a light at the end of a dark tunnel when we heard that Canada had opened its doors to immigrants from Germany. We applied, and after several rejections, were accepted. All we needed was a sponsor who would promise to give us work for a year and then money to pay for our voyage. I am still very grateful to the MCC for working so hard on our behalf. Together with my sister and her family, I boarded the Beaverbrae and started the long journey across the ocean to Canada.

We arrived safely on April 22, 1952 in Quebec City. An MCC representative greeted us and we learned the name of our sponsor. Jake and Elfriede Dick in Waterloo, Ontario, needed help and gave me a chance. They welcomed me into their family, introduced me to their friends, and to the Waterloo-Kitchener congregation. For \$50 per month I worked on the farm and helped in the household. I was able to pay off my debt to the CPR who had advanced us the money with 2% interest. I am thankful to the Dicks for everything they did for me.

But I missed my family, and after one year, I joined my sisters in Essex County. One sister and her family lived on Concession 6 and they took me in. Surrounded by farmland, I felt at home. I had grown up on a farm, but here everything was different. In the old country we grew vegetables only for our own use, and had one or two fruit trees of every variety. We did not know peaches and surely enjoyed them here. It was good for us newcomers, that everything was planted by hand. There was a lot of work. I learned to crawl on my knees, work with my head down most of the time and adjust to the heat. It was very important to me to earn a living.

And then our parents came to join us. They stayed with my sister and her family for a time and I joined my other sister in Leamington. We found it to be a new experience for us when we looked for an apartment together. I remember a place advertised as a three bedroom apartment that turned out to be a large room



divided by blankets into three rooms. We had to practice patience. And then luck was on our side. One of our newfound friends knew of an apartment and guided us in the right direction and we rented a nice place. It even had a backyard where my mother could grow flowers and my Dad planted a vegetable garden. We moved in before busy season.

I liked working on the farm, but there was no work in winter and no insurance. So my sister and I started work at the Heinz factory. My father found work in the Pyramid factory. We shopped at yard sales and with the help of friends and orange crates, managed just fine.

Every beginning is hard. Money was scarce. But we had vegetables and fruit and I also remember smelt fishing in spring. And in the winter we had a chance to learn English at night school. Eaton's catalogue was handy. Also, finding so many German-speaking people ready to help was good.

In 1952 and 1953, a large group of immigrants arrived from Germany. In a very short time, we found friends and it was so good to be safe. In summer we met at Point Pelee and in the winter it was visiting time again. We all joined the Leamington United Mennonite Church and were made welcome by *Ältester* (Bishop) N.N. Driedger. The sermon was in German; we felt right at home.

In ending, I would like to say that Essex County and its people have been good to us. I think the memorial marker erected in the park by the Mennonite people says it very well: We express our gratitude to God for having allowed us to find a new homeland of peace and prosperity.

*The writer, a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church, was born in Altmünsterberg, Prussia in 1927. Elfriede speaks German and English fluently.*





**Summer of 1956: The Danziger Mennonites gather at the Wheatley Provincial Park on the occasion of a visit from Pastor Ernst Regehr from Uruguay.**

**Standing, l to r:** Werner and Rosemarie Janzen Froese, Siegfried Wiebe, Paul Fiss, Renate Janzen Dick, Christel Fietkau Froese, Adolf Funk, Amanda Reimer, Gustor Wiebe, Elfriede Quapp and Henry Bergman, Ernst Regehr, Walter Froese, Ernst Reimer, Adolf Dueck, Lothar Wiebe, Willie and Annemarie Janzen, Hans Quapp, Elfriede Dyck, Alex and Erika Dueck Schmidtgall, Paul G. Epp, Anna Wiebe, Alfred and Ruth Fieguth Harder, Guenther and Käthe Goerzen Froese.

**Seated, l to r:** Anna Quapp with granddaughter Marianne, Hermiene Fietkau, Marie Fieguth, Helene Wiebe, Erna Dueck, Annie Wiebe, Gertrud Wiebe

**Seated on ground:** Klaus Wiebe, Klaus Janzen, Peter Fiss, Axel Froese, Paul Fiss, Gisela Wiebe Schartner, Ingrid Wiebe Unger, Rosemarie Quapp Tiessen, Jutta Froese Rahn, Sabine Froese Kaiser, Lore Adishkewitz, Karin Froese Dupont.



## 2) Our Move to Leamington

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Katie Penner Brown

As a sixteen-year old girl I was NOT pleased when we moved from BC to Ontario! I had made up my mind to be *brummsch* (grumpy) on our trip by car to this place called Leamington. I simply was NOT going to like it here; I was NOT going to join anything; I was NOT going to smile anymore; I was NOT going to make new friends; and I was NOT going to school either.

We arrived on July 28, 1949, a hot humid day. When I expressed my utter contempt for this move as we turned the car onto Oak East from Erie Street, my dad had had it! He pulled the car to the side of Oak East, and lectured me on my attitude. Our destination was the Jacob and Olga Hamm farm, just down the road from where he had stopped and he told me in no uncertain terms to behave when we got there.

Our welcome at the Hamm place was very friendly. They went out of their way to make us feel at home. Since the house, Peter and Helen Epp's place on Highway 77, was not ready yet, we spent a few weeks here.

Remember, I was NOT going to do anything but read. Well, that changed. It was not long before I had a seasonal job at the H. J. Heinz factory. My jobs, working on the tomato rigs with a million crickets, and/or scouring rusty cans in the basement on the night shift, made me change my mind about NOT going to school.

Anna Neufeld, Bill's sister, invited me to come to choir practice the second Sunday we were here. Of course I was not interested a bit. Surprisingly, my dad convinced me that I should try it. Choir practice at that time was held Saturday night in the old white church on Oak Street. I think there were two or three choirs at the time, which really impressed me. Here I was introduced to a new form of notes, a bunch of numbers! When I came home I told Mom and Dad and they laughed and said I was going to learn *Ziffern* (music with numbers instead of notes) and the *Dur* (key). I guess they used these in the Ukraine when they were young. We also sang a cappella, for there was no piano to be seen. This changed shortly, though, and notes became the new standard. I never did catch on to *Ziffern*. After choir practice the young people would walk, some would get rides, to Diana Sweets, a restaurant on Talbot Street West. Hmm, that was fun, but was I going to admit that? No way!

In September I did go to UMEI (United Mennonite Educational Institute) and found the teachers and classmates very accepting. My first test came when I was asked: "What are you, an Old Kolnia or a Molotschna?" I had no idea what that was and that noon hour Mom and Dad gave me a quick Mennonite history lesson. I remember Dad making a strange comment at the time. "*O, so bläst der Wind hier.*" (So that's how the wind blows here).

Learning to know the kids was one thing, for the use of nicknames was another strange phenomenon here. Who was Mitzi, Hammy, Shorty, Neht, Hairless, Farmer, Herr Gossen, Kubenic, Tiny, Wilkie, Hobby, etc., etc.? It took me quite a while to put the real names, the nicknames and the faces together.

During this time I was "thawing out". I could not resist joining the many activities of the youth. For example, there was *Erbauungsstunde*; we called it construction hour. This was a program for the youth, by the youth every two or three weeks, either in the church or UMEI basement; the Sunday night spontaneous lawn parties held at the various farm homes; the canoeing parties at Cedar Beach; the roller skating evenings at the UMEI. What fun it was to skate around and around that floor to the strains of "nice" music!



Then there were the retreats Out East, which I found out was the St. Catherines, Niagara area - not the Maritimes; the weddings, which took place almost every Saturday during the summer months, when the whole family was invited. Remember the invitations always read, *nebst Familie* (including family). The youth were usually asked to serve, and I recall how the girls would stand around the kitchen in the basement of the old church and wait for the boys to ask their favourite girl to pour coffee with them. Oh, the anxiety and worry if no one asked you and you would have to pour coffee with another girl!

For the *Sängerfeste* (song festivals) we would pile into a car and head "East", not always getting to the right destination on time. School activities with their literary programs, their musical programs at the various churches, octet and quartet practices were also great and enjoyable events.

Some Friday and Saturday nights a group would meet at Carder TV on Fox Street to watch the newest invention - TV! My brother Bruno worked there and had brought one of these sets home, put up the antenna on the roof, and we thought we were all set, but in a few days Dad was asked to take it down, because he and his family were not being good role models for the young people. So the *Sündenkasten* (sin box) had to go! I really did not understand this, but that's the way it was.

Within a year, Dad noticed I had changed, and I too was ready to admit that Leamington was really a great place to be. The friendliness, the acceptance and the hospitality shown to us really could not have been greater.

Thanks, Leamington Mennonite community, for making me/us feel part of you so quickly.

*The writer was born in Hague, Saskatchewan in 1933, and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church. Katie is fluent in High German, Low German and English.*



**Katie Penner Brown (r) and mother Catherina Winter Penner on their way to Essex-Kent.**



### 3) My Memories of the Windsor Market

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*Alice Krueger Toews*

**F**or many years, during summer and fall, in the late 1940s until the early 1950s, my family spent Wednesdays and Saturdays at the Windsor Market on Chatham Street. When I was about twelve, I was deemed old enough to go to market with my dad. Sometimes one of my brothers came along, sometimes even my mother. When I was much older and not going to Market anymore, I had to explain to my husband, that if I ever did strange or bizarre things, it could easily be explained by my growing up at the Windsor Market.

The day before market the whole family would work hard, sometimes even after dark, to get the pears, plums, or peaches, picked, packed and loaded, ready for next day. Market day dawned very early. About 3 A.M. my dad would softly call upstairs and five minutes later I would be dressed and ready to go. I'm sure the early morning hour was a deterrent to my brothers. They were happy to leave the job to me.

On the way to Windsor, Dad and I ate Ritz crackers. I spent most of the trip sleeping; Dad spent most of the trip singing Russian folk songs.

Unlike many market vendors, we did not have a seasonal stall. Thus we had to wait on the "pleasure" of Scotty, a very intimidating supervisor. My dad's dealing with Scotty always impressed me. My dad was a very patient, gentle, man.

The market looked a lot like our June sale at UMEI, only much messier, much dirtier, and much noisier. I spent a lot of time visiting with the other market people. I'm sure Dad sometimes wondered why I was there. I was, however, very good at unloading; I could carry four six quart baskets at a time, as well as any of the guys.

It was at the market that I first met Anna Dick Klassen. To this day she treats me well, just as she did during my obnoxious years. Others that I met in those years were the Neufelds - John and Bill, as well as their brothers and sisters. They were also our neighbours on the farm, so their stall was a safe place to go. There was George Hamm, Senior (Erika's father-law), Bill Martens' parents selling poultry, and the Willms brothers - Bill and John, selling watermelon. Also Jacksons (Jacksons' Flowers) were there with peaches, Simpsons with apples and peaches, and the Krauses - Pete and Mike - selling fruits and vegetables.

And the rest of the vendors were as diverse as the population of Windsor and Essex County. Some were black, some Chinese, some French, some Dutch, German, Belgian, Russian, and all the others in between. A very colourful group was the large number of Jews who hawked their wares outside, sometimes under canvas, in sunshine or rain. The customers were every bit as multicultural as the vendors. There were also quite a few from the US in those days. I got to recognize the buying patterns of some of the nationalities. For example, the Italian ladies always looked for the biggest and the best peaches at the lowest prices. It is a unique world. Yet, with all those crowds of strange people I rarely felt unsafe.

The best part of the day was going home. It was my duty to count the money. I still enjoy doing that! We always stopped at the side of the road, so Dad could take a ten-minute nap. When we got home, it was back to the fields to finish the work of the day.



*The writer was born in Albuna, Gosfield North Township in 1940, and died of cancer at her Leamington home July 19, 2004, just two months after writing this article. Alice was a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church and spoke English, High German and Low German.*



#### **Friends**

**L to r: Mary Anne Krueger Klaassen, Rita Klassen Lepp, Elizabeth Schartner Toews, and the writer, Alice Krueger Toews. 2003.**



## 4) Our New Homeland

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*Susie Hildebrandt Driedger*

**M**y parents, Gerhard and Maria Hildebrandt, my brothers George, Henry and I, came to Canada by ship in April, 1949. Our long journey brought us to my uncle's home in Saskatchewan, but at that time there was no work available in Saskatchewan. So my uncle from Alberta came to pick us up, and brought us to Alberta, where jobs were already waiting for us on the farm. My two brothers went to school. There were many obstacles to overcome, but we were always so grateful to God and our relatives that we had finally made it to Canada.

In the fall of 1950, Dad had a bad farm accident during harvest time, when his clothing got caught in an unguarded power take-off shaft. After two surgeries and four weeks in the Edmonton hospital recovering from skin grafts, Dad came home just in time for my wedding to Henry Driedger on October 22. Upon arriving in Canada by airplane in 1948, Henry had been drawn to Alberta because his sister was living in Didsbury, Alberta. Henry and I had met in the summer of 1949.

Shortly after our wedding, my parents decided to move to Leamington, Ontario. Two of my dad's sisters were living in Leamington. My parents found work and a place to live on the farm of Peter and Erna Dyck. Henry and I stayed in Alberta and lived in the city of Red Deer. Our two oldest boys, Robert and Karl, were born in Red Deer.

In the summer of 1953, Henry and I packed up and moved to Leamington to be closer to my family. We rented a house at 251 Erie Street South in Leamington, now the current home of The Hair Port. The house belonged to a Froehlich family. We rented it for two years, and then purchased a house on Martin Drive on the east side of Leamington. Henry found work at the H. J. Heinz Company. Initially it was only seasonal work, but then he was given a full time job. For 35 years I sewed for others. Although I did this work out of necessity, I enjoyed it very much, and often completed seven dresses weekly. During this time I sewed many, many green jumper uniforms for the UMEI girls.

Our youngest two sons Ernie and Paul were born in Leamington. We bought a new house on Coronation Street in September, 1964. We had a lively and happy home.

We joined the Leamington United Mennonite Church in 1953. Henry and I were active members of our congregation. We both taught Sunday School, and in 1969 Henry was ordained as a deacon. Henry served in this position for 25 years. We loved our church and served it to the best of our ability.

In the years from 1971 to 1973, our home had many visitors. During this time, four sisters and one brother of Henry's came to visit from Russia.

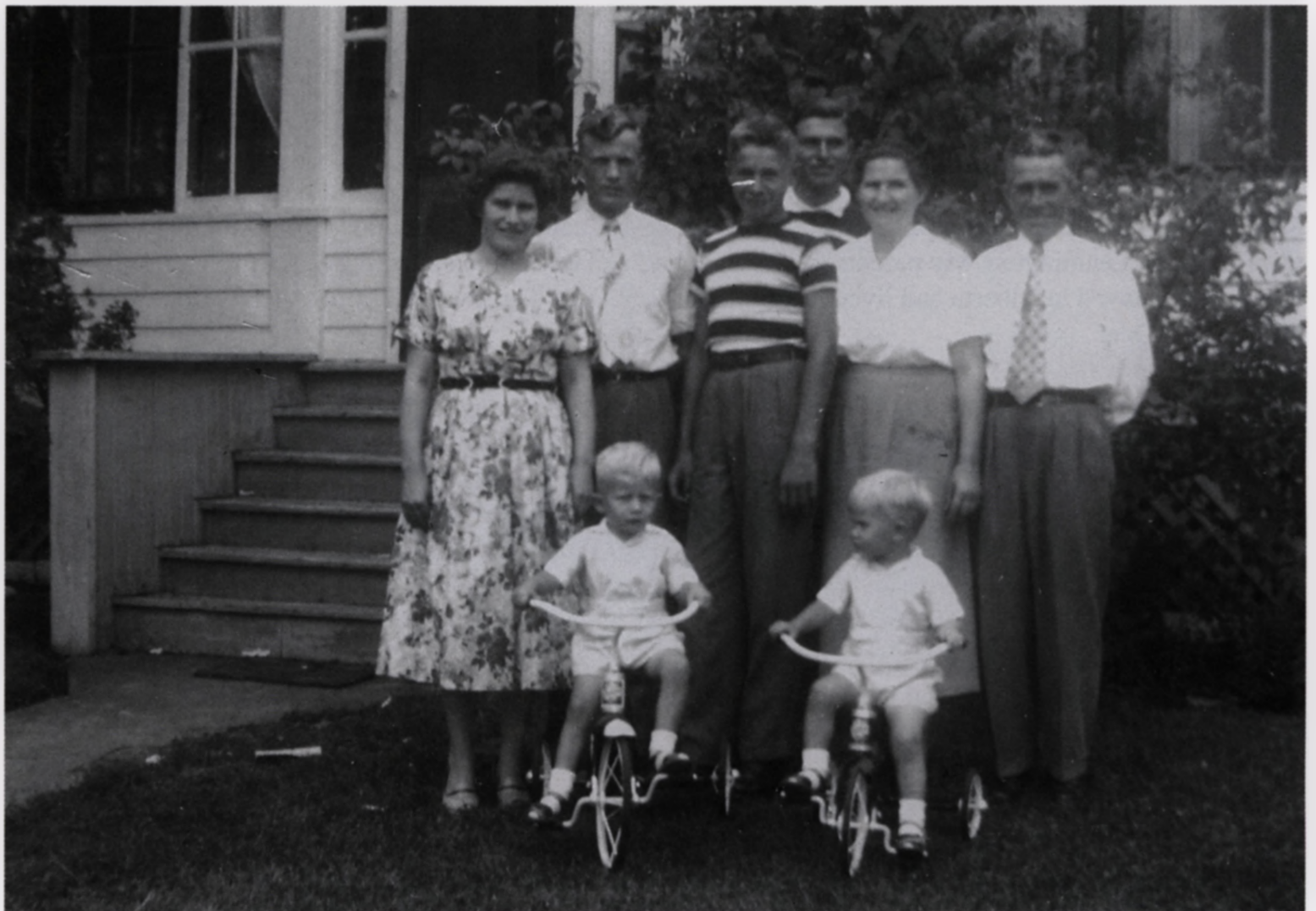
Our sons completed varying levels of education at college or university, and were successful in establishing careers. In a short period of time all four boys got married. In what appeared to be a "blink of an eye", our home was an empty nest. We had many happy times visiting our children out-of-town, and having our home full of children and grandchildren during holidays. Our family continued to grow during these years. My father passed away suddenly in 1979, and my mother passed away in 1989.



Henry retired in 1988 after 34 years at Heinz. The Lord blessed us richly, and granted us many happy years together. In the summer of 1995, Henry became ill, and was diagnosed with lung cancer. I had the privilege, and the Lord gave me the strength to take care of Henry until he passed away at home in January 1996.

I have now moved into a townhouse on Pickwick Drive. I spend my time quilting and enjoying my children and 12 grandchildren. The Lord continues to bless me every day.

*The writer was born in 1927 in Neuenburg, Ukraine, and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church. Susie speaks English, High German, Low German, and understands the Russian language.*



**1954: Henry and Susie with brothers George and Henry, Susie's parents Gerhard and Maria Hildebrandt, and Henry and Susie's little sons Robert and Karl. In front of their Erie Street South, Leamington, home across from where Tim Horton's stands today.**



## 5) Starting Over in a New Country

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*Erna Neufeld Tiessen*

**M**y parents Heinrich and Helene Neufeld, my brother Henry and I (Erna) originated from Neuenburg in the Chortitza Colony of the Ukraine. On October 13, 1943, during WWII, our entire village left our homeland with the retreating German army. After the loss of an infant sister and a brother and a long difficult trek with many hardships, we arrived in Germany where we lived for almost five years before emigrating to Canada. The ship Beaverbrae took us from Bremerhaven to Quebec City where we arrived on June 4, 1948. From here we left by train for Windsor.

My father's uncle and aunt Dietrich and Maria Froese came to get us from the train station on Walker Road in their 1936 black Dodge and took us to their home on Hodgins Street in Leamington. We stayed here for about a week while Henry Epp (Karl's father) made arrangements for employment and a place for us to live.

Our first home in Canada was on the 100 acre A. Grant Fox Peach Orchards in Olinda (now Nickels Orchards) where we moved into a converted tobacco kiln. There were two rows of kilns, three on each side with a road between them which housed immigrant families as workers. The kilns were all furnished with what we then considered old furniture but would now be priceless antiques. In 1948 workers here got 50 cents an hour except in picking season when the rate would go up to 60 cents. While my parents were working I spent many an hour learning how to ride our family bicycle up and down the farm lanes. During the time we lived in Germany, we received CARE packages through the Red Cross which contained many useful items as well as packs of cigarettes. After saving them for a while, Father was able to trade the cigarettes for a shiny black bicycle that even had lights on it. After much use, he dismantled it and built a special trunk to transport it via ship to Canada with us. Henry rode the bike proudly and was the envy of many boys on the farm and also later at school.

On a Sunday morning shortly after arriving in Canada we were welcomed officially at the Oak Street Mennonite Church. In 1948 this was almost a weekly experience as so many immigrants were arriving from Europe after the war. Sunday was always a special day for us and started with going to church in the morning, except in the summer when certain peaches were ripe and all employees were expected to be in the orchard picking the fragile fruit. After our parents' *Mittagschlaf* (afternoon nap), we often went visiting or else relatives and friends would come over for *Faspa*. This was usually a light supper of *Zwieback* (double buns), cheeses, jam, cold cuts (if available) and *Platz* (fruit squares) or whatever Mother had baked on Saturday.

That fall my brother Henry (12) and I (6) started our education at Olinda Public School. There were so many immigrant children who couldn't speak English that year that Mrs. Katharina Klassen who lived across the road at the Duke apple orchard was hired to teach us English for two months so that we could be put into our proper classes. Father, as a new employee, was also sent to evening English classes in nearby Ruthven, where his teacher was Margaret Askew.

Grant, Carrah and Cora were the three unmarried Fox siblings who ran the peach operation which was the largest in Essex County at the time. Being of German ancestry themselves, they understood the hardships we had just been through in Europe and they treated their immigrant workers very fairly. When it came to Christmas 1948, they asked each family to send the children to their stately home to sing German Christmas



carols for them. Since there were about eight German families living on the farm right then, we were quite a large group. After our performance each one of us received an 11 quart peach basket filled to the brim with nuts, chocolates, candy, cookies and fruit which was a rare treat for us.

After living in a kiln for a year, we were upgraded to one of the two larger homes at the back of the farm on Concession 5. Here we had more space and were able to plant our own garden and even an early tomato crop between the rows of newly planted peach trees. The farm was surrounded by large mature walnut trees and every fall we would gather up walnuts which we peeled, dried and stored for winter use.

Every summer when the Red Haven peaches were on, Mother, after working all day in the barns packing, would can peaches and make peach jam in the evenings. I remember helping with the peeling and later in the winter enjoying the wonderful treat. Evenings were often busy and I always looked forward to relatives with children in tow coming over for a haircut from Father.

Most of our meat came from butchering a pig at least once a year for which Father's *Onkel* (Uncle) Gerhard Neufeld always came over, as this was his specialty. From this came *Jreewe* (cracklings), lard and spareribs as well as *Griebenschmalz* (crackling-spread), which was delicious spread on bread. Sausage was made and smoked out in a smokehouse that Father had erected out back. Our meat was kept in cold storage in Leamington where small lockers were available to rent. We had a cow which, when Father purchased it, came with the name Buttercup. Besides providing us with milk, Mother also made *Dikji Malkj* (yogurt) and butter from the cream. As far as food went we were very self-sufficient.

Father was very handy at carpentry and built many pieces of furniture including a china cabinet, cedar chest and an upholstered couch. When brother Peter was born in 1954 he built a crib, highchair, playpen and later a youth bed for him. All of these items were made in a garage which Father, with the help of Henry, constructed beside the house.

In 1948 Father bought our first car from Scratch Motors on Talbot Street in Leamington. It was a 1932 Ford V8 which needed a lot of work and therefore the price was just \$150. He rebuilt the engine, re-upholstered the seats and then hand painted the outside in a dark blue colour. We were very proud of our car and drove it for a number of years.

In the summer, Father and later also Henry, would take daily truck loads of peaches to Delhi and Shakespeare where the Fox's had large fruit stands. They did not want the peaches to arrive bruised so each truck had a governor installed on it which would allow a speed of 48 mph loaded and 52 mph unloaded. I often went along in the summer and remember how hard it was to get up the hills on old Highway #2 past London. While our parents were working on the farm many of us children would go to various Mennonite farms nearby to pick raspberries and beans to add to the family income. Both Mother and Father would work at the Hodge Tobacco factory in Kingsville in the winter where many other newcomers to the country were also employed.

In 1955, my parents bought their own 50 acre farm on Concession 4 (now Deer Run road) towards Wheatley. Here they grew burley tobacco, early and late tomatoes, asparagus, corn and soyabeans. My parents farmed here until health would no longer permit. My Mother passed away in 1997, and my Father in 2000, after 61 years of marriage and a long, full life.

We give thanks to God for giving us the health, strength, and opportunities to make a fresh start again in a new land. We are also grateful to all the people who helped us get settled in and begin a new life in this wonderful country of Canada.



*The writer was born in Neuenburg, Chortitza Colony, Ukraine, in 1942, and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church. Erna speaks Low German, High German, and English.*



**Picking peaches in 1948 at the A. Grant Fox Peach Orchards in Olinda.**

Mother Helene Neufeld is second from left, Erna Neufeld Tiessen at center back, and brother Henry Neufeld in center front. To the far left is Katharina Froese. The girl behind Henry is Marie Binder Lasi, beside her is her mother Katharina Binder. Today this is the Nickels farm.



## 6) A Treasure

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Walter Koop

**M**y twin brother and I were delivered by Doctor Abram David Froese November 16, 1938, in a small house on the farmyard of my grandparents, Jacob and Maria Dick Koop. Brother Werner died of pneumonia at five months of age, just before penicillin came into use. As a result of my close proximity to *Opa* (grandfather) and *Oma* (grandmother), I became very attached to them. And when, several years later, I needed to spend time in Windsor's Metropolitan hospital with Spinal Meningitis they, and even neighbour Solly Quick, became truly concerned about me. It was Solly who suggested that if Uncle Henry Koop would be allowed to come home from CO (Conscientious Objector) Camp to humour me, I would become well again. He came and I became well; I believe they thought I was dying.

When, after a few years, my parents bought their own farm on Concession 7 of Mersea Township, we kept in close touch with *Opa* and *Oma*. I was always excited when I saw their gray 1940 Hudson pull onto our yard. Before I started school, I was bedridden with rheumatic fever during which time *Oma* and *Opa* continued to be attentive and loving.

A terrible tragedy occurred in our family when, in 1948, my *Oma* Maria Koop died in a car accident. Two years later, cousin George Tiessen and I were embarrassed to hear that our old *Opa* was marrying our Sunday School teacher, Margaret Braun. My new *Oma's* siblings were Agatha Tiessen, Maria Thun, and Helen Braun, who taught at UMEI. *Oma* also had several siblings in the Winnipeg area.

*Opa* and my new *Oma* Koop lived on *Opa's* farm on Concession 6 after their marriage. Initially, the Koop children may have been apprehensive about *Opa's* second marriage partner, but they came to respect and appreciate her very much. *Opa* and *Oma* grew peaches, tomatoes, and tomato seedlings. I enjoyed visiting there and spent much time with them.

Eventually *Oma* and *Opa* moved to Elliott Street in Leamington, next door to St. Michaels Catholic Church and across the street from Sterling and Barb Welch. *Oma* was a hard worker and a meticulous housekeeper and continued to clean for a Mrs. Logan and a Mrs. Parker, among others. I often marveled that every one of their neighbours were kind and friendly people. Many years later, it occurred to me that they were merely returning favours granted them by *Oma* and *Opa*.

One of *Oma's* fortes was entertaining. Besides being a wonderful cook and baker, she set an elegant table, with lovely linens, sparkling china and gleaming silverware. *Opa* appreciated *Oma's* hospitable nature and helped along to make their frequent guests feel comfortable. I can remember when he hosed their house exterior with cold water on a hot summer day, in order to cool it for their guests. One day *Oma* realized that she'd promised to clean for someone at the very time that they were hosting guests from Manitoba. *Opa* said he'd gladly help her clean, and if they could manage to get out of bed by 4 a.m., they'd have the job done before their guests were up for breakfast. It worked.

After I married in 1960, I continued to feel closely attached to *Oma* and *Opa*, and we enjoyed hosting them at our home. They were punctual people, and if we invited them for supper at 5:30, they would invariably come at 4 o'clock. My mom and dad would have known this and made it a habit to be ready very early, but it took my young wife a good while to adjust to the situation; one time she was in the bathtub when they arrived.



*Opa* and *Oma* were gracious guests, appreciated and commented on every nicety, and treated their grandchildren and great grandchildren with loving kindness. Our children called their great grandparents *Oma* and *Opa* in the *Stadt* (town). By the time cousin Diane Woelk married Paul Hildebrand, *Opa* and *Oma* had close to 100 descendants and Paul received a T shirt to commemorate this milestone.

Hosting the Koop family was a regular occurrence at *Oma* and *Opa's*. When the dining room became too small, they moved us into the basement. In advance of a get-together, *Oma* would check to see what our favourite pie and other desserts might be, and then she'd fulfill every request. After a meal at *Oma* and *Opa's*, the granddaughters, of which Gerda Enns Driedger was the oldest, scraped, washed, and dried the high piles of dishes. Many years later, a Koop family member happened to hear that when *Oma* and *Opa's* children, grandchildren and great grandchildren returned home after a visit there, scrupulous *Oma* and good sport *Opa* would wash and dry all the same dishes again!

The day came when *Opa* and *Oma* needed to down size. They were moving to the Homeview Apartments on Garrison Street and wanted someone to haul their junk away. They helped me load the stake truck and *Oma* put a big old oil painting on top of the junk. It was a picture that had hung on a two-by-four in their basement for many years. We could have it if we wanted, *Oma* said.

The painting is a treasure, as were it's owners!

*The writer was born on Concession 6 of Gosfield North Township in 1938, and is a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Walter speaks Low German and English.*





**1968: Jacob and Margaret Braun Koop family** with the Koop children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren on the occasion of Jacob Koop's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Note original German only scripture verse in background.

**Front l to r:** Jane Koop Tiessen, Janet Driedger Flaming, Jane Driedger Klassen, Leonard Driedger, Ken Driedger, Jamie Koop, Andrea Koop Yantzi, Dianne Koop Burk, Carolyne Koop Kerr.

**Row 2:** Helen Froese Koop, Lena Koop Woelk, Susie Koop Enns, Oma Margaret and Opa Jacob Koop, Mary Koop Tiessen, Gertrude Driedger Koop, Margaret Toews Koop.

**Row 3:** Marlene Koop Enns, Brenda Koop Snoes, Richard Koop, Diane Woelk Hildebrand, Robert Woelk, Cheryl Woelk Willms, Gerda Enns Driedger, baby Gerry Driedger with Henry Driedger, George Tiessen, Jake Koop, Ben Koop, Allan Koop, Randy Koop, David Enns, Dennis Enns.

**Row 4:** Vic Tiessen, Raymond Koop, Henry Koop, Jake Woelk, Ben Koop, Willie Tiessen with baby Dean Tiessen, Janet Toews Tiessen, Erna Neufeld Tiessen, baby Mark Tiessen with George Tiessen, Astrid Gossen Koop, Walter Koop, Marion Enns Driedger, baby Peter Driedger with John Driedger, Rudy Driedger, Linda Koop Driedger.

**Back:** baby Paul Enns with Ken Enns, Rita Konrad Enns, Edmund Tiessen.



## 7) Youth Activities in the 1940s and 1950s

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Harold Thiessen

What occupied the leisure time of young people during this time, when most still worked “down on the farm”, although office workers, teachers, nurses, carpenters, bank tellers, store clerks, and others, were beginning to emerge?

Well, for one thing, it was practically unheard of for a young person not to sing in a choir, whether it be the Junior or Senior Choir. At the younger end of the scale, girls and boys joined the Junior Choir after graduating from Sunday School. Acquisition of a driver's licence could signal a shift to the senior choir, and an engagement or marriage could be considered to be a resignation from the Senior Choir. Use of the family car was most easily obtained for a drive to choir practice. However, there were said to be cases of the driver forgetting the way to church and never arriving at practice on Thursday evening. Then, curiously on Sunday morning, his memory was restored and he could be found singing lustily in the choir, with only his friends (and the choir director) the wiser.

As gasoline became more plentiful, access to the family car became more relaxed. On Saturday evening the place to meet friends was the first block of Talbot Street West. It was considered a coup to nab the first parking space at the traffic light at Talbot and Erie Streets. When enough friends had accumulated, it became necessary to “drive around”. If negotiations for use of the car had dragged on too long, you were out of luck: the gang would be gone for the evening. No evening was complete without a stop at the Diana Sweets Restaurant, where pizzas, banana splits, coke floats and milk shakes were the order of the day. It is said that two guys could easily polish off a large pizza in short order in those days, and then look around for dessert.

A favourite summer Sunday afternoon pastime was swimming at “the dock” or at Point Pelee. When a few of the fellows acquired motor boats, water skiing became all the rage. In between turns at the end of the tow rope, both guys and girls worked on their suntans. All of this activity made it necessary to stop off at Chuck's Dairy Bar for ice-cream.

Warm summer evenings resulted in so-called “lawn parties”. Someone who had had time to mow the grass during the week would spread the word, and guys and girls in that age group, and beyond, would descend on the place for an evening of circle games. For seating, tomato baskets were upended at intervals and planks or boards placed across. Games such as *Schlüsselbund*, Wink, *Matjälletza*, and others, were the order of the day. When things got boring, ingenuity took over. One enterprising young farmer awakened the family cow from her slumbers and led her around the circle, much to the consternation of the girls.

Another favourite summer evening pastime was canoeing at Cedar Beach. One young lad while paddling, lost his wallet in the water. The giggling dates were transferred into another canoe and sent around a bend in the creek. The young man stripped to his unmentionables, jumped into the muddy water, and managed to retrieve his wallet.

A favourite Mennonite game was baseball. For many years, there was at least one team, and usually more than one, playing in local leagues. Who can remember sitting in the bleachers at the Leamington high school, cheering on “our” team, swatting mosquitoes, and watching the Russian Sputnik soaring overhead?



A highlight of the summer was the annual young people's picnic at Boblo Island. The rides were OK, all enjoyed the picnic lunch, but the main attraction was the roller skating pavilion. Many hours were spent skating in circles to the music. The sport really got a shot in the arm when the UMEI auditorium was built. We roller-skated Saturday evening, Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening, and sometimes during the week. If some of the more adventurous fellows got bored with skating with the girls, they would place one end of a plank onto the stage and skate down the ramp. They were the original skateboarders. No broken bones were ever reported.

When the winter was cold enough for the ice to be safe, dozens of people could be found skating on Sturgeon Creek. Guys would gallantly take the arm of a girl and skate with her, others would play a bit of hockey, or everyone would join in a game of crack the whip. All the activity in the fresh air made a hot chocolate at Diana Sweets a welcome treat.

Every few weeks, on a Sunday evening, a *Jugendabend* (youth evening) was organized. Songs were sung, stories or poems read, and an inspirational devotion given. Gravitational forces drew many to Diana Sweets again afterwards.

During the summer months, weddings were an almost weekly event. And no wonder, with all the skating, canoeing, roller-skating, swimming, etc. with the girls, and then seeing them home safely afterwards, some fellows figured they might as well get married. After the wedding ceremony, close friends of the couple sometimes showed their affection by decorating the honeymoon car. One enthusiastic and inventive group of guys drove the honeymoon Volkswagen onto the back of the family stake truck and put the ladders back in place, rendering the car invisible. After the groom had spent hours searching, the friend volunteered to help, and in short order happened to find the vehicle. Friends of the happy couple would also bend over backwards to welcome them home after the honeymoon. If time and opportunity had permitted, their new home would have been "prepared" while they were gone, with furniture properly arranged, surplus chairs stored in the attic, corn or oats sown in the flower pots, fuses from the stove put in a safe place, finely cut deer hair sprinkled under the bed sheets, and so on. When Mary and I had been married a short time, we were welcomed home one Sunday evening by a large group of friends. They had been quite inventive, but they had not been able to move the bed to the second floor because of a turn in the stair, the jello in the toilet bowl did not have time to "set", and the fuses for the stove were found in the freezer before the evening was over. To comfort them for these disappointments, Mary made a batch of pancakes for our guests, and to show that there were no hard feelings, she incorporated some of the confetti brought by the revelers, into the batter.

Once you were married, you were no longer "young people", so end of story.

*The writer, born on Pelee Island in 1933, is a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Harold speaks English, High German and Low German.*



# I am Thankful to God

Ernie Dyck, 1950s water-skiing champion.



**Ernie Dyck: 1950s water-skiing champion.**



**Henry Krueger: dressed in his finest.**



## 8) I am Thankful to God

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*Elizabeth Neufeld Hoch*

**M**y husband Henry and I, our children Harry and Hilda, and my mother Elizabeth Neufeld, immigrated to Canada in 1949. We first settled in Whitewater, Manitoba. On our way across the ocean, we had met a family by the name of Defehr, and they became our friends. The Defehrs settled in Essex County, Ontario, and we kept in contact with them. They wrote and told us that Essex County was the place where jobs were more plentiful, and it was easier to earn a living there. So, in 1950, we decided to move to Essex County.

The Defehrs knew the Jacob and Anna Martens family on Concession 6, Leamington, and recommended us as good workers. The Defehrs came to pick us up at the train station in Windsor, and took us to the Martens, where we lived in their garage. Henry worked for the Martens, while I went to work for Jake and Johanna Dirksen. Mother stayed at home and cooked our meals and took care of our small children.

My first job was cutting celery, and I got a rash on my fingers and hands, but that did not stop me from working. We didn't have much furniture, not even a stove to cook on, so at the beginning, we cooked over a fire outside.

On the first Sunday, Mr. Martens asked us if he could take us to our church. He thought we were Jehovah Witnesses, since the Defehrs were from that denomination. We had never heard about the Jehovah Witnesses. When Mr. Martens found out that we were United Mennonites, he took us along to his church, and he said, "We must go and buy you a stove". We used corn cobs to heat the stove and we bought milk from the Martens for 10 cents a quart. The eggs that were cracked, we got free.

On one Sunday as we were getting ready to go to church, the stove pipes overheated. Henry climbed on a rickety ladder to check the chimney, and the ladder toppled over. Henry fell, and he wasn't hurt too badly, but both of his pant legs were ripped. Since they were his only dress pants, Mother and I quickly mended the rips, and off we went to church in our Model A car, which we had bought for 75 dollars.

That first winter, there was no work to be found. The Jake Dirksen's neighbour Mr. Pretli, offered us a job stripping tobacco, but he would not be able to pay us until he sold his tobacco in March. There were many good people who brought us groceries that winter. After Mr. Pretli paid us in March, we bought a house on John Street. We made a down payment of 1,000 dollars. The total cost was \$3,500. We went to see Lawyer Edgar Dyck, and he told us to go see Mr. Wilkinson who lived on Highway #3, and together they arranged our mortgage.

The second summer, Henry and I got jobs at the Heinz factory during their busy season. We were able to work until January, when we were laid off. But in March, we were called back and got steady jobs. I worked at Heinz for 18 years; Henry worked there for 26 years. Henry died in 1995. I am very thankful to God that He was with us all the way.

I bought a house on Pickwick Drive, where I live today.

*The writer was born in Chortitza, Ukraine in 1920, and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church.*





**Winter of 1953**

**L to r: Father Henry Hoch holding young Bill, mother Elizabeth, and Hilda.**

**Son Harry took the photo.**



## 9) A Tribute to Anna N. Tiessen

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*Jutta Froese Rahn*

**I**t has been 52 years that I have known Mrs. Anna Tiessen, and she hardly changed during those years; her looks remained almost the same. Although she aged somewhat during the last couple of years, her hairstyle stayed very similar, and her character seemingly always happy. Mrs. Tiessen was very thankful and content, never a harsh word, and always pleasant. But she could be quite mischievous!

I first met Mrs. Tiessen on July 11, 1952 when we arrived at their farm on County Road 20, Leamington. The three brothers Frank, Nick P., Jacob P., and sister Tina took us into their homes and lives. We were refugees after WWII. Mom and Dad - Heinrich and Christel Fietkau Froese - were looking for a better life for their brood of six children. I was twelve years old, in the middle of our family. My siblings were Werner, 19 years, Anneliese, 17, Karin, 10 years, Sabine, 8, and Axel, 13 months. We had landed in Quebec City on July 9, 1952 and disembarked from the Beaverbrae after a very rough voyage.

Mr. Nick Tiessen and Hardy came to pick us up at the Windsor train station. Mr. Alexander Fischer was there also, in a separate car; he was the MCC representative there to greet us. The Tiessens came with a stake truck, hoping that they would be able to take all our belongings to the farm in one trip. Needless to say, we had one overseas *Kiste* - a large wooden box/trunk - and a few suitcases. Most of the back of the truck was filled with children: four of my siblings, Hardy Tiessen and I. Axel (13 months), was in the cab with Mom, Dad, and Mr. Tiessen. When we passed through Ruthven, Mom recognized this address and asked Mr. Tiessen if he knew Tina and Abram Dick. They had sent a parcel, probably through the MCC, to a refugee camp in Denmark, and we were the lucky recipients. Mr. Tiessen smiled and replied, "You can greet them and thank them at church on Sunday". Two items that I remember in the parcel were a doll (shared by all of us), and a black cardigan which was way too big, but it was to be mine. Mom was always very handy with needle and thread, so she embroidered the front with a flower motif and somehow twisted some yarn and looped it through the cardigan, so I could tie it into a bow at the waist. I believe I wore that cardigan for 10 years. In 1955 and 1956/57, I attended the UMEI with the Dick's daughter, Martha Dick Klassen. I had to quit after grade 10, to help support the family. The world is small and so wonderful!

I believe we all slept at Mrs. Tiessen's house that night. She and her husband Nick had one son, Hardy, at that time. And here we came: eight total strangers! We were immediately treated as family and friends.

I can't remember what we ate at suppertime, but I'm sure we were fed lots! Breakfast the next morning, however, was interesting. We were served the usual huge Canadian meal: milk, coffee, juice, toast, jam, honey, eggs, meat and cheese, and Corn Flakes! We were not sure what to do with the Corn Flakes, so we did as the Romans do, but I can't say we liked the taste. The same went for sweet corn and watermelon.

That same evening lots of people arrived at the farm with presents for us: boilers full of canned goods, a 75 pound bag of new potatoes (at the cost of seven dollars that year), watermelons, sacks of flour, bedding, clothing, furniture and more! We asked what was going on and Mrs. Tiessen, with a twinkle in her eye, replied, "It's my birthday". Of course, all these items were for our family, the occasion was called a shower. I still use a buffet which was gifted at that time. We couldn't thank the Tiessens enough for their friendship, the opportunity to work, all the free milk we could drink, their help and love, and of course the peaceful life that we have enjoyed over the past half century here in Canada.



A few months ago, I visited Mrs. Tiessen at the *Altenheim* (home for the aged). She was bent over in her wheelchair, frail but at peace and sleeping. We remained friends; I always received a sincere hug when we met and I'll remember her fondly.

*Aufwiedersehn* (until we meet again), *Annuschka* (Russian for Anna) and Thank You!

*The writer was born in Elbing, Prussia/Germany in 1939 and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church. Jutta speaks High German and English fluently.*

Note: A portion of this account was read by Jutta's son Martin at the funeral of Anna Tiessen in 2004.



**Summer of 1952: Karin, 10 years, Jutta, at right, 12 years.**



## 10) Having Arrived

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Bruno Penner

My family, excluding me, arrived in Leamington in July of 1949. I came a year later, by which time my sister Katie was in a good disposition, having recovered from the loss of her friends in British Columbia. My brother Rudy was doing well in grade 13, and my father was an established teacher at the UMEI. He had been accepted as a minister in the Essex County United Mennonite Church, where the words Molotschna and Old Colony were still important. Going to the movies was called *zum Kino gehen*, or *ins Theater gehen* (same thing) by some people who had a certain ring in their voices when they said that. Television was regarded with great suspicion. I had spent a successful year in Chilliwack, BC, learning how to fix radios and was totally intent on becoming a TV expert.

The stifling heat and humidity which greeted me upon my arrival in Detroit challenged my resolve. The vagrant who sat beside me in the middle of Cadillac Square smiled at the pigeons. I was encouraged by this setting and got on the shuttle bus with renewed determination to carry on with my mission in life, which was to discover how electrons could be made into pictures.

I slept most of the way on the Greyhound bus that took me to Leamington and got off at the CPR Station in a panic thinking I might have missed the entire town. The station attendant told me that if I came across a barn with big white letters saying "Edsal Hope" I was on the right road. Also there was a gas station along the way. I found both, as well as a man with a wooden leg dressed in black trousers, who pointed at the blue haze in the sky toward Concession 6. Eventually I came upon the Peter A. and Helen Epp house, and rejoined my family. But I had seen no TV antennas.

I was anxious to find out how television sets worked, and how to fix them, so I prevailed upon my father to take me to Windsor to find a job in a television repair shop. He and his friend Jasch Hamm, whom he took along for moral support, drove me to Waddell's TV Shop. No luck. The second stop, at a shop called Radio and TV Repair on the "Horse Shoe" at Glengarry Avenue, yielded success. I was surprised, Dad was surprised, and probably so was Jasch Hamm.

Very few people even owned a television set which meant that I learned nothing about how to repair television receivers, while I was employed at the shop on the 'horse shoe' at Glengarry Avenue. I spent that summer ferrying Checker cabs from their Goyeau Street office to our store, to have two-watt radios installed. When I heard that Canada had joined in the Korean War, I thought I would get drafted and shot and killed before I ever laid hands on a TV set, because I was 21.

Actually it wasn't the Korean War which threatened my survival as much as the sticky summer nights. I got up early to catch the Greyhound bus going to Windsor, after having lived through a night as warm as tepid tea, not at all like the cool nights in the valley between the mountains of BC. The workmen were already out in their trucks scooping up the June bugs from underneath the lamp posts, which had died on the spot. At night the streetlights glowed like a string of orange moons through the bags that were tied around them. They bristled with insects who had yielded up their life. But I was on a mission.

Marriage was not on my mind, as it was on Elizabeth Taylor's mind that year. One morning while I was waiting to board the bus at Cook's Bus Stop, on the corner of Mill and Erie, I peeked through the pages of Life and came across a picture of Elizabeth Taylor dressed in a satin and lace wedding gown, holding a white bouquet of flowers.



I saw my first television set in the show window of a store in Amherstburg, on the occasion of the young people's annual church picnic on Boblo Island, a permitted form of recreation. The television set was a seven-inch Admiral in a brown cabinet. The show was called Howdy-Doody. The clown cavorted life-like across the tiny screen in his polka dot suit, his nose being remarkably clear. There it was, indelible proof that I had come to the right province.

When the summer was over, I decided to go to Radio Electronics School in Detroit to further my education. Henceforth my journey was extended through the tunnel to Detroit. Every trip along Drouillard Road in Windsor, with its many windowless bars, brought me more knowledge about the *Fernseapararat* (television), or *Der Sündenkasten* (box of sin) as it was sometimes called by those who were fearful of it.

Meanwhile Mr. Epp's tomatoes ripened. Our shaggy dog Laddie, without a pedigree, thrashed among them leaving a swath of destruction. Katie's friends at school looked out of the windows during the physics class, likely having been encouraged by Katie, and saw his tail waving about. They nicknamed the dog "Resonance" in honour of his tail. The situation was not good. Mother said it was too risky to keep the dog, and looked very serious as she put the potatoes on the table one night. Poor Laddie the Second.

The Leamington Fair came and went while I rode the bus. The roar of the diesel engine drowned out the laughter of the men who teased good-natured Charley, as the bus driver changed gears. Every day I arrived at the Greyhound terminal from where I walked to get on the tunnel bus, which took me in a plume of exhaust fumes, across the border. There I got on a shuttle vehicle that brought me to the streetcar terminal. From here I journeyed, among a crowd of black people, to 3037 Woodward Avenue. It was here, at RETS, in the temple of electronics, that I eventually found out how the electrons were made to dance across the television screen and form a picture.

During the following winter months while we stoked the furnace in Mr. Epps' house, Rudy joined our friends Victor, Werner, and Helen Heinrichs on Sunday afternoons to play canasta. Sunday mornings I occupied the very last bench in the Essex County United Mennonite Church far away from the pulpit. It was so far away that I imagined the speaker could not make out the faces of those of us who sat at the back. I closed my eyes and dreamed of electrons moving through an intricate maze of wires.

The aroma of resin core solder frequently filled our bedroom as I built an electronic voltmeter kit. The poplar trees beside the UMEI auditorium grew slim and pliant in the wind. Dad drew time lines on the blackboard and practiced *Der Bauer hat ein Taubenhaus* (The farmer has a dove house) with his girls' choir. He worried about the response of the audience at the program: "*Nah! Vaut ver ein Led es daut?*" (Well, what kind of song is that?).

My two siblings continued their high school education and consolidated their relations with the opposite sex, in which they were eminently successful. I enjoyed a measure of success as well, when I became a laboratory assistant at RETS.

The long hot evenings I spent studying the circuitry of RCA television sets at the Grand River Division of RETS eventually paid off and I got a job at Star Radio in Leamington. I was now the envy of my classmates because I was working "in the field" as they said; with real television problems, not just book theory.

The shop I worked at, after coming home from school, was on Fox Street, in a renovated barn owned by Murray Carder. He sold 17 inch Coronet TV sets by the hundreds, and each one had to be fixed sooner or later, for certain.



My co-workers tried to teach me how to drink beer. They wanted to introduce me to the girl at Chuck's Dairy Bar, but I was too busy fixing TV sets. My mission was being achieved.

Shortly before Christmas the boys and I stuck a pipe with a TV antenna into the chimney of our home. It was pretty obvious what the preacher was doing. We managed to watch the Super Bowl on New Year's Day after which prudence prevailed, and the offending array of metal and wires was removed from the rooftop. I took the set back to our shop, much to the surprise of my boss.

The following year we moved to Miss Brown's house on Elliot Street, a short distance from the shop. I had graduated from school and was now working full time. The sound of the bells ringing from the tower of the Baptist Church told me when it was time to go home for dinner. Mother liked to hear the children playing in the schoolyard next to the Catholic Church. It reminded her of our days at Hamburg School in Saskatchewan.

Murray and his team of salesmen sold more and more Coronets as the months went by. Needless to say, within a year they all needed to be repaired. Their pictures would shrink; they would lose height, width, or they would be out of synchronization. The tops of the pictures would tear from the bottom. They would become lopsided and had to be adjusted according to the test pattern. I fixed everything. I was in my glory.

In 1952 Murray sold one thousand TV sets and we moved up town, "to the big time". Star radio was now located on Talbot Street East, next to Kennedy Cleaners. This was the year when my parents bought the house at 9 Marlborough Street East. I was now making \$60 per week (the boys called me the "high-priced help") Mother made my meals, washed my clothes, and I walked a few blocks to work. I had arrived.

During the warm summer Saturday evenings people would stand outside the store window and watch Caesar's Hour with Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, Jackie Gleason and Art Carney, and boxing shows. All of them were miracles of sight and sound. Even the advertisements were interesting to watch, and were regarded with awe. On weekday afternoons the chairs inside our long, narrow show room would be filled with people watching Joe Di Maggio, while the muted chatter of the baseball crowd filled the air.

The back door of my shop was open to let the breeze in while I watched Kookla Fran and Ollie before supper time on Mondays, making sure that the outlines of the alligator puppet were as clear as I could possibly get them. On Friday evenings, the detective called Joe Friday, (Just the facts ma'am), was my subject of scrutiny. I worked until late at night repairing the television sets whose owners said they couldn't live without them. I was their only hope for a quick deliverance from life without television.

Then, one day in November of 1954 I received a telephone call from Ross Thompson of RETS offering me a teaching job in a subsidiary of RETS in Toronto. I must go out into the unknown and tell others how to fix television sets. I had to do it. And I did. I left my comfortable home and joined my brother Rudy, and my friends Victor and Werner Heinrichs who had already moved to the big city.

*The writer was born in Langham, Saskatchewan in 1929, and is a member of Leamington United Mennonite Church. Bruno speaks English, High German and Low German.*



# 11) Tomato Royalty

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*Mary Froese Thiessen*

**I**n the early 1950s, shortly after my family had immigrated to Essex County from the far West (Vancouver Island), the Leamington Agricultural Community held its first ever Tomato Festival. We were novice farmers, growing a modest five acres of late tomatoes. Mom, Dad, and four children ranging in age from five to fifteen worked hard to make a go of it.

Dad heard the news at the Stokely Van Camp tomato processing plant in Essex. There would be a competition based on the quality and beauty of three hampers of tomatoes. There would also be a competition based on the beauty and quality (talent) of several young ladies, but as good Mennonites not concerned about worldly outward appearance, we did not dwell on this.

Now the whole family was enlisted in this project. Each of us, in our regular tomato picking labour, had a separate basket into which would go the choicest of this fruit. Mom particularly, coached us in this endeavor. These tomatoes should not be too large, but of uniform size. They must be absolutely unblemished, of good colour and firmness but slightly under-ripe since the judging was to be held three days hence. And so the choicest prime fruit was tenderly gathered by each person of our family, and brought into the summer kitchen of our house. Handling the tomatoes like fragile eggs, Mom placed them in a single layer (without allowing one to touch the other) on blankets on the floor. Here they would ripen, hopefully to perfection, in the darkened room.

On the morning of the judging, Dad drove to the fairgrounds and delivered our entry, which had been gently placed in three new, clean Heinz hampers. None of us, not even the youngest children, held out much hope for a winning entry. We were, after all, mighty small fry in the tomato growing business in the area. However, in this first Tomato Festival competition we had something going for us. No other factor was taken into account - not the size of the farmer's acreage, not tonnage per acre produced - but only three anonymous hampers of tomatoes.

I remember being alone in the house, sneaking an afternoon break from work and listening to a very young Elvis Presley on the radio, when the phone rang and an official informed me that we had won First Prize!

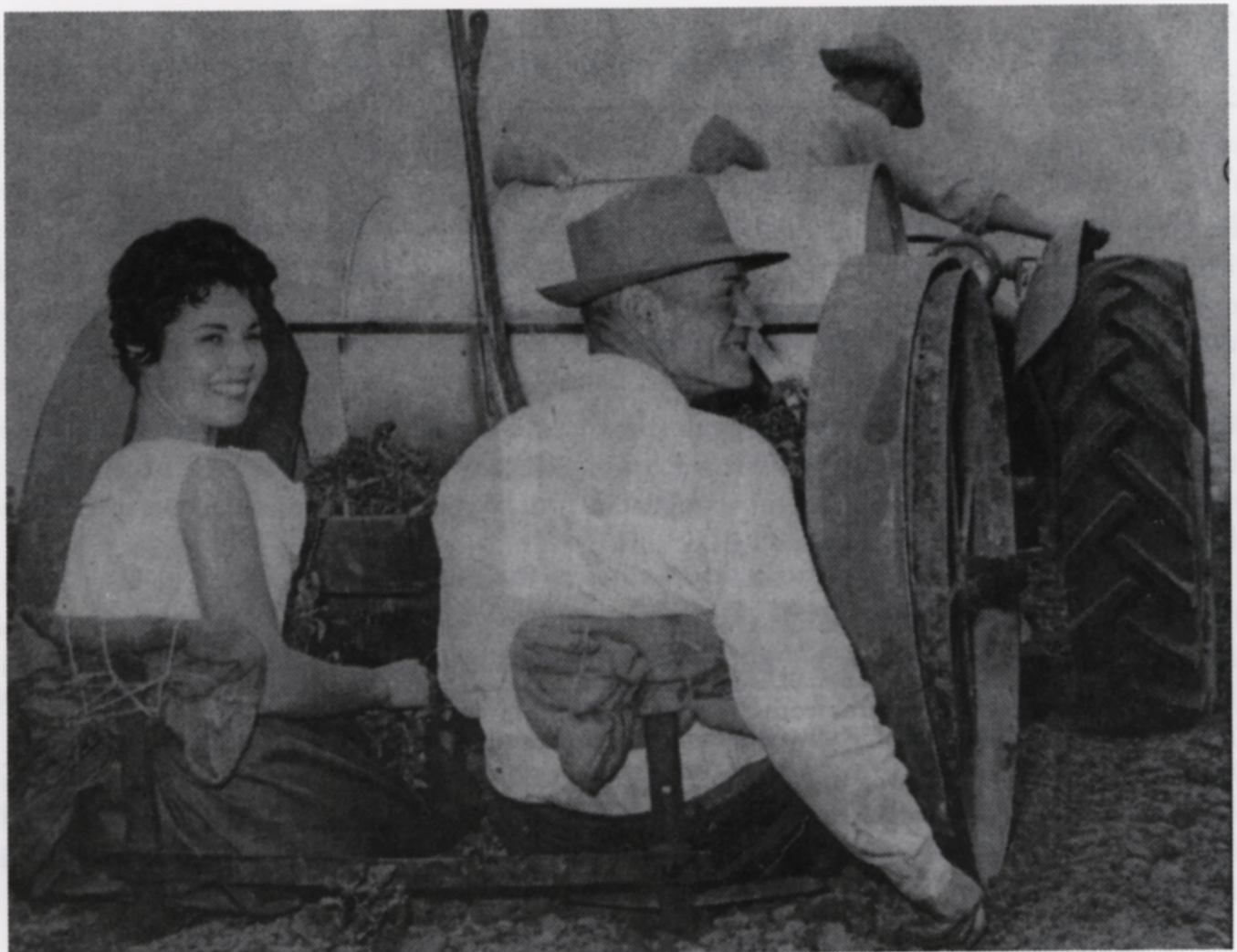
Disbelief! Amazement! Jubilation! The thrill of being able to run outside to tell the others!

So Dad became the very first Tomato King. Rosalie Welker of Kingsville was chosen to be the first Tomato Queen. But as good Mennonites we did not concern ourselves with this. In our household we kids were the Tomato Princes and Princesses and Mom, for sure, was the real Tomato Queen.

And to top it all off, each one of us in the family, youngest to oldest, shared in the monetary prize equally - the princely sum of one hundred and twenty-five dollars!

*The writer was born in Mayfair, Saskatchewan, in 1940 and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Mary speaks English and High German.*





**Tomato Queen and King: Rosalie Welker and Abram Froese on tomato planter.**



**National Tomato Festival plaque.**



## 12) All the Little Houses

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*Luise Dyck Taves*

All the little houses and the first years in Canada.

A small group stood at a train station in Halifax ready for the last leg of a very long journey. The arrival here was such a far conclusion to all that preceded it. A village in Ukraine followed by life in German refugee camps. Work on German farms and estates where houses were built of walls almost a meter thick and had stood for centuries and now all these little houses. They looked and looked at the passing landscape. Miles of trees and then suddenly a few little houses huddled together. What sort of country was this?

"*Schweveldosen*", my father remarked as he shifted his long frame and adjusted his hip. "Match boxes. One strong wind and they'll blow away."

And every train station carried a large sign: LUNCH. Speaking no English they wondered at this. "LUNCH", they pronounced it in German. So it was that four adults and one baby in arms stepped from the train in Windsor. They were Rudy and Helen Dyck, baby daughter Luise, Bernhard Dyck and David Funk. The train had belched soot all the way and it had not spared the passengers. So upon arrival we could not step out clean and ready to meet our relatives. Also the baby clothes and diapers that had been sent to us where stolen off the wash line even before we left Europe. My father had tied the one washed diaper around his middle to dry while I wore the other one. A bunting bag and an army blanket were what my mother had left to carry me in.

A car drove up and a man got out. He addressed them in Low German. "Do you believe in God?" He asked. "Yes", they answered completely taken aback. The man turned around and drove back home.

We arrived at the warm and beloved home of my father's Uncle Jacob and *Tante* (Aunt) Lena Funk. It was December 22, 1947. Starvation and deprivation have a long reach and *Tante* Lena must have wondered how much bread it would take until we could feel that we were full. How many stories would it take to fit our lives back together again. The pieces lay scattered from Siberia and Ukraine to Poland, Austria and Germany.

My mother remembers that in this pre-Christmas arrival time Jo Schellenburg took her into Leamington to the Metropolitan store. The sight of all the bright Christmas lights was a marvelous wonder. The tables and shelves stacked high with goods took her breath away. Perhaps it was only a dream. There were only stories of times when there had been enough and plenty. Now she stood totally unexpectedly before a fullness beyond comprehension.

Uncle *Jasch* and *Tante* Lena were very good to us and we lived our first winter in Canada with them. Upon our arrival, Uncle *Jasch* had taken his nephews into town and bought them each a good quality winter overcoat and dress shoes and socks. Aunt Jo had a black winter dress coat, white shawl and black dress shoes for my mother. When we arrived at church for our first Sunday here we were well dressed.

It wasn't long before relatives and friends also arrived. The Winter family was reunited. The friendship circle enlarged. Tables grew long and overflowed with food at every gathering. There should always be enough food now. We owned little but were rich in long evenings of songs, stories and food shared with



friends. Long through the evening and into the night four part harmony filled the house. German language folk songs: "*Im gruenen Wald da wo die Drossel singt*", "*Horch was kommt von draussen 'rein*", "*Am Brunnen vor dem Tore*", and many, many more, all from memory.

Our first car was a Model A. Rudy and Ben Dyck pulled it from the chicken house on Dick and Erna Enns' farm. They were very proud of it! It needed "manuring out" and it had no floor, but it ran. Sunday afternoons they worked on the car. A plywood floor was added and when it was ready to drive they polished it with floor polish until it shone.

The question of work was immediate, as was the concern of establishing a way of living in this country. The first new concept was debt. It is one thing to live without possessions but it is quite another to suddenly have a debt. There was the trip to pay for. This we did as soon as possible.

We had lived and worked for the communist system of collectives and on the land in Germany after the war. There had been a measured pace and many hands to do the work of dairy, hogs, sheep, pasture, hay and planting and harvesting potatoes, beets and other root crops.

Now, however a very different pace set in. Intensive vegetable and tobacco cropping meant stooping and planting, handpicking, cutting asparagus, chopping tobacco, loading and unloading produce. "With our noses we dig the furrows and with our ears we close them up," my father observed about his new proximity to the land.

When I asked my mother how she had sustained the work she replied, "I always had courage." "*Ich hatte immer Mut.*"

We sharecropped. We worked on the farms of Wolodja Unger, Frank Klassen, Jake Founk, Garnet Bruner, George Holt and Doctor Froese. We lived in little houses from Leamington and Kingsville to Harrow and back to Kingsville again. Some watched us and counted our work and measured it which was very uncomfortable. Sometimes the work flew and we felt good at the end of the day. In winter, work could be found at Omstead's Fishery or the tobacco factory.

With each move there was the curiosity of it. The smell of scrubbing. My mother and *Oma* (grandmother), together rolling up their sleeves and taking into their arms a great washing of windows, walls and floors. Freshly washed white curtains hung flying in the wind. Sometimes long rolls of wallpaper were laid out and spread with glue and soon flowers bloomed on the walls of our new little house. Cupboards were painted white. Then the linoleum would be carefully unrolled. The red one was for the living room and the green one in the kitchen.

Each move meant a new house to explore for my brother Henry and me, as children. We entered each new room consecutively until the strangeness passed and the lingering presence of former residents diminished.

New farms and new soil. New summers spent playing in the fields while our parents worked. The smell of hot sand and tomatoes. The smell of rain coming as dark storm clouds towered in the west, then the smell of rain on dry earth as we ran for cover from the thunder and the lightning.

Once we arrived in the house just as a violent gust of wind slammed the door on my mother's face. The window shattered and after careful cleaning and cautious wiping of glass shards we were relieved that there had been no splinters lodged in her eyes.



Sunday dinners at *Oma and Opa's* (Katharina and Heinrich Winter) generated animated discussions of tomato prices, weather conditions and yield potentials. We ate roast chicken, *Bobbat* (stuffing) rich with raisins, red and yellow jello, coleslaw, mashed potatoes and gravy. We lived on the threshold of new opportunity. Someday soon we would own our own farm. Optimism was high. After dinner chairs were brought outside and placed in the shade. Adults laughed and talked in a circle of sunburned arms, white summer shirts and light summer dresses. A growth of grandchildren played on the lawn but before the day was done a soft melancholy of longing stole quietly into the voices drifting on the evening air. Names of villages far away. Names of people I would never know. My father's parents among them. Where? Siberia. Alive? Sad desolate places of death covered by silence.

We were sharecropping the Bruner farm on Concession 4, just west of Highway #3 with Peter and Kaethe Klassen. I was five. Enough money had been saved to put a down payment on a farm. It was 1952. A farm was available just around the corner from us on the Graham Sideroad bordering the north side of Concession 4. There was a modest sturdy house and a second smaller house beside. There was a large red barn, a chicken house and related buildings. Oma and Opa would farm here together with Uncle Pete and *Tante* Kaethe.

A new vigor took hold in all of us. We all came here often. During the summer a familiar sight was the packing of tomatoes in the shade of the large maple tree next to the tool shed. Wooden eleven-quart baskets, wooden lids with specific hook nails hammered in. Relatives from Winnipeg visited and marveled at the abundance of fruits and vegetables in this hot Sun Parlour of Ontario.

If we came in the early evening just when the work was finished we children might be just in time to watch *Oma* do the milking and even get a taste of fresh warm milk in a little cup. Or we could walk with *Opa*. He would give each of us a baking powder box with a few pebbles in it. We would shake it vigorously to chase the birds out of the tomato fields.

It was Opa's quiet joy to walk the fields at the end of every day. He loved farming and he loved nature. He seemed aware of every plant and tree, every bird and bird song. He walked with God.

My parents purchased our farm in 1957, also on Concession 4. Henry Winters purchased theirs in 1961 after living for awhile in Leamington. Their farm was on Highway #3, east of Leamington. Bernhard and Johanna Dyck, who had also sharecropped, bought their farm on Highway #18 near Kingsville in 1957.

Our new house on our new farm was a large frame farmhouse. It stood unpainted and bare on a small rise which made it seem even taller. Not only the buildings and the land had suffered from years of neglect, but also the dairy herd. There was much work to be done.

Our family had grown to include two more children, Rudy and Walter. We felt so complete. Ray Peterson, our neighbour, who was in his eighties and still farmed with his horses Dick and Nell, came over every day. He would sit on the well and in his slow wisdom teach my father about the land "Now Rudy", he loved to begin most of his sentences, "this is not Leamington sand, you have to fall plough. And that side field....."

A sense of groundedness soothed that which had been harsh, homeless and restless for so long. Feet on our own soil. Houses and rooms that now belonged to us. Barns to fill with chickens, a cow, calves and hay. A garden and root cellar to put food away for the winter.



Our arms could stretch to the sky  
From here we could embrace new life

*The writer was born in Nieheim, West Germany, in 1947, and speaks High German, Low German and English fluently. Luise is a member of Faith Mennonite Church in Leamington, Ontario*



**1948. Our first car, a Model A: Father Rudy Dyck and daughter Luise Dyck Taves.**



# CHAPTER

# FOUR

*1965-1985*



# 1) The Four Car Trip

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*Henry Kroeker*

**M**any people not familiar with the local families from Mexico are often under a great misconception. They believe that these people made one trip here and stayed permanently. This is almost never the case. Most of the families came to Canada to work in order to take money back to Mexico; they tried very hard to hold onto their homes. But they realized, eventually, that the dream of staying in Mexico and raising their families successfully was just that, a dream.

One such family was Henry and Anna Kroeker and their six children. They had made many such trips before they decided to make Canada their home. By the time Henry and Anna made Canada their home, four of their children had already married. They had usually stayed and worked in Canada for the better part of the year and then returned to Mexico for a few months every year.

For the first few trips, the Kroekers came in a combination of train and bus, as they did not have a car of their own.

The first trip where they themselves drove was in June of 1970, and what a trip that was!

Henry bought the first car he had ever owned, and packed up his family for their first solo trip to Canada. They had been driving only a few hours when the car stalled, and no matter what they did, the car would not start again. The only choice left to them was to push the car off the road. Anna and children Peter, Margaret and George, Henry and Helen, got out of the car while Henry steered it. The children were barefoot and their feet were blistered and raw from the heat of the highway. They were stranded and had no way of getting help because they didn't know what to do when, suddenly, a vehicle stopped to see what was wrong. That helpful group were young men from the US Marines, from the White Sands Military Base. These Marines cut up the seats of their jeep to put between the bumpers of the car and the jeep and pushed the car to the nearest service station.

From the service station, they called the car dealer and told him about the car. The car dealer had to tow the car back to his lot and replace it for the Kroekers. Henry and son George went with him to get the second car. Anna and the children were put into a cab and taken to a motel to wait for them.

In all the confusion, Anna left her wallet containing all of their money in the cab. Anna and the children had a long wait which felt even longer because of the lack of food and water. The two boys Peter and Henry decided to ask the elevator attendant for a loan of five dollars for something to eat. With this money, they bought a bag of sweet buns for their mother and the smaller children. Soon after this, Henry and George returned with another car and they were on their way again.

This car took them a little further than the first before it broke down, as well. Again Henry had to find a different car; this time they traded it for an old Studebaker, and finally made it to Canada. As a result of all the problems with the cars, it took the Kroekers six days to get to Canada, twice as long as it normally would.

When they finally arrived in Canada, they went to work for a very nice couple named Pete Reimers. The Reimers also provided them with a small home. There were no cupboards in the house so they fashioned



them out of old onion crates which they nailed to the walls, and hung curtains in front of them. There was no lock on the front door so they wedged a two by six between the wall and the door at night, and during the day, that same two by six kept the fridge closed.

The whole family worked long hours in the tomato and cucumber fields every day, leaving little time for homemaking. Baking bread for the family was done by night. Anna would get the bread ready for baking and then she and Henry took turns sleeping and watching the oven.

The car Henry eventually got for them was not legal in Canada so they had to rely on the Reimers for transportation to and from the grocery store. Every Wednesday, the Reimers would come for Henry and Anna, leaving the children at home. It seemed that every time the parents left to buy groceries, there was a thunderstorm. The little home was surrounded by woods, leaving the children feeling very isolated, and more than a little frightened. They never told their parents how terrified they felt alone at home, because they knew there was no other way. All the children slept in one room except for Jacob, the youngest, who slept in his parent's room.

Another time the Kroekers came to Canada they had no problems with the drive here but when they arrived, they found that they had no place to stay. They had made arrangements in advance, before leaving for Canada, with a friend to secure for them work and a home. The friend assured them that both were in place, but when they arrived here, that was not the case. The work was there, but the home was occupied. They lived out of their car for two weeks before they could move in. They ate their meals in the car, and slept at friend Jacob Janzen's house. All their meals were cold, mostly peanut butter and syrup sandwiches, because there was no stove to cook on. One day Anna had an idea. In the morning before they left the Janzen home, they cooked potatoes and mixed in a can of corned beef. When they got to work, they set the pot out in the sun, and when it was time for lunch, the food was still warm.

They were so very grateful when they finally were able to move into the house their friend had gotten for them that they almost didn't mind not having an indoor bathroom.

The Kroekers had many more such adventures and every one made them stronger and more appreciative of the life they were able to make for themselves. I know this because I am Henry, their third son. All of us have gone on to raise great families and we thank our parents for showing us how to raise them right. My brother George and I do well with our Landscaping and Lawn care business.

*The writer was born in Mexico in 1961 and is a member of Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church. Henry is fluent in English and Low German.*



## 2) A Long, Full Life

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*Helena Klassen Sawatzky*

I was born in 1909, in the home of my parents Johann and Helena Hiebert Klassen. We lived in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. My father and mother had come to Canada from Russia in the 1880s. In Saskatchewan, my parents farmed with horses and grew oats, wheat, and barley. Mother died after her third child was born, and Father remarried. Our family attended the Reinfeld Mennonite Church. Because we always lived in and around our Mennonite people, I learned to speak the Low German language only.

When I was 16, our family moved to Swiftplan, Neuanlage, Campo 105, Mexico. We attended the Old Colony Mennonite Church. On the farm we grew wheat and oats and raised pigs, cows, and chickens. Horses continued to be necessary for travel and farming. All our shopping was done in the Low German language, because the store owners were Mennonite people.

When I was 20 years old, Peter Sawatzky and I became engaged. Our engagement was announced in church on Sunday morning, Dec. 15, 1929, and our wedding took place after the church service during the Christmas season. For our wedding meal in my parent's home, we had ham, mashed potatoes, gravy, *Zwieback* (double buns), dill pickles, *Plumamoos* (stewed fruit), and tea and milk. Peter and I lived and farmed in Neustaedt, Campo 101, Mexico. I worked in the garden, and Peter worked on the field. I did much cooking and baking such as bread, *Zwieback*, cookies, cake and pie and sewed all the clothes for my family. I needed to milk the cows, make butter and cottage cheese. We butchered pigs, cows, and chickens. I didn't like cutting the chicken's heads off, so someone else did that for me. The pigs needed to be shot, then their throats were cut to bleed them.

Peter and I had 14 children, all born in Mexico. After the birth of each child, I spent two days in bed, with one exception. On the day that one of our children was born, the house had filled with flies because of all the coming and going. I found this very irritating. I got out of bed, killed all the flies, swept them up, and forgot about going back to bed!

Our son Ben moved to Ontario, Canada in 1966, and we followed six months later. Our family first lived near Wheatley. It was a difficult start. My husband Peter became ill and died shortly after our arrival. Our older children attended our private Old Colony Church school in Wheatley; the youngest child attended public school in Wheatley.

Today, I am a resident of the Leamington Mennonite Home, where I get treated with loving kindness. I have made friends with my roommate and others. I wish I hadn't sold my sewing machine before coming here. I'd like to sew a few new dresses for myself.

Two of my adult children have died, and I have only two half-sisters left: one in Mexico, and one in Manitoba. Three of my children live nearby, namely Ben, Dave, and George. I have 363 grandchildren, 36 great grandchildren, and 33 great great grandchildren. My family, including the spouses, totals 532.

God has blessed me with a long, full life.



*The writer was born in Saskatchewan in 1909 and died in the Leamington Mennonite Home on August 1, 2005. Helene was a member of the Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church.*

Low German - English translation by Walter Koop



**Helena Klassen Sawatzky**



**Peter P. Sawatzky**



### 3) Mennonites and the Gregory Family Connection

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*Mary G. Epp Neufeld*

**F**rancis Roger Gregory came to Canada from North Carolina in 1901. The family lived on Talbot Street West in Leamington, Ontario. Francis and Ina Grace Higgs Gregory were parents to three children, all born in Canada, namely, Herbert T. Gregory, Frances Augusta Gregory (died at 3 years), and Ella Jane Gregory Olmsted.

Extensive farming interests were held in Essex and Kent Counties and other areas. Some of our local Mennonite men traveled to the Delhi area every year to manually harvest the large Gregory tobacco acreage there. No machine harvesters were used in those days. Three substantial meals daily, lodging in bunkhouses, and good pay drew workers from a wide range, even Europe. Somehow the Sunday sermons justified this five to six week harvest as necessary, considering the economic benefits to the families involved. A 1960s story entitled Hunky written by Hugh Garner, tells of this annual harvest phenomenon.

When the Mennonites in this area first wanted to buy farms, their mortgages were often held by Francis R. Gregory and other individuals, since banks were reluctant to lend to immigrants.

In these early years, the Imperial Tobacco Factory in Leamington, of which Francis R. Gregory was one of the original managers, provided winter seasonal employment for men and women from our area, and many Mennonites worked there. Summer employment as primers and leaf handlers provided tuition money for students; camaraderie eased the hard work.

Francis Roger Gregory died on May 10, 1960 at the age of 79. The farms still held were equally shared by son Herbert of Leamington and daughter Ella Jane of USA. Francis Roger Gregory held mortgages during his lifetime, which now became due, to settle the estate. New management was established. A Trust Company managed the 'Olmsted' farms. The Herbert T. Gregory and his children's farms: Francis R. Gregory (1993) - Anne E. Gregory (2002) - Herbert T. Gregory Junior - were managed from the original office built in 1911 on Mill Street West in Leamington, Ontario, as H.T. Gregory Farms.

I began my employment with H. T. Gregory Farms in October of 1978. The work of secretary and book-keeper provided continuum for previous employment experience, so I accepted. Little did I suspect I would soon be looking after all the details of the Sharecropper portion allotted to the H. T. Gregory Farms by the Agreements in place, which included 6,500 acres to be processed, along with the many Government Programs.

In Essex and Kent Counties the names of Taves, Wiebe, Gossen, Reimer, Epp, Thiessen, Konrad, Cornies and many others, had found their way into the Sharecropper Agreements. Early on, some tobacco was grown. Now mostly tomatoes and grains were grown. Purchasing their own farms was always the goal, but quite a number of growers stayed on as sharecroppers after they bought their own farms. Herbert T. Gregory was proud of the fact that some had farmed his farms for over 41 years. "My Growers", he called them. He sincerely shared in the concerns of drought, too much rain, and of course enjoyed the years when things turned out well.

Herbert T. Gregory had great admiration for the Mennonites, as well as the Belgian people in Delhi, but noted that we Mennonites did seem to go to church more often. Hardly a Monday morning went by that he

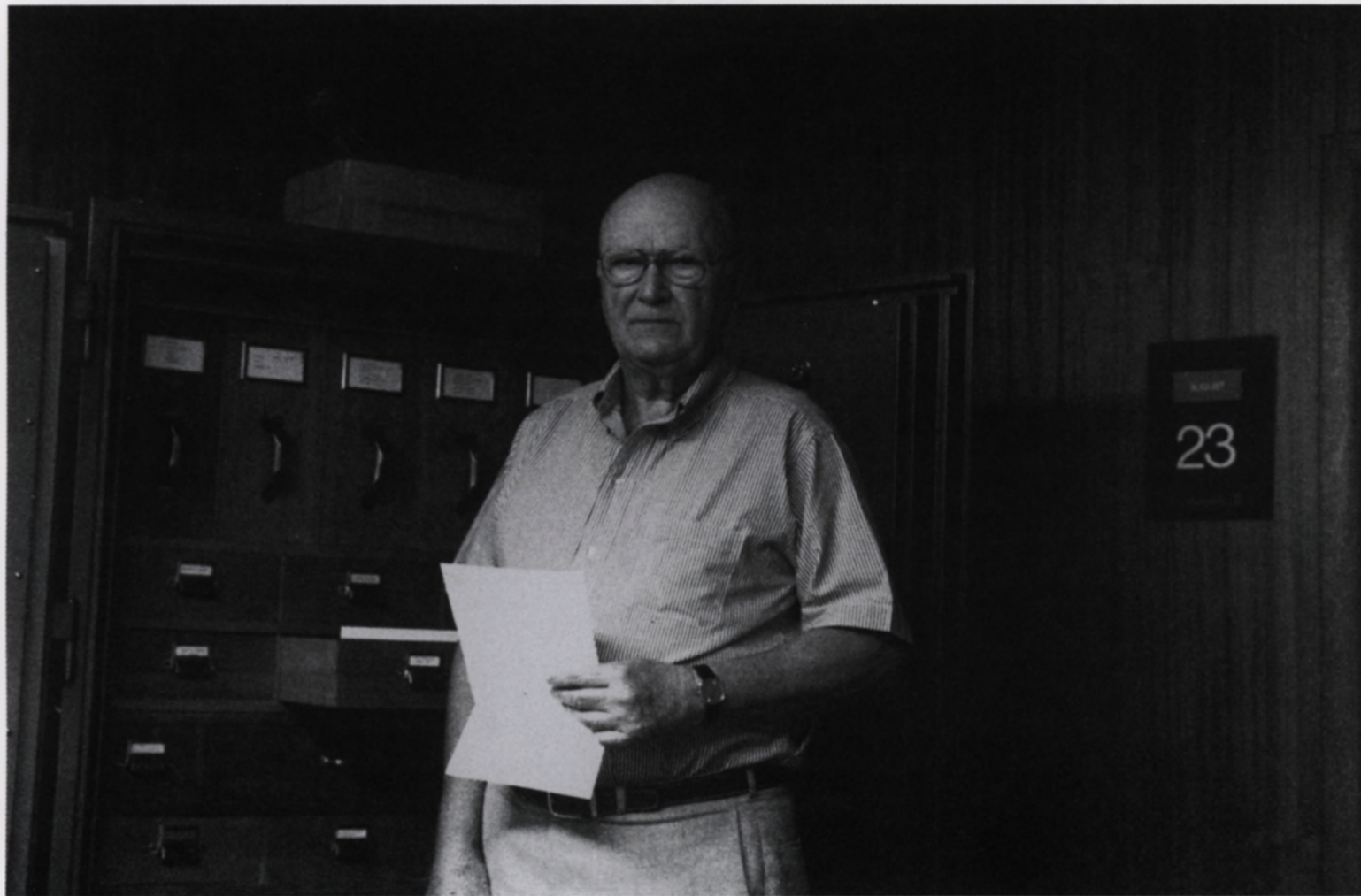


didn't ask me if I had gone to church on Sunday. Some of our Mennonite ladies worked at the Gregory family home to "help out", he said. He was most grateful to Agnes Enns (mother to Harold, Ron, John) and Margaret (Hiebert) Pankratz. These ladies taught his children Mennonite songs and little prayers which they remember to this day. In his last days he still surrounded himself with the Mennonite people: Freda Penner to take his wife Marion to appointments and Ernest Brown who takes care of the yard and everything else. The Gregory family was Anglican, and he'd often remark that all the Mennonite food we brought to their house would perhaps make him less Anglican!

Our family members were treated like one of their own, and shared "The Farm" in North Carolina on vacations for many years. Roaming the 3,200 acres there was a privilege for us. I count it an honour to have known this man and his family. Mr. Herbert T. Gregory died June 10, 2003, at 93 years.

Most of the farms sold to end H. T. Gregory Farms were bought by the share growers who farmed them; all between 1996 and 2000. An era had come to an end. There have been numerous articles in various publications, and several books published documenting this legendary family, at least one in fiction format.

*The writer was born in Leamington in 1935, and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church. Mary speaks English, High German and Low German fluently.*



**Herbert T. Gregory in his office**



## 4) The Way I Remember Coming to Canada

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*Aaron R. Friesen*

I remember sitting near the front of a very large bus headed for Canada. At the age of four, in 1971, I was not clear on exactly what was going on except that I loved the ride. Bus rides were for people who were going to far away places, so I guess Canada was really far away from Mexico.

My next memory after the bus ride, is seeing the excited face of my older sister Margaret in Drayton, Ontario, Canada. I do not recall exactly how long we stayed there, but I remember that while at her house, it was my birthday, and I received my very own bright red building blocks to play with. I had no idea that my life in Canada was now starting to unfold. We had traveled from Durango, Mexico to southern Ontario with hopes of finding work and possibly returning to Mexico for the winter. For some reason unknown to me, we stayed in Canada. Perhaps the work paid better here and was more reliable than in our former home.

After a short stay at my sister's house, my family moved to Leamington so that my parents (Johan and Suzanna Friesen, born in Saskatchewan) and older siblings could take advantage of the farm work available. We were a family of 14 children, namely: Susan, John, Helen, Jake, Margaret, Peter, Henry, Tina, George, Abe, Anne, Dave, Bill and me, Aaron. The oldest five siblings had stayed behind in Mexico. Our first house was located on Ken Enns's greenhouse farm north of Leamington. It still stands and I can't help but glance at it in passing by.

Through the years, we moved from place to place. Some houses included the farmsteads of Rudy and Louise Tiessen, Henry Epp, who farmed with his son Karl, Leonard Driedger, son of John, George and Betty Konrad, and at a house owned by Alfred and Elsie Neufeld. Through the course of time, I received my education at Mount Carmel Public School, Blytheswood Public School, and East Mersea Public School. Later I would resume my education at the Adult Learning Center in Leamington.

It was upon coming to Leamington that the first Sunday School I attended was at the North Leamington United Mennonite Church because the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Wheatley was not yet complete. I remember the colourful paper sheets we received after each class for take home, and I remember playing with David Cornies. After the Old Colony Church was complete, I attended Sunday School there. After all, we were Old Colony people, probably never to return to the North Leamington United Mennonite Church, or so I thought.

In 1986, I married Margy T. Wall, born in Tillsonburg, Ontario, who has two siblings, Susan and Nancy. Her family was from Chihuahua, Mexico, but she was born here, so I guess I married a "Canadian" Girl. We were baptized and wed in the Old Colony tradition in Wheatley which consisted of me wearing a dark suit and Margy wearing a black (or brown) dress. At twenty years old now, it seemed natural to be wed in this fashion, but on the other hand, having been raised here in Canada most of my life, I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to be married with the bride wearing white. Around this time, many of my friends had already left the Old Colony tradition behind.

After our marriage, we tried our best to accept the Old Colony Order. However, times were changing, and we felt that after a while, our faith was not being fulfilled. This led to the option of transferring to another congregation. This was a very difficult decision, and even resulted in three years of hardly attending the Old Colony congregation. This tested our faith as we had, by now, three young children to think about. It was



New Year's Day, in 1997, that Margy, my wife, attended a morning service at the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. This was the beginning of a whole year as guests there. The following year, on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1998, we were accepted as full members by Pastor Victor Kliewer and the congregation. This was all too ironic, as my own son Philip was beginning to attend Junior Kindergarten, exactly where I was when I came to Canada!

Today, we are still faithfully attending NLUMC. Our children may never see Mexico unless they decide to travel there some day. But I have fond memories, even if few, from there, and would never trade them for anything. If it was God's intent to bring me here to Leamington to raise my family, then I am thankful that I was brought here at a young age. I believe that it has helped me to understand Canadian customs and traditions to better prepare me for my future here in the workforce, and where my family is concerned. The Mennonite people have moved from place to place for many centuries; perhaps my story is my way of contributing to our Mennonite history.

*The writer was born in Mexico in 1966, and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Aaron is fluent in English and Low German.*



**Three Friesen brothers.**

**L to r: Bill, Dave and Aaron. Photo taken on the Rudy and Louise Tiessen farmstead.**



## 5) Highlights of My Life

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*Herm Dick*

I was born on May 17, 1928 to William and Justina Dick, the fourth child of six siblings. I was over eight pounds at birth, but at seven months, I weighed only eleven pounds, due to an intestinal disorder called Celiac, and I wasn't expected to live. Medical technology was limited at that time. The ultimate cure was a regular dosing of *Alpenkräuter* which pulled me through. The older generation will remember this alcohol-based herbal cure-all.

At the age of two years, 'til I reached four, I was farmed out to various aunts and uncles to be raised. My mother had twins and was unable to care for me too. Only a few of the cousins of these families are still here today. I thank them all for their care and kindness of taking me in during my formative years.

I had a happy childhood, moving from farm to farm. My father worked for wages or was a sharecropper during the "dirty thirties" of the depression. At that young age I wasn't aware of the hardships our parents went through.

I passed my grade eight at Mount Carmel School in 1941. I wanted to be a farmer already at an early age. It was the custom in those years that you stayed at home to help on the farm after completing elementary school. I attended a three-month course in Bible Study in the Oak Street Church with Elder J. P. Dyck as instructor. This was the beginning of UMEI. And later I attended the Ontario Bible School (high school) in Fort Erie. My father needed me on the farm after that, so that was the end of my formal education.

Growing up was exciting in my day, even without television and computers. We skated on Sturgeon Creek, played baseball in pasture fields, had Sunday evening lawn parties in summer and house parties in winter, festivals and retreats with churches from eastern Ontario (Niagara and Waterloo areas).

On May 16, 1948, I was baptized on the confession of my faith by *Ältester* N. N. Driedger. My scripture verse was John 10:27. On October 4, 1952, I was married to Elizabeth Janzen, daughter of Reverend Jacob D. and Liese Janzen. We celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on October 20, 2002. We have seven children: Diane (Ron Froese), Dennis (Vicki Hamm), Phil (Doctor Wendy Reimer), Greg (Susan Neufeld), Bob (Janet Willms), Dave (Vickie Seefuss), Joan (Ken Epp) and nineteen grandchildren.

The 1950s and 1960s were very challenging. Our children were born. We purchased our parents' farm in 1956. As the children grew up they also helped on the farm. We all worked hard, but always made time for picnics, parties, and get-togethers with family and friends. Going to church and Sunday School were a must. Many baseball games were played in our back yard with our children. We were always thankful we had our health.

In 1968, seven ball diamonds were laid out on the UMEI grounds to accommodate a boys and girls Sunday afternoon softball league. You had better be there to coach a team from 1-3 P.M. or you would hear from Mr. Cornie Driedger or Mr. Nick Schmidt! This league lasted for over twelve years. After 3 P.M., the youth and young married men of 6 teams played. Only the catcher and first baseman used gloves. When you caught a line drive or a fast throw it stung a bit - but so what?



Baseball was a high priority for me. I had played in the Leamington town league in 1948 for Heinz office, but I really enjoyed the involvement with children and youth later, too. In 1969, a church league was formed with six local churches participating, playing once a week on Monday, at 5 PM. We hoped the game would be over before dark, for we had no lights. This league lasted nine years. Coaching in this league was a good way to get to know the young people and these friendships have lasted through the years.

Till now, life was all fun and games, but bigger challenges were to come. In 1970, I was elected to the UMEI school board. When I first joined the board, not all members were optimistic about the future of UMEI. Being a new member, I was full of vim and vigor and had a very positive outlook. I expected our seven children to attend and graduate from UMEI (And they did!). Our fathers had given us the opportunities to have our own private high school, and it was up to the next generation to carry the torch further.

In 1971-1972 the science room and music dome were added. Mr. Vic Heinrichs, a UMEI graduate, was the architect. Henry Warkentin was chairman at that time. I was elected chairman in my third year on the board, followed by three more years as chairman. At that time, board members' families were actively engaged in spring cleaning, curtain sewing, painting, landscaping and general upkeep.

Baseball was still a going concern at that time, with our young people playing in different leagues, but we had no lights and games were played after work. Ridgetown was replacing their lights, so we purchased them for \$500, poles and all. There was a big pond where we wanted to locate the diamond with lights. We filled the hole in, but the whole nine acre complex needed to be tiled. I remember going across the road to the North Church site where they were tiling, to ask the tiler if he would come over and tile the UMEI grounds when they were finished at the church. He asked me "When?". I said, "Tomorrow would be just fine!" He chuckled and said, "You don't even have the tiles!" I replied, "By the way, we have to go through Ernie Epp's peach orchard with the main tile and we have permission to do so." Another chuckle. I bravely said, "The tiles will be there in the morning and we'll have ten men to hold back the branches to avoid damaging the trees." Another chuckle from the tiler. Ten men generously agreed to come out after some phone calls. At midnight I picked up the tiles from the Comber tile yard. In the morning, when the tiler reluctantly came over, he couldn't believe his eyes. Then I chuckled and thought to myself, "Well, that's the Mennonite way!"

Mr. George Hamm took on the responsibility of installing the lights and fences with the help of many volunteers. Years later, these lights were replaced by the present ones.

A plaque was originally hung in the foyer of the auditorium complex honouring Doctor A.D. Froese. Doctor Froese, a long time family physician in Leamington, left a \$50,000 bequest to the UMEI. This was to go toward a new school building. Was the community ready to support building a new school with the cost of over half a million dollars? We needed a new gymnasium/auditorium badly! Our community had outgrown the present facilities. The students couldn't play basketball properly in the old aud and many wedding meals were held here. We were bursting at the seams.

Through many meetings and discussions and negotiations with church council, the UMEI association members, Doctor Koch, board members and lawyers, we finally decided to build the new gymnasium and foyer and washrooms at the present site, with the help of Mr. Vic Heinrichs giving generously of his time. The new gym was built for the contracted price of \$250,000 by Grossi Construction. We arranged with Mr. Grossi to help him in certain areas with voluntary labour. Again, the volunteers kept the total cost down, or the final figure would have been higher. I remember, while pouring the foundation, we had to go under the old auditorium to pack the cement being poured. I was in cement up to my knees. Carl Grossi, the builder, offered to buy me a new pair of jeans - still a standing joke between us.



It was thought by some that the building should be done mainly by volunteers as it was some 30 years ago, when the original school and aud were built. Had we lost the spirit of volunteering? I got my ears full for even thinking about such an expensive structure! But the world had changed in 30 years. Building codes had changed and were strictly enforced, but the spirit of volunteering was still very much alive as it is to this day. At that time many UMEI graduates had entered the professional work force, few came back to the farm. They couldn't leave their work during the week, or they had moved out of the community so the number of possible volunteers to choose from diminished. There was still always the opportunity to support the project financially. During construction of the new gym, 25 volunteers came and shingled the old auditorium.

In 1974 the sod-turning ceremony was held. Mr. John N. Driedger, vice-chairman of the board, agreed to take on the responsibility of building committee chairman. A job well done, John, and thank you, Marion for supporting John! In 1976, the cornerstone laying ceremony was held. The building debt of the new gymnasium/auditorium and foyer was paid off a few years later.

There is so much credit to be given to so many people, I can't begin to name them. One couple I must mention is Henry and Helen Koop who, with their endless enthusiasm, were always ready to pitch in whatever the need or occasion. Countless fundraisers and Helen's excellent catering served the community for many years, with Henry always at her side. Much credit must be given to the board members, secretaries and teachers and treasurers and many volunteers who took on the extra responsibilities during building projects and to the wives and children who kept the farms and home fires burning. One instance was the purchasing and sewing of the huge stage curtains. No problem, they just thought bigger! Those were good years for me. I was always thrilled to see another UMEI class graduate, including our own children.

After my term was up at UMEI, I was going to concentrate only on our farming operation, but I spent four years on the Essex County Associated Growers Board, then another four years on the County Federation of Agriculture Board. During this time, I was asked to host a greenhouse tour for a group of scientists who were coming here from Kiev, Russia. This pastime has developed into hosting many groups from Europe, UK, USA, and from all over Canada, in particular many groups from Ontario, one of the most recent being our Agricorp board from Guelph in 2003.

In the mid-eighties, the Ontario Greenhouse board was having serious problems when two directors resigned. I was asked and appointed to this board and re-elected the following year. In addition, I was appointed to represent the greenhouse board to the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association in Guelph. After two years, the problems were resolved, and I chose not to run again, but stayed on as an OF&VGA board member by special request to also attend conventions for another nine years. This position took me to many winter conventions in Ottawa, Quebec City, Charlottetown, Winnipeg and other cities. Many friendships developed coast to coast.

During this time our sons Dennis, Greg, Bob, and Dave had joined us in our farming/greenhouse operations. This meant buying more farms to make a viable operation. I was asked specifically to tell the story of what we call "The oil farm".

In the fall of 1981, I approached my longtime friend and neighbour Bob Wiper to lease his 80 acres of land. He was not interested in leasing - he wanted to sell! We had purchased four expensive farms recently and were in no position to buy another so soon. But we agreed on a lease to purchase and made all the necessary legal arrangements. On May 17, 1982, we made the deposit to purchase the land. Five weeks later, I had a visitor in the field bluntly telling me that the oil company he represented would be drilling for oil on this



farm in three weeks. The drilling rigs came, struck oil, capped the well and left. We were told it was a good well - but what was good? In January of the next year the drilling rig came to the other end of this farm, struck oil, capped the well, and left again. I happened to be on the site when the second well came gushing out and got showered with oil. I felt like Jed Clampet from the Beverly Hillbillies! Now the fun begins. My friend Bob Wiper was still the legal owner of the land. He came over and said to me that the farm had been in his family for 80 years and they should have a share in the royalties.

We had a bona fide offer of purchase. We didn't owe him anything, legally. Our obligation to him was to finalize the purchase at the given time. How do you handle this kind of a situation? I wrote out three conditions. 1) Return the deposit we had given him. 2) Tile the farm properly. 3) Give us a 10-year lease on the land. I signed my name to the conditions. Two weeks later, Bob came back to me and said, "I don't want to be like a dog with a bone in his mouth looking in the water. Let's go through with the sale!" I kept my friend. We closed the purchase of sale on April 2, 1983. On April 4, 1983 the oil company opened the valves. It was a good surprise.

In 1994, my longtime friend Dave Wilkinson, former Mayor of Leamington, tried to interest me to run for a seat on Mersea Council. There was no representation of the southern part of the township on council at that time. I could only say "Why?" I had no political ambitions. I went through two elections, serving on council for four years. In 1998, Leamington and Mersea Township amalgamated. By this time it had gotten into my blood, so I ran for a council seat. I lost by 16 votes.

In the middle of this political campaign, I received a registered letter from Queen's Park in Toronto informing me that I was being considered for an appointment to the board of directors of Agricorp. Two weeks later, I was appointed. Directors are appointed from all areas of Ontario. Agricorp is a crown corporation that administers and delivers crop insurance in all of Ontario covering 57 field crops. Since joining the board six years ago, the corporation has branched out into many other areas of agriculture services. My second three-year term expired in October 2004. Only two three-year terms are allowed.

Guelph has become very important to me as I've made over 200 safe trips to that city for meetings. The friendships that developed are invaluable to me.

In 1999 I was honoured by the Essex County Associated Growers board of directors. Since 1950 this organization has presented an annual Award of Merit to individuals who have contributed significantly to agriculture in Ontario. Last year Henry Iacobelli of Sun Brite Canning received this award. The first of these awards was given to Mr. Abram Barg in 1950.

In the fall of 2000 our two sons Greg and Dave and I took part in a video produced by the Great Canadian Food Show from Ottawa. They were filming a special on the Tomato Capital of Canada featuring tomatoes. The filming began in Greg and Dave's tomato field harvesting tomatoes mechanically. Then they went on to the Heinz Co to the grading station, unloading trailers with water pressure, elevating them to the factory to the scalders and then finally to the process of cooking your favourite Heinz ketchup. On their last day of shooting, Heinz Company officials, Greg, Dave, and I and members of Leamington Chamber of Commerce were invited to Spago's restaurant for a six course meal; each course contained tomatoes - even the dessert! Some of you will have seen it aired on National TV.

Elizabeth and I have been so fortunate in that we have been able to do some traveling in the past 30 years. We've enjoyed Russia, Australia, Egypt, Holland (where Ron and Di lived), Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Cuba, Mexico, as well as North America from coast to coast and our latest trip to South America. Visiting



the Chaco, Paraguay, was a longtime dream for me where our Mennonites had settled from 1927-1947, rising from literally nothing to where they are economically well off today.

Through all this time, I have never lost sight of the most important highlight of my life: my wife Elizabeth, our children and grandchildren, having many family gatherings, and day to day happenings. Having a close-knit family means everything to me.

I hold dear in particular our church, the UMEI, Mennonite Home for the Aged and the Leamington Hospital. God has led me in many directions in my lifetime. I am thankful to God for all the blessings, and enjoying them in good health.

Thank you Elizabeth, and family for supporting me. Thank you readers, for walking with me as I've taken you through some of my life's experiences.

*The writer was born in Arner, Ontario in 1928, and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Herm is fluent in the English, High German and Low German languages.*



**Liz and Herm Dick**



**Herm Dick in 1948**



## 6) I Thank God That We Came This Way

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*Lisa Froese Fehr*

**O**ur trip from Mexico to Canada was planned to be short term, and then back to Mexico for an easier life with the money we had earned. Instead it turned out to be a long, difficult, and seemingly everlasting experience.

In 1979, I traveled with my parents Jacob and Anna Froese and ten siblings from Mexico to Canada. I was 15 and found this very fascinating. After all, this was our very first time out of our home country, although it was our second try.

Two years earlier, in 1977, our parents had realized that in order to ever get ahead, or just make ends meet and raise the family, changes would need to be made. An opportunity arose. There was some new land for sale in Seminole, Texas, and our parents decided to go for that. It all sounded very good, but first they had to sell their small farm and most of their belongings. Finally, when everything was planned, we had an auction sale and people walked away with our belongings. It was a sad day for my mother, but few days later, the exciting moment came. We all packed into a pickup truck and set out for the Texas border. A final phone call was made to the people we were buying our land from, to let them know we were almost there. The answer from them was that we should turn around and go back home; there was no land available for us! What a shock for our parents. Not only had we made a two-day trip to the Texas border, but my parents had sent their money for the land up front. It was at that moment that our parents realized that what they had worked for all their life, was now gone. I remember it as a very quiet trip home, except that we had no home to go to.

When we arrived back in our home village, we moved in with aunts and uncles, spread out with different families. My father searched hard to find a place to rent, and after two weeks, a small house was found. The oldest four siblings had to go find jobs and move in with other families because the house was too small for all of us. Father share-cropped an apple orchard and we younger children helped him.

Then, in the winter of 1979, we had our second try. Our parents thought that summer work in Canada might make things a little easier for them. They did some research and prepared our documents for Canada, although family and church leadership did not agree with the idea. Once all documents were prepared and spring came, it was time to pack up our three suitcases amongst the thirteen of us; only our most needed clothes could come. Off we went again. This time all thirteen, plus our three suitcases, fit into the neighbour's pickup truck. We even had room for the neighbour in the driver's seat, who drove us to the bus station in the nearest town. Here we purchased tickets and got into a bus that had, for most of us, standing room only. We drove as far as the city of Chihuahua which was about two hours; there we needed to purchase tickets again and switch busses. This time we all got seats all the way to the El Paso airport where we had planned to buy tickets to fly to Ontario. Here they told us that unfortunately, there were not enough seats on one plane available for us all until a couple of days later. Our parents wouldn't consider sending some of us on a different plane because not one of us had ever flown before. And so our only choice was to go back to the bus station and buy tickets again. This time it was all the way to Detroit by bus, a forty-eight hour drive. And yes, we all had our own seats! I'm sure my mother said thanks to God many times that not one of us had to stay behind anywhere. Rest stops along the way were good, but they didn't do us a lot of good because we did not know any English, so we didn't know how long the stops would be, or how to order meals in the cafeteria. Because we were always afraid that we'd miss the bus we'd just go to the



vending machines, and we children sure did enjoy the potato chips and pop! I remember this as a very joyful and relaxed trip. Unfortunately for my mother, it was not very joyful because she was expecting a baby at the time, number twelve.

When we finally reached Detroit, Father made a call to some friends in Leamington and they came and picked us up. We crammed into a station wagon and a car to cross the border to Canada. We were only able to come across on a two-week visiting permit, which meant that we'd either need to go back within two weeks, or apply for Landed Immigrant Status. Decisions, and more decisions for our parents to make! Many thanks go to a Friesen family who took us into their small rented house, and helped us find our own house and work.

The only way for us to stay and earn the money we had come for, was to apply for Landed Immigrant Status and stay awhile, which ended up being five years. It seemed like a long time at first, but toward the end of the five years, our desire to go back to Mexico had diminished somewhat.

I am now forty years old, and I thank God that we came this way, and I believe that this trip was a learning experience for us.

*The writer was born in 1964 in Mexico and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church in Leamington, Ontario. Lisa speaks English and Low German fluently.*



## 7) Relationships

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*Louise Walde Block*

Harry and I were married on August 12, 1951 in a small church in Gem, Alberta. We spent our childhood and youth in a community near Rosemary, Alberta and attended a one-room rural school called Clemenceau. This school was the center of all our activities: education, worship services, entertainment and social. The community was unique, where Mennonites from all different denominations worshipped, worked, and played together. Relationships and friendships formed in those years were lasting, as was evident when hundreds attended a reunion held in 1990.

Harry continued his schooling by attending Mennonite Bible Institute in Didsbury, Alberta for one year, continuing at Rosthern Junior College in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. His education was interrupted when he served in a CO (Conscientious Objector) camp for two years, before completing Grade 12.

I attended the Mennonite Collegiate Institute at Gretna, Manitoba for two years, took a four month "Blitz" course of teacher training and launched out on a teaching career. I taught the primary grades for five years, and after completing several summer sessions at the University of Alberta, received my permanent certificate.

Harry had worked on the family farm for some time, but shortly after we were married, we packed up all our *Hab und Gut* (possessions) in the back of a pickup truck and headed east. Why Ontario? Why Leamington? Ontario seemed to offer job opportunities in industries, and we connected with an uncle and family, as well as former Alberta friends in Leamington. I have to admit that there was a certain element of adventure underlying our move. We were strangers in a large, well-established community. How and where would we fit in?

Our first home was in a basement apartment at the corner of Oak and White streets, in Leamington. We shared the basement with two young girls employed at the Heinz factory. Our friendship circle widened when they introduced us to their friends and boyfriends. We were invited to their weddings and other social events. We still value and enjoy these relationships and friends.

Job opportunities were at a minimum during the first years. I was informed that my teaching certificate was not valid in Ontario; I was required to attend Teacher's College to teach. This was impossible at that time, so we found employment on farms planting seedlings (Ouch!), picking fruits and vegetables, detasseling corn, hoeing fields, etc.

We were unaccustomed to this type of work and found it extremely difficult and discouraging. Eventually, I got a job at Heinz's in Quality Control for a season and later was given "A letter of Standing" by the Education Department to fill in for teachers on maternity leave or other reasons. I taught at Mersea #5, Inman, and Colchester North, and supply taught for many years. My last experience in the school system was as a "Grandmother Volunteer" working with primary children who had learning difficulties.

Harry found employment in various factories, for example: Ford, McCord, Clarke and finally General Motors in Windsor. He worked there for thirty years before retiring in 1989.



Harry and I grew up on farms and enjoyed country living, so in 1955 we purchased a 75 acre farm in Gesto, near Essex, Ontario. It was an ideal place to raise our family: a daughter and three sons. The children attended Colchester North Public School, Essex High School and various Universities. They have established their own homes in Leamington, Ontario, Delta, British Columbia, Calgary, Alberta and Jordan, Ontario.

We left all our relatives and friends when we moved to Ontario, but kept connected by participating in reunions, anniversaries, weddings, and funerals. We traveled across Canada many times - 28 at last count - with British Columbia as our destination because our parents and siblings lived there. However, we took many side-trips to Jasper, Banff, Yellowstone National Parks, California, etc. Our traveling passion was not limited to Canada and the US. We joined tour groups to Africa, Alaska, Australia, Hawaii, South America and Europe, to enjoy and marvel at the wonders and beauty of God's creation.

We are members of Harrow Mennonite church and have been active in deacons work, Sunday School, choir, and committee work. I have always enjoyed working with people and have been involved with Home and School Association, Christian Women's Club, Women in Mission, Bible Study groups, and volunteer work with MCC in the Et Cetera Shoppe, Mennonite Disaster Service, Habitat for Humanity and conference work. The opportunity to be associated with the various organizations was a learning experience in acceptance, tolerance, and appreciation of people of all faiths, cultures and lines of work.

God has blessed us with good health, a loving family, many friends and a positive attitude. We cherish the memories of the past, life in the present, and have confidence in the future.

*The writer was born in Sagradowka, Ukraine in 1925, and is a member of Harrow Mennonite Church. Louise speaks English, High German and Low German.*



**Harry and Louise Block in their Gesto, Ontario home.**



## 8) A New Beginning

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*Nancy Martens Kroeker*

**I**n 1971 my parents, Bernard and Margaretha Martens were having a very difficult time providing for their family of six children, as well as my father's 18-year-old brother. They had been steadily losing their land to squatters and had no other means to make their living. Survival in Mexico is almost impossible if one has no land on which to grow food for the family and livestock. For some time they had been speaking of going to Canada, where they would try to get back on their feet enough to start again in Mexico. They heard of a Mr. George Penner who was going back to Canada and was willing to take passengers.

From the time that the decision was made to come to Canada until we were on our way was only one and one-half days. This gave my parents very little time to get everything ready and say goodbye to family and friends. The only things they packed were our clothes; no toys or other luxury items were allowed. The other thing they had to do was make arrangements for the neighbours to take care of the livestock.

Right from the beginning the trip was difficult; my little sister Margaret had been ill for a few weeks before we left and didn't get any better for the entire trip. My older sister Helen was also not well as she had a very badly infected toe. When we reached Juarez, which is the border town between Mexico and New Mexico, we learned that there was a problem with some of our documents, which needed to be corrected before we would be able to continue. This meant that we had to go by taxi to many different government buildings to try to straighten out the problem. After many such taxi rides, my mother insisted that Father go alone and leave her and the children at one of these buildings in order to be done faster. We waited under a tree in front of the building for Father to return. The extreme heat and lack of water made the wait that much longer and uncomfortable, and only caused the children to become irritable and cranky, especially the youngest two-year-old Margaret and one-month-old Annie. We must have been quite a sight and drew the attention of a Mexican National couple. Without a word or permission, the Mexican woman took Annie out of Mother's arms and began to quiet and calm her. The man explained to mother that they had been watching us, and being concerned about our welfare had decided that we needed help. Mother explained that we were waiting for our father and did not have any water. He then took my brother John, 7 years, sister Helen 6 years, and brother Isaac, 5 years, to get some water. The young woman stayed with Mother to help with the youngest children. The walk for water took longer than anticipated because Helen's infected toe slowed them down. The time that the three older children were gone with a complete stranger, were one of my mother's hardest moments.

Finally, after about five hours, Father returned with the correct documents and we were on our way again. We had to pick up another family of five in the US for the rest of the trip to Canada. Now we were a total of fourteen people crowded into the back of the truck, and Margaret and Helen were both sick. At last, after four days traveling in such a cramped space, on Sunday, June 18, 1971, we arrived in Canada. We went to the only people we knew in Canada, my uncle Cornelius Driedger's house. For the first few months we lived in their enclosed front porch, but soon found a farmer to work for who had a house for us to live in.

Soon after arriving in Canada, we joined the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Wheatley, Ontario. There were only fifty to sixty other Old Colony Mennonite families living in this area at the time, so the church was a tiny one-room building. As soon as we could afford to, we rented a house of our own in Woodslee.



We had lived in Canada for about three years, my father had a good job at Freedlands in Kingsville, and everything seemed to be looking up. My parents decided that Father would go back to Mexico and sell the little they had left behind. Father and two of his friends flew to Mexico and proceeded to dispose of the livestock and other household items. On January 26, 1974, one month after he left for Mexico, Father was coming home. He called us from the airport to say that he would be home within an hour. The house was tidied and we were all dressed in our best clothes while we waited anxiously for our beloved Father. Instead of a joyous homecoming, a police car carrying his traveling companions brought terrible news: Father had had a heart attack and died right after he talked to Mother.

Now, Mother at age 28, was left widowed with seven children ranging in ages from 12 years to one year. Shortly after my father's death we moved to Concession B to be near my aunt and soon after that my grandmother, having been widowed six months before, came to live with us. In the spring and summer months, everyone worked as much as they could. We planted, hoed, and picked tomatoes and pickles during the spring and summer months; in the fall Mother picked and sorted apples. The worst times were when we had to go to school; there we were teased, taunted, and bullied on a daily basis.

At the time of my father's death we were working for a farmer named Cornelius Lehn, and he saw how hard it was for us so he helped Mother apply for child tax credit and social assistance. There were also a Mr. and Mrs. Cornies who helped Mother a great deal. They drove her places she needed to go, helped her enroll in English as a second language classes and read and explained to her anything she got in the mail. Mrs. Cornies even taught Mother to drive and helped her get her driver's licence.

Finally, after two years of waiting and a lot of help from Mrs. Cornies, we got a small life insurance payment and were able to put a down payment on a house. With the whole family working as much as possible and saving every dime, we managed to pay off the house. As each of us got older, we got year-round jobs rather than only seasonal work, bringing more money into the household.

The struggles and hardships my family endured made us stronger and more resilient. We have all gone on to build lives and families of our own that we can be proud of. I am married with two children. My husband owns a successful business.

*The writer was born in Compo #78, Mexico, in 1967, and is a member of the Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church.*



## 9) The Fast Family and the Reinland Mennonite Church

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*Susan Dyck Fast*

I, Susan Fast, was born in Tillsonburg, Ontario in 1976. My husband Abram was born in Durango, Mexico in 1975. In 1994 we were both baptized by Bishop William Friesen from Manitoba. My husband's family had come here in 1984, when Abe was nine years old, and settled in Langton, Ontario. We were married 10 years ago and have five children.

Dad's parents were both born in Canada: Grandfather David Dyck in Manitoba in 1919; grandmother Susanna Peters Dyck in 1921 in Saskatchewan. They were both baptized by Bishop Isaak Dyck in Mexico. Grandma's family moved to Mexico when Grandma was four; but she can still remember what it was like in Canada. She explained to us how her father made snow sleds for them to play with in the snow. She also remembers how he made shoes from wood with leather straps, and relates how they sounded when she walked in them. My Dad's grandparents moved from Canada to Mexico in order to maintain their Mennonite school system and to avoid military service.

My mom's parents, Peter and Susanna Peters Knelsen were both born in Compo 17 of Mexico. My Grandmother Knelsen never left the country in her lifetime. Grandpa came to work in Ontario a few times, and later, in the 1980s, he went to work for a Mr. Reddecop in Texas. Grandmother passed away in 1995, and Grandpa in 1999. Today, my mother has two brothers and one sister living in Mexico, one brother and one sister in Texas, and two brothers in Ontario. Dad's only sister lives in Manitoba.

My Dad came to Canada for the first time in 1965, in Frank Wieler's car, with his parents David and Susanna Dyck, and the Wieler boys, Frank and John, and cousin Peter Wall and Aaron and Margaret Hamm. They wanted to see what type of work was available here. First they went to Alberta, then to Manitoba for 10 days where they hoed beets. Peter Wall did some welding, and the shop owner wanted to hire him immediately. Peter was an experienced welder in Mexico where his family owned a business building bean threshers.

Peter decided to stay in Manitoba; the others went on to Ontario. Here they worked in cucumbers, tomatoes, and tobacco, but didn't stay long. They returned to Manitoba by train. As they were waiting in the train station to be picked up they heard that Peter Wall had had an accident that morning. He had been the first to arrive in the welding shop, and a gas welder hose had exploded, burning 90% of his body. He died two weeks after the accident.

My parents David and Anna Knelsen Dyck were both born in Mexico in the 1950s. They grew up in the same village and were baptized in 1974 by Bishop Heinrich Dyck. They married the same year and moved to Manitoba. One reason they wanted to move to Canada was to get Mom's emigration papers. I think in her heart she wanted to raise her children here. In the summer of 1975, Dad's sister Aganetha Dyck was hospitalized with a weak heart. The doctor wanted to do surgery but because she was pregnant, they waited. In 1998 she had open heart surgery in Toronto at age 50, and felt better than she ever had.

Meanwhile, Mom and Dad stayed in Ontario for four years. They had three children at this time, of which I was the oldest. Several years later, my family returned to Mexico for good, where all their family members lived. Here they bought 70 acres of land, and we could keep in close touch with our grandparents. We spent a lot of time with them in those three years, and loved listening to the stories they had to tell, which left us with many good memories.



While we were still in Canada, Dad sent money to Mexico to Grandpa to have a well made for irrigation. Grandpa didn't think it was a good idea, especially because it was on what was considered the worst piece of land with black, heavy soil. But Grandpa had the well made while Mom and Dad were still here. It pumped water day and night with a 10" pump without running dry. Once Dad had everything going we got very good crops. The costs, however, sky-rocketed. A barrel of diesel, for instance, had been 60 Pesos in 1983; now it was 400 Pesos. Fuel prices climbed 10% per month, and sometimes even 120% monthly. My parents had to sell in Pesos and buy in American dollars, which didn't add up. But the people with irrigation still did well; the families without irrigation seemed to go downhill.

Another reason Mom and Dad had moved back to Mexico was that they wanted a Christian education for their children. But the schools were not run according to the way they were supposed to be run. They would hire whatever teacher would charge the least amount of money; they didn't care if it was a good teacher or if they had any teaching skills. Sometimes they didn't have the basic reading, writing, math and singing skills. I went to school there for three years and had a total of nine teachers. The church, however, was good. The Reinland Fellowship in Mexico still works together with our Ontario Reinland Fellowship Mennonite Church.

So my parents decided that the future looked better in Canada, even if their children had to attend the public schools. We moved back here in 1987, after Mom and Dad sold their farm for \$42,500 American dollars and bought a farm in Clear Creek, near Langton, Ontario. Today, my parents' youngest three children attend the private Old Colony School in Wheatley, Ontario. They became members of the Reinland Church where Bishop Quiring was at that time. They elected two new ministers, and in 1990 they built a new church in Fairground, Ontario. In 1992, they elected two more ministers, Peter Dyck from Aylmer and David Dyck, my Dad. The church split in 1999. I was baptized in Fairground Church which had no Bishop at the time. The next year Bishop William Friesen from Manitoba came for baptism and Communion services.

In August of 1995, Mom and Dad bought a greenhouse farm from Peter Enns in Leamington, a church member who was moving to Bolivia. The farm is close to our Coatsworth church and good for the church since no other ministers live nearby. Dad also liked the idea of the family working at home; this way he could take time off for church work more easily.

Today, the Reinland Fellowship Mennonite Church in Ontario also serves a congregation in Missouri, USA. The Missouri church is a new congregation with 10 to 20 families attending. Our ministers take turns going there once monthly. The ministers of the Manitoba Reinland Mennonite Church go there to serve communion.

*The writer was born in Tillsonburg, Ontario in 1976 and is a member of the Reinland Fellowship Mennonite Church in Coatsworth, Ontario.*





**Grandmother Dyck, Susan Dyck Fast and Abram Fast.**





**George and Nely Enns' first Canadian vehicles.** The family came from Mexico to Canada in 1986. They are members of Blenheim Old Colony Mennonite Church.



# CHAPTER

# FIVE

*1985-2005*



# 1) Uniting Two Cultures

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*Maa and Denys Singkhaew*

I, Maa Singkhaew, was born in a small village in Sayaboury, Laos in March of 1970. My family consisted of my parents, one older brother, and three older sisters. We were raised in the Buddha religion. When I was about one month old, I became very sick and almost died. My mother prayed to the Buddha to save me; she was willing to sacrifice her life for mine. Soon thereafter I slowly became well again and my mother passed away.

My father had a difficult time caring for my siblings and me, and after several days, my mother's older sister stepped in and cared for me from that day on. I instantly had another two brothers and two sisters. We lived in a coconut and bamboo hut. We had no running water and no electricity. We grew our own food on the farm and if there was something we needed, a chicken for example, we simply took a product we grew, such as rice, and bartered. We had no farm equipment, only two machete axes or knives for harvesting our crops. We never attended school; we just helped out on the farm.

In 1979, when the war was going on in Laos, the fighting came closer and closer to us, just a couple of towns away from our home. My father, my siblings, and my aunt and her family feared for their lives. We fled to the Thailand Refugee Camp.

About two years later my stepbrother, his wife and children were sponsored by someone in Leamington, Ontario, Canada. It was hard for them to come and learn a new language and see snow for the first time. They were helped to live a Christian lifestyle by several families, but they never forgot about their family in Thailand. They, along with help from some Leamington families, arranged to sponsor me, my aunt-mother and two step brothers. We had been in the refugee camps for five years. When we got the good news that we were going to Canada, I was scared and happy at the same time. I didn't know where Canada was, or what to expect when I got there.

In January of 1984, we arrived in Toronto with the clothes on our backs and bare feet. We were greeted by Frank and Anna Klassen, who gave us warm clothes and drove us to Leamington. That is when I realized that I had angels guiding me and my family to a better life. After we had recovered from jet lag and settled in, our family started going to the Mennonite Brethren Church.

I was 13 years old when I arrived in Leamington and went to Mill Street School for grades 7 and 8. I had great difficulty with the English language, but once I got to high school, it became even harder. There was no one to help me, and I dropped out. At 16 years, I started work at Highline Mushrooms. A year later, I went to Oak Farms, then on to Derkach Farms for four years. When I was 22, I got a job at Thiessen Greenhouses where my brother and sister worked, and I stayed there for 10 years.

I continued going to church, switching from Mennonite Brethren to North Leamington, back to Mennonite Brethren, and finally back to North Leamington United Mennonite Church. I knew that it was the right church for me and on June 14, 1992, I was baptized there.

In June of 1996, I went to visit my father and two biological sisters who lived in California. I had not seen them in over ten years. When I arrived, I found my father very ill. Soon after I returned to Leamington, I got a phone call saying that my father had passed away. I thank God for the opportunity to see my father before



the Lord took him. I had a difficult time after my father passed away, but with many prayers, the Lord helped guide me through it. I didn't realize then, that in a couple of months time, the Lord would help me find Denys, my future wife!

My name is Denys Singkhaew, nee Hatt. I was born in Southampton, Ontario in 1976. I was raised by both my parents in Southampton and have an older sister. We attended the United Church where I was baptized and attended the first five years of my life. After high school, I went to Ridgetown College from where I graduated in 1996 with a diploma in Horticulture. I worked first in Collingwood, then I got a job at Poppys Garden Center. After a month's time, I got a job at Newland's Greenhouse in Leamington. I never thought that moving to Leamington would help me find my future husband!

One day, Maa came into Newlands to visit his friends. I thought nothing more of it. Some time later, my co-worker invited me to her birthday, where she had set me up with Maa. He drove me home that night, and the next day he came to visit me and asked if I would go to church with him the next day. I accepted, and when we got to church, I met his family there. Since I had never been to Point Pelee Park, we went there and spent the afternoon with his family. In 1997, Maa and I moved into an apartment together. By that August we were engaged and going to church on a regular basis. Maa was still at Thiessen Greenhouse, and I quit Newlands. We planned to get married on September 12, 1998. In April of that year, I broke my ankle and worried that Maa might leave me because I was unemployed. He stayed through my three surgeries and then I knew our relationship was meant to be. As planned, we were married in September at North Leamington United Mennonite Church by Reverend Victor Kliwer. Maa accompanied me to catechism classes, and I affirmed my faith and became a member of NLUMC on June 6, 1999.

Soon after, I was hired at Thiessen Greenhouses; it was nice to work at the same place as my husband. On December 24, 2001, our lives changed for the better when our son Justin was born. This was the best Christmas present in the world God could have given us!

In January of 2003, Maa started new work at Carmen's Catering, where he still works today. I decided to become a stay at home mom, and throughout the last couple of years, we have noticed our relationship becoming stronger through the guidance, love, and support from God.

Once again our lives changed. Our daughter Alexa was born January 15, 2005. She arrived one month early, to our surprise. She had a rather rocky start because she needed to spend a week in the NIC. We knew that God was testing our love and faith. With all our love and prayers answered by God, she was home with us again.

We thank God and cherish each moment we have with each other and our kids, and look forward to a long and happy future as a united family.

*The writers, Denys, born in Southampton, ON in 1976, and Maa, born in Sayaboury, Laos in 1970, are both members of North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Maa speaks Laotian and English, Denys and their children speak the English language.*





**The Singkhaew family:** Denys is holding Alexa, and son Justin is sitting on Maa's lap.



## 2) The Beginnings of the Blenheim Mennonite Church

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*Reverend Isaac Harms*

In 1988 the Evangelical Mennonite Missions Churches of Ontario (EMMCO) wondered if it would be possible to start a Low German speaking church in the Blenheim area. Pastor Ed Stoesz of Aylmer, Pastor Dave Friesen and Pastor John Reimer, both of Bell Mill Gospel Church were asked to canvas the area to see where the people attended church.

In the meantime, Pastor Dave and Helen Friesen started having song services (*Singstunden*) in the homes. After several weeks, the people started talking about having Sunday morning services. The Guilds Community Hall was rented for June 4, 1989. Seventy people attended that first service. The second Sunday the Morpeth Community Hall was rented and 50-70 people met regularly. In May, 1990, the Morpeth United Church offered their church basement, and later, their sanctuary.

During July of 1989, Richard and Elizabeth Hamm drove 190 km each Sunday from Houghten Center to lead the group in Morpeth. Isaac and Sara Unger, and Jake and Edith Peters from the Leamington EMMC, came to assist. In October of 1989, Frank and Neta Thiessen of Winnipeg, Manitoba, came to keep in touch physically with the Mennonites in the surrounding area. In October of 1991, the congregation was able to purchase the old Harwich Township Hall in Blenheim on 117 McGregor Street for \$60,000, which was renovated and named the Blenheim Mennonite Church.

I, Isaac Harms, was born to Canadian parents who had moved to Mexico in the 1920s. Their lives in Mexico were characterized for the most part by difficulties and poverty. My siblings and I were born in Mexico and registered as born abroad citizens. My three sisters died in Mexico and my five brothers and I moved to Canada with our parents in 1966. It was our intention to settle in Manitoba, but after three months, we decided to move to Southern Ontario. We first settled in the Aylmer area, and shortly after arriving, my parents bought a farm and started growing vegetables and cash crops. I helped my parents on the farm until they retired and sold the farm. We attended the new EMMC which was started by Manitoba churches. I attended the Sommers Corners School east of Aylmer, and one year at UMEI in Leamington. Next I went to Bible School in Manitoba and was married shortly after graduation in 1976. Lynne and I lived in the Aylmer area until the Lord called us into fulltime pastoral ministry. Our first move was to Houghten Center, approximately 12 km from Port Burwell. We were there for six years and then returned to College.

In July of 1992 we, Pastor Isaac and Lynne Harms, moved to Blenheim to take the first pastoral position, paid as missionaries by the Evangelical Mennonite Missions Conference. Our congregation steadily grew to 80 plus. The Town Council had set a limit on the number of people who could be in the building at one time for fire regulations. Therefore the search began again for a suitable building. The Search Committee was reintroduced to the idea of purchasing the empty Glad Tidings Church on Catherine Street. The initial purchase price in 1989 had been out of range for us. The Evangelical Mennonite Missions Conference of Canada representatives came from Manitoba and explained the situation to the Glad Tidings Church and they were willing to lower the price so that it was affordable to the Blenheim Mennonite Church.

In September of 1993, the Blenheim Mennonite Church moved to its present location on 428 Catherine Street, Blenheim. The first baptism took place on September 24, 1994, and on Thanksgiving Day, 19 people were accepted as charter members. With generous giving to the Lord's work and extra Thanksgiving offerings, the Church was paid for in record time by September, 2002. There was much rejoicing and thanks



to God for this accomplishment, a great Thanksgiving service and mortgage burning ceremony. The Blenheim Mennonite Church then started sending money to the Conference to help pay for the Pastor's support and in January of 2003, the Church started paying their own pastor with subsidies from the Conference.

In March of 2002, the Blenheim Mennonite Church saw the need for changing their services from Low German and High German, to German and English, because the children understood English better than German, yet their parents preferred the German. Now the first half of the service is in German and the second half is English in two messages without a break, as most people attend both services.

Lynne and I have a son Adrian, and a daughter, Amy. We believe that we have a very rich heritage and count it a blessing to live in a country and a community in which we can raise our family, work, and serve our Lord in peace and freedom. The future for Mennonites in Essex-Kent is great - not as a separate community, but as Canadians with a distinct faith.

*The writer was born in Mexico in 1952 and is Pastor of the Blenheim Evangelical Mennonite Missions Church. Isaac is fluent in German and English.*



**Amy, Lynn and Pastor Isaac Harms**



### 3) God's Beautiful Creation

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*Peter and Helma Dick Schmidt*

**B**eautiful Essex County has had a strong attraction for our family, not only because of the warm sunny climate and proximity to the water, but particularly because of the warmth and hospitality of the people living here. Though we moved away and lived in other parts of the province for a number of years, a future return to the Sun Parlour of Canada was always a consideration.

Peter was born 1933 in Leamington. In the early years, his father, Henry Schmidt, spent hours traveling by bicycle and on foot to invite people to attend the services of a newly formed Mennonite congregation. His goal was to help draw together the early Mennonite immigrants scattered throughout Essex County.

Helma was born in 1935 in Kitchener. Her father, Jacob Dick, brought his young family to Essex County in 1928 to try to establish a home here. They share-cropped the one hundred acre Wagle farm on Concession 3, near Kingsville. Unfortunately, illness forced him to return to Waterloo County. There he established large apiaries and was known throughout the province for his clover honey, also sold here in Leamington for many years.

We were married in Kitchener in 1956. Early in our marriage, we moved to Leamington with daughter Marylou and lived there for five years. Two more daughters, Susan, then Donna Mae, were born in Leamington hospital. During our stay in Essex County, Peter drove transport for Jack Stockwell, learned several trades while working for B&R Plumbing, Heating and Wiring, and worked in the Electrical Department of the H J Heinz Company. Helma directed the swimming instruction program at the newly opened Kinsmen Pool on Erie Street North, and established the Physical Education program in the Leamington Public Schools. Both of us enjoyed the privilege of singing in Mrs. Law's choir.

An opportunity to expand Peter's qualifications in the electrical trade drew us back to Kitchener in 1965. Other than a brief time living in Niagara-on-the-Lake from 1974 to 1977, while Helma was teaching at Eden Christian College, we remained in the Kitchener area. Both of us pursued studies in our chosen fields and continued to sing in church and concert choirs. Peter was an Electrical Trouble-shooter in industry for Sutherland-Schultz, then later, Electronics Technician at the University of Guelph. At the same time, Helma was teaching for the Waterloo County Board of Education.

A fascination for the history of Mennonites and a desire to honour the struggles of our parents who had lived through the atrocities of the Communist Revolution in the villages of southern Russia (now Ukraine), prompted us to visit that country in 1995. As tour hosts on the first Mennonite Heritage Cruise, we were delighted to find that a large contingent of Mennonites from Essex County were part of that group. Cruising down the Dnieper River with 160 fellow travelers who were also excited about their heritage was a life-changing experience. We found it humbling to hear the many stories, and to walk the same streets our parents had walked. We sang the old hymns from memory, and in perfect harmony, with people who had come from all parts of the continent. This was exhilarating and a special gift from God.

Retirement brought with it a desire to live closer to the water again. But first we fulfilled a few long-held dreams. Peter returned to driving for a transport company, while Helma completed seminary studies in pastoral counselling. In 1996, a weekend visit to Essex County culminated in the purchase of a townhouse close to Lake Erie. It was an opportunity to live close to Peter's family again. Although we had been gone



for over thirty years, we have been overwhelmed with the warm welcome we have received from the people here. The early springs and the beautiful trees and flowers that grow here awaken a thankfulness to God for his beautiful creation. The many varied fresh fruits and vegetables available are a special benefit that many of us might take for granted.

Part of our retirement plan included spending winters in Florida. From November to March, we join other Mennonites from across Ontario and Manitoba in enjoying the sunshine of the south while sharing a common faith. It is when you are far from home that life stories become important. We can see in so many ways how important it is to be thankful to God for his many blessings.

Our daughters, now all married, are scattered across Canada. Marylou is the Registrar at Heritage Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario, and teaches Distance Education courses in Geography for Wilfred Laurier University. Susan teaches Music and Drama at Bethany College in Hepburn, Saskatchewan, and Donna Mae is Director of Operations at the Crisis Pregnancy Center in Calgary, Alberta. We have four granddaughters.

Peter continues to serve friends and neighbours, both here and in Florida, in solving household technical problems. Helma has been part of the Ontario Inter-Mennonite Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Team since 1995 and is part-time marriage counselor. Summers are spent out on Lake Erie as much as possible. A special blessing has been the opportunity to join in the Leamington Mennonite Heritage Choir, where we sing many of the old hymns, carols and folk songs. To live in Essex County, where the importance of our faith and dependence on God is kept alive, is indeed a privilege.

*The writers: Peter, who speaks English, High German and Low German, was born in 1933 in Leamington, Ontario. Helma, who speaks English and High German, and reads/translates Russian, was born in 1935 in Kitchener, Ontario. They are members of the Meadow Brook Fellowship in Leamington, Ontario.*



**Peter and Helma Dick Schmidt.**



## 4) We Moved Back Home!

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*Nancy Sawatzky Friesen*

**M**y parents tried to establish their own cheese factory business in Mexico so that they would be able to provide for their big family. They tried as best they could but after some time it just wasn't enough. So, in 1979, my parents decided to move their family from Mexico to Canada. Dad hired his cousin who had a pickup truck so that all ten children could fit into the back of the truck. I was six years old at the time, so for me it was an adventure of a lifetime.

Our first night in Canada was spent at a cousin of Mom's near Tilbury. They found a house for us to live in outside of Leamington, near the lake. Once we were settled in, it was time for us kids to start school. There were six of us going to school and because we needed to learn English we started our mornings at Ridge Campus and over the lunch hour we were driven to Mill Street School. We had other Mennonite friends at school who helped us communicate with the teachers and students. The school bus never came down the dirt road where we lived, so we always walked with some neighbour children up to the paved road where the bus would pick us up. We were very excited when it started to snow because we were not used to snow staying on the ground for long in Mexico. But when the snow just kept coming down with no end in sight and we needed to walk through it every morning, we got tired of the snow fast!

Our first winter here was hard on my parents. They had only a couple of cousins here and starting a new life for their family of 12 was difficult. Only Dad and my oldest brother were able to work in the greenhouse; this wasn't quite enough to support our big family.

Our first Christmas in Canada is the one memory that has stayed with me all these years. I was six years old, and because the income at that time was so low in our family, our first Christmas here was also our first Christmas with no presents. We children took it quite well, but our mom had a rough day. Now that I am a parent, I can understand why she was the only one with tears in her eyes on Christmas morning.

In spring of 1980, we moved to Dresden. We found a farmer who wanted a big family to help on his farm. We were all able to help that summer with picking cucumbers and tomatoes. And our parents more than made up that Christmas for our first one. In the fall, we started to go to the Dresden Public School. We were the only Mennonite children there but we had already learned some English in Leamington so we were able to communicate better this time, and made friends right away. We stayed in Dresden for 10 years.

Our second winter in Canada was so much better than our first. Our school bus picked us up at our house and our neighbours introduced us to skating. Since we lived on a farm, we had a lot of space on the field to make our own skating rink. It had been a very wet fall, so all my brothers had to do was shovel the snow aside and there we had a nice-sized skating rink which we, along with our neighbours, enjoyed until it thawed.

All in all, I have many good memories of growing up in Canada and I am grateful to my parents for always thinking of their children in the decisions they made. My parents have always set a good example for us. The one thing they ask of us is to never forget who we are and where we came from.



I am married now and have two children of my own. We moved back to the Leamington area last year. Leamington is a busy place and provides a lot of job opportunities in both agriculture and factories. My husband and I were both fortunate to find jobs that we enjoy. Our children attend Ruthven Public School. They made new friends quickly and enjoy going. We too, have made a lot of friends in this area, and enjoy meeting new people. We attend the church we were both baptized in and were married in, so it felt like moving back home!

*The writer was born in Mexico in 1973 and is a member of the New Reinland Mennonite Church.*



**The Sawatzky siblings enjoying the ice rink. 1980 photo.**

**L to r: Sister Mary Sawatzky Gunther, Nancy Sawatzky Friesen, and brother Peter Sawatzky.**



## 5) The Journey of Finding Oneself

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*Peter Quiring*

**T**he road is sometimes smooth and, at other times it is rough. Each person needs to find a purpose to their existence on earth. I, Peter Quiring have an interesting journey to share.

I was born in Mexico on November 20, 1962 into the family of Gertrude and Abraham Quiring, the eldest of seven children. My family came to Canada in 1967 by bus, speaking only Low German and Spanish. Merlin was our destination, due to friends there. Shortly after, a move to Leamington was necessary for employment opportunities on a farm.

I began my working career at the tender age of seven, driving tractor to load tomato baskets. I attended Public School in the Leamington area. Sometime later our family moved back to Mexico where we purchased a farm. Here I attended a Mennonite Public School. After eight months in Mexico, a second move to Canada was made. Kitchener was the destination this time. Our family was relatively poor, but determined.

Soon after a move back to Leamington was planned where a farm on Concession 9 was purchased. After 3.5 years the farm was sold with the intention of moving to Texas. My formal education ended halfway through grade eight. As plans are often changed, the family moved back to Mexico where farming and importing farm machinery from the U.S. became a way of life. I was 13 years of age, and assisted my father in selling machinery. This was the beginning of my training requiring strong people skills, which I credit to my mother.

In 1977, our family moved back to Leamington once again, purchasing a home on Concession 6. At the age of 15, I began working for a hog farmer in the Staples area until a job became available as mechanic at a unionized factory in Windsor. Three years later the company closed. A position became available for half the wage at a custom fabricating shop in Windsor. When the union factory reopened one year later and I was called back, I declined the offer. I felt a strong distaste for the union environment and conversely enjoyed the upbeat experience and camaraderie between employees. I worked hard for less money but was always learning, gaining valuable experience, and was never bored. Positions of leader, supervisor, and shop manager were enjoyed for the next five years. As fate turned, that company was sold.

Throughout this time, I met my wife Kathy. We were married in 1985. In 1987 our first child, Amanda was born. In 1989 Matt, our second child was born.

I decided to go into business in the Kingsville area for myself. With insufficient business experience, and the recession of the late 80's occurring, I accumulated debt with insufficient work. There was no alternative but to declare bankruptcy. I obtained employment from one of my competitors, but only for a short time, and was then laid off. It was 1990 and I was unable to find employment. An ad from St. Clair College attracted me to return to school specializing in a one-year program in engineering/product design. Fortunately the program was sponsored by the government. As my formal education was limited, it was necessary to upgrade my math skills to write the entrance test for the program. This was an extremely difficult time. Kathy worked while I went to school and worked part time. Clothing was purchased from second hand stores. Late in 1990 our third child Ashley was born. Graduation followed and employment was offered from the company where I had earlier held positions of leadership. There I entered into a position of engineering and purchasing for a machine tool automation company for the auto industry. In 1992, Andrea, our fourth child arrived.



A job opportunity became available as plant manager at an automotive racking manufacturing company in Windsor. There I worked very long days with only one family car. When Kathy needed the car we carried the sleeping kids, blankets and all into the car to drop me off at work at about 5:30 AM. Our children still talk about it today as one of their fondest memories.

There I was terminated, but had saved enough money to pay the bills for approximately two months and to purchase a used welding machine, cutting torch, and a small grinder, to do small contract jobs from my garage at home. As more and more work became available, it became necessary to rent an industrial building on Highway 77. It was 1994 and within five months, eight employees were hired and I took on a partner who is my brother-in-law, Henry Froese. South Essex Fabricating & Machining was born. From the very beginning it was hard to find qualified people who had honest work ethics, so we hired mostly Mennonites from Mexico and found them to be easily taught to perform almost any "skilled trade" work. Some of them were so honest that they returned their paychecks because they had been overpaid; the secretary nearly fell off her chair.

I have always believed in treating others with kindness and respect while being able to maintain order. A strong belief in God has given me a talent to see and inspire potential in people. Many seemingly simple, uneducated employees became supervisors and managers, doing highly technical jobs such as traveling overseas, which made rapid growth possible. As growth continued, within three years, a manufacturing shop was built in Kingsville. The work consisted of building automation conveyors and racking for auto and food processing companies, and also manufacturing equipment.

In 1995 hot water heating systems and automation for the greenhouse industry were added. Henry took care primarily of the auto and food industries, and my focus was the greenhouse business. In 1997 two additional partners were added, this turned out to be a wrong decision.

A new company was incorporated which would eventually become Sunrise Greenhouse Manufacturing. This business manufactured only greenhouse structures. Within one year, 60 acres of greenhouses were built and due to the wrong choice of partners, the company was essentially bankrupt. All the partners were bought out. At this point, a debt of over \$1,350,000 had accumulated to suppliers and the bank. South Essex Fabricating & Machining continued to make a healthy profit. I was absolutely sure that the greenhouse manufacturing company should not declare bankruptcy against the advice of the other partners. It would put the business in poor standing with the suppliers and very negatively affect South Essex Fabricating, and all the customers that were ongoing.

As I had already been through one bankruptcy, I was certain that I would do almost anything to avoid a second occurrence. There were numerous battles to overcome. The confidence of customers needed to remain. Suppliers needed the reassurance that they would be paid. All former partners needed to be released from bank guarantees. All this was accomplished within three to four months. I had sole ownership, and also talented and dedicated employees, eager to continue working. Both companies continued to sign new large contracts to manufacture and build greenhouses as well as heating systems, and incorporate new technologies from Europe. Business continued to grow. In 1999, I took on two new partners; my brother-in-law Henry Froese and my brother Neil Quiring who worked at Sunrise Greenhouse Manufacturing and South Essex Fabricating, to build 18.5 acres on Concession 7 known as Nature Fresh Farms. This is a greenhouse operation that grows sweet bell peppers. A Dutch horticulturist (grower) was hired. In 2000 an additional 18.5 acres were added to Nature Fresh Farms. I continued to hire assertive people interested in learning to grow, who ultimately became Nature Fresh Farms management.



In 2003 I acquired a 5.5 acre greenhouse farm called Lebo Creek Farms which grows seedless cucumbers. In 2004 Nature Fresh Produce Sales was added to pack and distribute the produce from the same location as Nature Fresh Farms. Two sales people from Florida, and one from Chicago, have joined this company. At present I am working on building an additional 31 acres of new glass greenhouses. At this time, South Essex Fabricating and Sunrise Greenhouse Manufacturing is the largest turnkey greenhouse contractor in Canada, and Nature Fresh Farms is the largest bell pepper farm in Canada. When the 31 acres are completed it will be the largest greenhouse farm in Canada.

A total of over 300 employees have employment at these various locations. More than 200 are Mennonite men and women, with little formal education, trained by my companies. In addition, many subcontractors are employed. After 12 years of concentrating all efforts into business and material wealth, one comes full circle in realizing and appreciating life's values. So the question remains, what do I perceive as the purpose of my existence on earth? My answer is simple. To help make someone else's life better, to treat my fellow people with respect, dignity, and tolerance. To instill a positive outlook and influence people towards a balanced lifestyle. I believe fulfillment comes from helping others become the very best parents, spouses, employees, and friends they can be.

At one time, I was financially poor but emotionally and spiritually rich. As time evolved, I became financially rich but very poor emotionally and spiritually. I was in search of inner peace. I had found the woman of my dreams and prayers, and had four wonderful and beautiful children.

As I wandered away more and more from God, my priorities became distorted, my marriage and relationships became distant and unhappy. Alcohol and smoking slowly crept into my life. I ended up in rehabilitation morally bankrupt. Now I understand financial, moral, spiritual and emotional bankruptcy. Understanding the true balance of life has brought me to this point in time. Today I am very aware of my own values and morals and strive to make my lifestyle and friendships that of which I strongly believe.

I gave my life to Christ.

*The writer, born in Chihuahua, Mexico in 1962, speaks Low German, High German, Spanish and English. He is a member of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church in Leamington, Ontario.*



## 6) Three Days Like No Others

*Nick DiLaudo*

**T**his is a story about three memorable trips that changed my life forever. The first trip started on the same path that I've taken a thousand times before: off to Windsor down Highway 3. The oddity of this trip was that it was past midnight, there was a light November snow falling, and my wife was with me.

The second trip of similar nature was on a beautiful spring evening in May, just after supper, before the sun had set. To my wife's dismay, this time we started our mission with many people having the knowledge of where we were going. Once we arrived at our destination, my wife's cool composure led the staff to believe that we may have started on our trek a little early. They were mistaken.

The next trip started just after midnight, when I could hear my wife stirring about. I knew that it was that time again. This third trip was a recent early morning adventure that would result in a third miracle for our family.

If you have not guessed it by now, these three trips were to the Metropolitan hospital in Windsor where we experienced the birth of our three beautiful children, Ryan, 8 years, Marissa, 6 years, and Serena, 6 months. Part of the reason that we chose to have our babies in Windsor was so that we would avoid the hectic visitation schedule that surrounds the arrival of a newborn in the Italian community. But they came! Cousins, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews and grandparents came to greet our newborns. It was a little like "My Big Fat Greek Wedding."

Despite the long days and sleepless nights, we truly enjoyed everyone's company and are especially thankful that the good Lord blessed us with three beautiful, healthy children that are the central focus of our lives.

*The writer was born in Leamington, Ontario in 1968 and is a member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church.*



**The DiLaudo family:**

L to r: Ryan, father Nick, mother Kim, baby Serena, Marissa



## 7) Out of my Comfort Zone: South Point Community Church

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*Jamie Willms*

**I**t had been a great ski weekend in Collingwood during the winter of 1999 and we were having breakfast with Brad and Dianne Wilson before heading home. Brad and Diane were in the midst of trying to discern the next step in their lives. Brad had resigned his job as youth pastor so the conversation turned to their future plans.

“Why don’t you start a new church in Leamington?” I said off the cuff, looking for a reaction. “If you do I’ll guarantee you’ll see Cindy and me every Sunday”. Brad sat there and seemed only amused by the proposal. Not the reaction I was looking for.

For many years I’d believed that Leamington needed a new church that could serve the many people that I knew who were either bored or just disillusioned with their church experience. I felt that making an impact on people had to be more than what I had experienced. Personally, I was falling asleep and remaining unchallenged. I am a visual learner and I could only stick with a traditional sermon for the first few minutes, and I knew I wasn’t alone. Maybe it was because I came from the TV generation. Our generation is used to fast paced entertainment, engaging presentations, and a variety of communication modes (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, etc.) to get a point across. Why did the church communicate the same way as it had for centuries? A church needs to speak to the culture around them and speak their language. (As an aside, I do realize that the churches I previously attended are not the same places they once were. I love the people there and enjoy participating in their events and contributing to their institutions. Being part of the larger Mennonite community will always be important to me.)

The seed had been planted and it was about three months later that Brad invited us to meet with Tom and Wendy Murray and discuss plans for a new church in Leamington. Tom had apparently asked the same question and after a lot of prayer a new church plant began to take shape.

Those were pretty exciting days. We relied heavily on prayer and asked God to work His will in us and give us wisdom for this new venture. The meetings were very creative and enthusiastic filled with worship and prayer. My sides ached from all the laughter and we looked forward to each and every meeting. Who would have known that it could be that meaningful and fun.

My fire had been lit and I was learning so much about the early church, particularly the Acts 2 church, and how Jesus intended it to be. We were inspired by Rick Warrens The Purpose Driven Church and Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire, by Jim Cymbala. We also studied the vision, purpose and style of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Many of us visited there and saw the huge impact it had on so many lives. Willow is a mega-church but it’s vision, style and resources proved invaluable.

Our plans were taking shape. The church we envisioned would be user friendly to the unchurched. Casual dress, contemporary style enhanced with the art (music, drama, video presentations, dance), teaching that connected the Bible to real life and a commitment to the gospel. As people were drawn in we would connect them to a small group where deeper growth would take place. Our vision was to turn the irreligious and the disillusioned into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. As a bonus, a new church would not carry any baggage or tradition, which could be a stumbling block to those who won’t enter an established place of worship.



The new church planting was challenging. The issues and questions that arose were tough to overcome. "What does Leamington need a church for?" "Who is going to be the bean-counter?" "Do you know how much work it is going to take?" "What's the point?" ("Southpoint of course", was the answer).

It was true that we were unprepared for what was about to unfold but God was pointing us in this direction. It was unmistakable. When obstacles seemed destined to sink the ship, something unexpected would happen and we would carry on. The Holy Spirit was working in our lives. It took a lot of prayer and commitment to step out in faith. Great things happened when we got out of our comfort zone and just did what God was directing us to do.

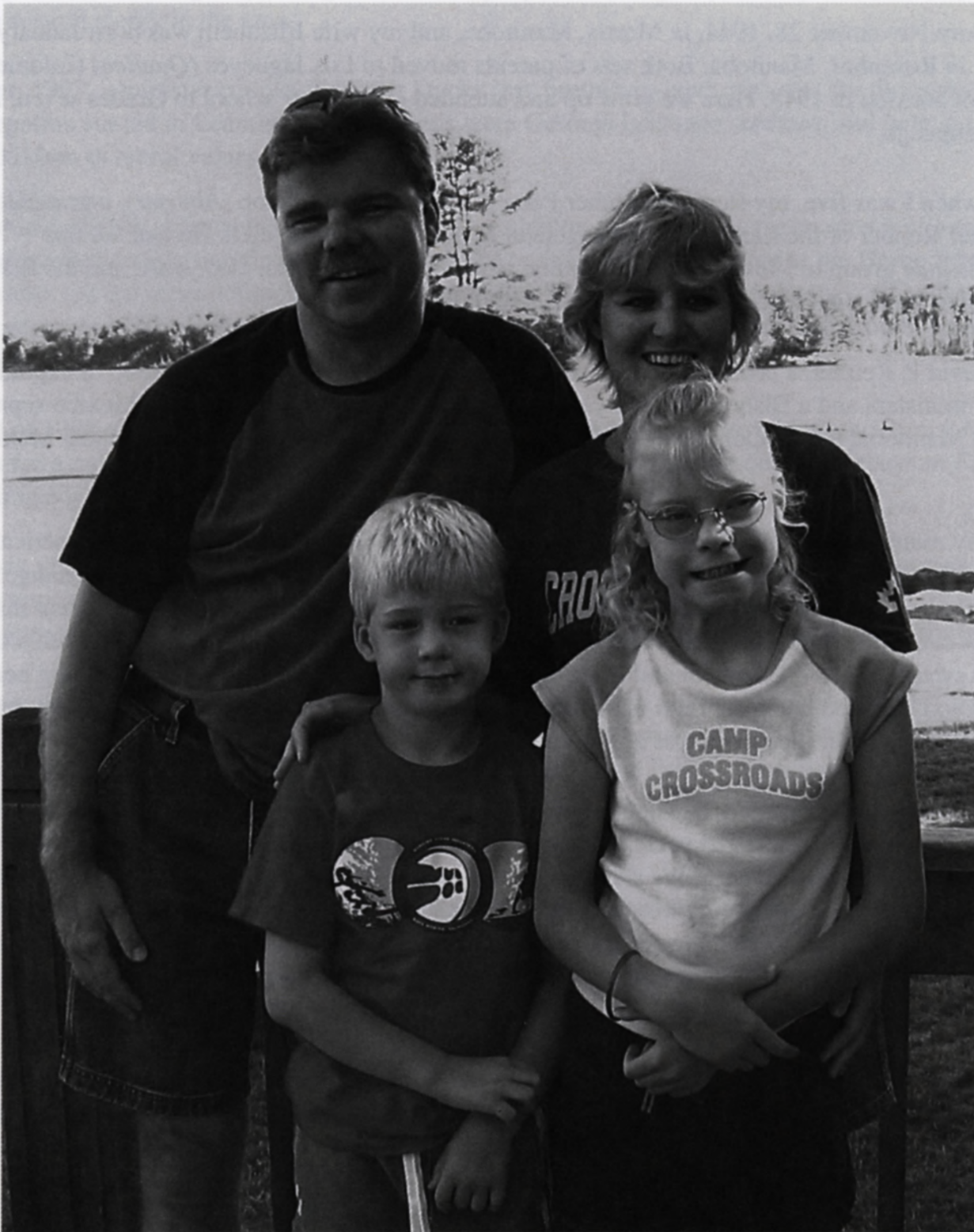
We studied our spiritual gifts and how we could plug them into this mission. God had gifted me musically and in the digital graphic arts. My conviction grew when I realized God had given them to me for a purpose. I had crafted my musical style to win the praise of others and make money. I was going to turn it over to Him and become part of the worship band and eventually, a worship leader.

My spiritual growth accelerated rapidly as I saw God working in our lives. I don't understand why I didn't grow in this way when I was much younger. I was raised in a Christian home, had godly parenting, went to a Christian high school, attended church regularly and was baptized at 18. The formula seems good but I was a lukewarm, liberal Christian - a very dangerous place to be because I thought since I was saved there was no need for personal growth, besides, I was a "good person" and my parents were devout Christians (there must be some kind of spiritual osmosis at work, I thought). Ha! What a Bubba I am! I'm convinced that the Holy Spirit was working in me when I took that step of faith, put the allure of the world aside, opened the Bible and began to study. Nothing compares to the greatness of knowing He loves me. I have never regretted taking that step of faith. I found my purpose.

The church is doing great - never a dull moment. We have been in operation for six years and moved from a small school gym to a larger one. In 2005, we converted a large retail facility into a church in downtown Leamington. This move required another leap of faith because we really couldn't afford it. The guiding of the Holy Spirit prevailed and we got 100% support from our members! We are part of the Mennonite Brethren Conference. The Mennonite in me appreciated this connection and service to our local community is important to our mission. Our vision remains the same and we have seen lives transformed. Praise God!

*The writer was born in Leamington in 1963 and is a member of the South Point Community Church in Leamington.*





**The Willms family: Parents Jamie and Cindy, children Benjamin and Katie.**



## 8) The Friesen Family story

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*Wilbert Friesen*

I was born November 28, 1944, in Morris, Manitoba, and my wife Elizabeth was born January 5, 1948, in Rosenhof, Manitoba. Both sets of parents moved to Los Jagueyes (*Quellen*) Colonie in Chihuahua state of Mexico in 1948. Here we grew up and attended elementary school to Grades seven, in the German language.

In 1949, when I was five, my step grandfather Peter P. Reimer, then Bishop (*Ältester*), a grandfather of Pastor Peter Reimer of the Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church, died. He had led the *Kleinegemeinde* group to Mexico. My own father, who was a Minister for two years, and the first teacher in a strange new land, died when I was almost 11.

Bishop David P. Reimer, a brother to Peter from Manitoba, assisted the Mexican group in baptizing and ordaining ministers and a Bishop. Several years later, the *Kleinegemeinde* church in Mexico separated from the one in Manitoba, whereupon the Manitoban group renamed themselves the Evangelical Mennonite Church.

In 1959 my mom with 10 children, moved to British Honduras (now Belize), in Central America. By 1960, some forty families had settled there. Here we encountered a drastic climate and cultural change. For a teenager like me, it was an adventure; for Mom and my older siblings, it was filled with great responsibilities. It was called the land where milk and honey flows. It eventually did just that, but not without much effort and sweat. In 1964, Elizabeth and I (we were yet unmarried), with a number of young people were converted and baptized upon our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A lot of prayers answered. At that same time, my oldest brother died of cancer at 25 years.

In 1967 Elizabeth and I married, and began our own little farm and carpentry business, and eventually a woodwork shop. In 1984, after 25 years in Belize, we moved to Nova Scotia with 20 other families. Most of these parents were Manitoba born. We started a private school, where two days of classes in the German language and three days of English were taught each week. In 1985, Elizabeth and I were elected into the Ministry there. Today, in 2005, there are about 60 families in the settlement of Northfield, near the Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia. A second congregation was started in the Annapolis Valley area with a dozen or so families. Our oldest and youngest children live there.

My 90 year old mother recently had a leg amputated because of cancer in the knee. She recuperated amazingly well and is now knitting and mending again. My 85 year old mother-in-law spent ten weeks in a Manitoba hospital after surgery for a broken hip. She is in a low mental state and we expect that she will leave this world soon. We have two sons in Manitoba.

My two grandfathers were *Kleinegemeinde* Bishops in Manitoba. My wife's grandfather was a minister, and over 60 of their descendants are, or have been, in the ministry.

In 1997, Pastor Klaas Penner of the Northfield *Kleinegemeinde* church in Nova Scotia made a trip to Manitoba to visit siblings and friends. On the way back, they also visited their cousin, a pastor in the Waterloo, Ontario area. Because there are so many German-speaking people from Mexico in that area, brother Cornie Dueck advised Pastor Penner to begin mission work in that area.



Since we were looking for an opportunity to get involved in an outreach, this was readily considered. This then was laid before the ministerial and the brethren. Then in August, two ministers on their way to a ministerial conference in Mexico, made a visit to the Waterloo, Elgin, and Essex Counties, where meetings were held. The one in Leamington was most responsive. In October we made another visit to the same areas, and again, the Leamington meeting had over 60 people attending on a Sunday afternoon. We also visited with several clergy in the area.

In November, 1997, a minister couple, the Peter Dycks (my brother-in-law), was sent for three months to get a congregation started in Leamington. The needs were German language sermons, and help in training youth and children in moral values.

Late in February of 1998, Elizabeth and I arrived in Leamington with three teenagers, and a 25 year old somewhat mentally-handicapped daughter. On our first Sunday here, we gathered at the Henry Peters' in Staples, Ontario. On the second Sunday, the Pleasant Valley Hall, a former schoolhouse on Concession 11 was rented, where over 60 people gathered for the afternoon. Pastor Klaas Penner and Brother Peter Dyck brought the message. We had lunch together at the hall.

On March 9 of 1998, the Peter Dycks returned to Nova Scotia. Our family moved into the Rymal Motel in Leamington for a month until the house we had rented was available. Singing on Wednesdays or Saturdays was begun immediately. Now we needed to find work for our two sons

For almost six years, we were financially supported by the church in Nova Scotia. In the meantime, I've slipped into my old skill of furniture-making and retailing under the name of Acorn Furniture. Elizabeth has the gift of a server and has made hundreds of wonderful meals and prepared many beds for visiting friends.

In May, I was diagnosed with colon cancer. Doctor Klassen wanted to operate the next day. This was a shock to us; we were not ready. We returned to Nova Scotia, where, after a month of dieting, I had part of my colon removed. At this time, Benny Penner, a deacon, and Martin Penner, a minister each took over for several weeks. In August, we returned to Leamington. Praise God for a new lease on life!

On November 1, we had our first service in an old school building on Concession 3, near Kingsville. The other hall had become too small, and it was unavailable over the Christmas season.

On May 22, 1999, we had the official church planting. We, with our family, two couples, and three singles were united and blessings given by three couples from the ministry in Nova Scotia. The next day, two young men were baptized, and on the day after, communion was held with 40 people attending, including guests. In August, the first wedding took place in the Leamington United Mennonite Church on Oak Street of Leamington. The United Mennonite Educational Institute has been rented for weddings and other occasions.

In winter of 1999-2000 we moved to the Staples Community Hall and began a home school. Henry and Evelyn Penner, a Minister from Nova Scotia, took charge of the school, and assisted me in the ministry. A garage was prepared for a school building. During the second year, Henry, along with our daughter Doris taught there. Two years later, Ben and Rosella Friesen came to replace the Henry Penners. Evelyn and Rosella are our nieces. By the third year, we had three teachers and over 30 students. In the 2004-2005 school year, we have a total of 39 students and three teachers.



In December of 2002, we had the first election of two Deacon couples: Henry, age 24, and Nettie Unger, and Abe, age 28, and Mary Dyck. The ordination took place in the UMEI chapel. This was an important milestone for the Cornerstone Community Church, as we have chosen to be called. In 2004, Brother Henry Unger was ordained as Minister, and later as Pastor. We also ordained Ben and Esther Froese as a Deacon couple.

Over a year ago, a Minister from Durango, Mexico, came to work in the Aylmer area during the summer months. Upon the request of the brethren there, and the encouragement of the ministry here, he took leadership in Luton, south of Aylmer, Ontario. The church was officially organized in Spring of 2004, and we take turns in bringing sermons there.

On January 29, 2005, at 6 P.M., we had the dedication service for the new church building on Deer Run Road. This was another great milestone for our church. The usual Sunday morning attendance stands at about 200. Presently we have 60 members in Leamington, and five in Aylmer.

The fields are ripe, but few are the workers to go into the harvest. Let us pray for workers and more converts before the great day of the Lord is at hand.

We thank the Leamington United Mennonite Church, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church, the Meadow Brook Fellowship, the Evangelical Mennonite Church, and the Knox Presbyterian Church for allowing us to use their facilities for weddings, funerals, and meetings.

*The writer, a Pastor at the Cornerstone Community Church on Deer Run Road, Wheatley, Ontario, was born in Manitoba in 1944.*



**Cornerstone Community Church Leadership.** L to R: Deacon Ben and Esther Froese, with children Fabiola and Estella, Pastor Henry and Nettie Unger with children Jona and Louisa, Deacon Abe and Mary Dyck, Co-Pastor Wilbert and Elizabeth Friesen.



## 9) This is a Great Place to Live

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*Justina Dyck*

**W**hen I first came to Leamington with my husband Isaak, I was 28 years old. I came here at midnight from Mexico in January of 1995. I came here to live and to enjoy the better life.

When we crossed from Mexico into the USA, I thought it would be somewhat different from Mexico, and it is a lot different. Then, when I crossed from the USA into Canada it was dark with lots of lights, which were beautiful. In February it felt like Christmas because of all the snow. When we were traveling, I saw different things that I'd never seen before that were new to me.

But now, eight years later, when I look around Leamington, it looks like Mexico because of the garbage that's lying around. When we still lived in Mexico, many people, when they came back from Canada, said there is no garbage lying around in Canada, because of the laws Canada has. But now there are so many people that throw their garbage around, it doesn't look nice anymore. I wish I could somehow set an example to the people living here to pick up their garbage, and make a difference to the whole town.

We started to look for a doctor and I was hoping to find one. And yes, we found a doctor! And after I went to see the doctor, I felt better.

I have made many friends here. Therefore, I think Canada is a great place to live.

*The writer was born in Cuauhtemoc, Mexico in 1967 and is a member of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church in Leamington, Ontario.*



**Justina Dyck** admiring the first snowfall after her move to Leamington, Ontario.



## 10) A Window Into Our Past

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George Schartner

Memories of our past are often triggered by stories, experiences, and journeys to the birthplaces of our ancestors and to places of our own early years. So it was for over thirty Essex County travelers who took part in the first Mennonite Heritage Cruise between September 21 and October 3, 1995 along the Dnieper River in Ukraine, organized by Marina and Walter Unger.

From a vantage point of a good life in Canada, this group of travelers was able to get a glimpse into their past as if through a window opened by this trip.

The cruise along the Dnieper on the *Victor Glushkov* during moonlit nights and sunny days, visits to the cities of Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhye, Kherson and Odessa, and most significantly, bus trips to Old Colony and Molochna villages, as well as Schönfeld, provided emotional connections to the land of our ancestors where good and most difficult times were experienced.

I was deeply moved when I saw the land where my grandparents, parents and family lived. As I saw the crumbling walls of the Schönsee church and picked up a brick from these ruins, my thoughts went back to my mother's stories about this period in her life. Now those stories came to life and took on a new significance. I was thrilled to stop at Landskrone where my parents lived shortly after their marriage and where several of my siblings were born. Words can hardly describe the feelings I had as I thought of what life was like in those troubled times in this distant country we once called home.

Comments of some of the other group members clearly reflect the depth of feelings aroused by this journey.

Bruno Penner recalled, "We journeyed to a land that had existed only in our imagination. At Tiegenhagen, Freda and I discovered an empty field and imagined how our jovial uncles, Peter, Jake and Henry might have massed the straw in those long piles. We imagined how her relatives had arrived at the train station at Lichtenau. In our mind we saw Freda's twenty-one year old father taking leave of his family on the very platform we stood on, promising to write soon, hopefully having found a farm so that they could all come to Canada. I was thrilled to see the institutions my parents had talked about so often: the *Zentralschule* (high school) in Chortiza and the neighbouring *Lehrerseminar* (Teacher's Seminary), as well as the *Mädchenschule* (girl's school)."

Margaret Driedger remembered her trip experience this way, "After seventy years I was privileged to go back and set foot on the street of Rudnerweide, where I was born. I brought back a little flask of *Heimaterde* (soil of my homeland). It gave me an exciting feeling."

Walter Koop had ambivalent feelings. He recalled, "I felt joyful and sad at the same time when I discovered a marker of my ancestor at the Rosenthal Cemetery."

Astrid Koop described how she and Walt with Stas, their driver and guide in a red Audi, had made their way to the junction of the Osokorowka and Dnieper Rivers, the former site of Felsenburg, the birthplace of her father, and then two kilometres further east on the Osokorowka the site of her grandparents' and uncles' homes. As they stood at the water's edge in silence they remembered the life story of parents, grandparents and other relatives and experiences they encountered while they lived in this place many years ago.



Ralph Tiessen remembered the excitement of going to Schönfeld with a group of twelve on a special bus. "It was exciting to see the beautiful black soil in large gradually sloping fields, surrounded by straight hedges. Truly this trip was emotional, exciting and memorable."

Gisela Schartner recorded, "We had high expectations for this trip with its promise of Mennonite history lectures by Al Reimer and Paul Toews, and architectural information from Rudy Friesen as well as various cultural performances. These expectations were more than fulfilled. Since we had been warned that we would not find many Mennonite sites, I was not really shocked by the few we did find in a state of collapse. However, it was still sad to see a once progressive and very productive colony almost totally erased."

Helen Dick stated, "It was 1926 when my parents with three little girls emigrated to Canada. I was two years old. The Lichtenau train station was very meaningful to me. It was here that buckets of tears were shed as Mennonites leaving Russia said good-bye to loved ones, not knowing if they would ever meet again."

Irma and Henry Janzen remembered among many highlights the very moving reunion of Frank Wall and his cousin and the visit with an elderly Ukrainian woman near the old oak tree. This lady approached Henry and recited *Lieber Heiland, mach mich fromm das ich in den Himmel komm*. (Dear Saviour, make me devout so I may go to Heaven). Then she sang *Gott ist die Liebe* (God is Love). This was the only German she knew. We joined her in singing *Gott ist die Liebe* as well as How Great Thou Art, which she had started in Russian.

Elsie Fleming expressed her feelings as follows, "I was emotionally overwhelmed as I heard the welcoming music of the Ukrainian band and ate the bread and salt that was offered to us as a welcoming symbol. We experienced holy moments as we worshipped together in the piano bar of our ship. My overwhelming feeling was one of sadness because the homes and buildings of our Mennonite ancestors were either destroyed and gone or they appeared in poor repair."

Margaret Braun remembered the Saturday evening Sleeping Beauty ballet in the Odessa Opera House stage as having taken her breath away.

John Dick, in reference to the side trip to Schönfeld, stated, "With beating hearts we got off the bus. What excitement when we found the first pieces of bricks. I felt sad and yet I also felt a strange thrill to think that this was where our parents had lived, gone to church and school, and had married. I can hardly believe that I was actually there, but I treasure the experience that I had."

Marina Dyck Lepp recalled, "I could hardly grasp the fact that I was standing on the soil in Neuhorst where my Dad had grown up. I met a cousin in Ekaterinoslav whom I never expected to find. The emotions and thoughts that went through my head were unexplainable."

Margaret Tiessen found that, "Visiting villages where our mothers and fathers had lived was very exciting. It stirred our emotions to see people meet relatives whom they had never met before or whom they hadn't seen for many years."

Katie Penner Brown was confronted with this reality. "There before me was the architecturally beautiful building of the former *Mädchenschule* (Girl's school). My mother had attended there. She had walked those same halls, had run up and down the Lepp-Wallman factory steps, which were now carrying my feet, to her former assembly halls and classrooms. Then on to the *Zentralschule* (high school) and *Hof* (yard) – Dad's home place. Here we decided to walk to mother's house and that's when it hit me. I needed a quiet time alone to internalize these emotions."



Victor Dyck enjoyed the entire cruise down the Dnieper but specifically recalled, "There's no doubt that the highlight of the trip was the journey to my home village of Blumenort. The initial contact by bus had proved to be disappointing because of the changes wrought by famine, war and the communist regime. However, the next day, via car with driver and guide, Gary and I returned to Blumenort where we met an old Mennonite lady who had been born there and who remembered my family. She also could point out the exact locations of grandfather's and our houses that had both been destroyed during the war. As Al Reimer mentioned at the beginning of the cruise, something happens to us when we walk the lands of our ancestors. And something did."

Erna Janzen said, "I had not expected such an emotional impact from our Mennonite cruise. Strangers before, now became united by a depth of feeling for our Mennonite heritage."

Elsie Tiessen Dick concluded, "The memories of our ten days on the Dnieper River will remain with me and continue to draw me back. This experience was like no other as we turned back the pages of our family history. I remember feeling my heart pound because I had no idea that the Thiessen Mill still existed. I was filled with a feeling of awe and thankfulness. This old mill was still in operation, building a bridge between the past and the future."

This journey to the land of our ancestors rekindled vivid memories and brought to the surface strong emotions about our past, the roots of our heritage. At the same time we experienced renewed feelings of thankfulness for the peaceful life we are able to enjoy in Canada.

*The writer was born in the Waldheim Hospital, Molotschna Colony, Ukraine in 1936 and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church.*



**Ruins of the Schönsee Church building in the former Molotschna Colony.**



# 11) Beginnings in Essex County

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*Helen Boschman*

As the first generation in my family to be born and raised here in Essex County, I have grown up with many privileges and luxuries that my ancestors never had. Originally, my great-great grandparents came from Russia and Austria, leaving behind a life of famine, disease, and political unrest. They were searching for a better life for their families, and the freedom to practice their faith openly. When my father's mother was in her late teens, my great grandparents left Saskatchewan and took the trip by train to Mexico. They wanted to regain control of their children's education that had been lost, in part, because they stood up for their beliefs during the War. My mother's grandparents made the same journey from Manitoba later on.

My parents John and Marie Friesen Boschman, were both born and married in Chihuahua, Mexico. On April 17, 1981, my parents arrived in Essex County, looking for employment and only intending to stay for a year. Not having any family or close friends here, or knowing any English, made the beginning a very difficult and lonely time for them. Financial hardship was a major obstacle for the first while; there were weeks where groceries were sparse and they had to stretch the food and money available. As time went on, they began to make friends. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Dyck, an elderly couple who had earlier moved from Belize to Essex County took my parents under their wing and provided them with shelter during their first weeks here. My parents have always been very grateful for the hospitality shown by this Christian couple. As time went on, the English language became easier for them to understand. They have now lived here for 23 years, only returning to Mexico occasionally to visit family and friends. Though their beginning here was a challenge, my parents believe that coming to Essex County was the right decision and that it has made a positive impact on both their lives and the lives of their children. They now feel completely at home here.

I am the oldest of four children, born in the Leamington District Memorial Hospital on July 12, 1982. I have two sisters, Mary-Anne and Judy, as well as a brother, Peter. Our family has moved several times, but has never left the Essex County area. Until the age of 15, my parents and I attended the Old Colony Mennonite Church. When I began high school at Leamington District Secondary School, I met a group of friends from the Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church youth group and began to join them. This was when I rapidly began to grow in my faith. Shortly thereafter, my family and I began attending church there. I was active in the Junior Youth, Senior Youth, and later, in the College and Career group. On June 10, 2001, I was baptized upon confession of my faith at our church. I have been secretary at our church for four years, and have greatly enjoyed serving the Lord in this position. Since finishing high school, I have obtained a certificate in interior decorating through a post-secondary course and recently finished a course in book-keeping. I am currently employed as a quality control personnel at Kingsville Plastics, Limited, but hope someday to become a full-time interior decorator.

The Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church first began with the Board of Missions in the late 1980s. There was a need for another church in Southern Ontario to minister to the Low German Mennonites arriving from Mexico. It was decided that the location would be in the Leamington - Wheatley area. In May of 1989, Ben and Edna Klassen, a deacon couple from Mount Salem, led regular worship services and Sunday School in the UMEI dome. On July 1, 1990, following God's calling, Peter and Elma Reimer came to pastor the church. On June 21, 1992, eight people were accepted as the first official members of the LEMC congregation. As the group continued to grow, so did the various church events and activities such as bible studies, choir practice, revival meetings, weddings, and youth gatherings. In the same year, a youth



ministry was started by Marvin and Helen Klassen of Burns Lake, British Columbia, later continued by Bill and Helen Friesen and currently led by Lowell and Marlene Froese. Originally, our Sunday School outreach consisted only of three separate classes, currently we have approximately seven classes, with at least one teacher and helper per class, all overseen by the Education Committee.

In May, 1994, the LEMC congregation purchased four acres on Mersea Road 3, and construction began. The Lord was gracious in providing the funds and the many volunteers needed to make building a church possible. Many people from our congregation, our sister churches in both this region and even from as far as Manitoba, came and volunteered their time and skills to assist with our building project. By November of 1995, the church was completed and everything was officially moved into the new building. On August 12 and 13, 2000, our church celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a weekend filled with praise sessions, sharing, and reflecting back on what God had done for the LEM Church. During the summer of 2003, upon reaching retirement age, our founding senior pastor couple, Peter and Elma Reimer, decided to return to Manitoba to reunite with their family. This gave opportunity for us, as a congregation, to celebrate their involvement in our church and community with an exciting weekend on June 28 and 29, 2003. During this weekend there was plenty of food, fellowship and many opportunities to share of the impact that Peter and Elma had made through their ministry here in Leamington. This was the beginning of several months of church services conducted by a variety of visiting speakers from our sister churches. During this time a Pastor search committee was formed and given the task of finding a senior pastor couple. They were guided to make contact with George and Betty Remple of Vernon, British Columbia, who at that time (November, 2002) were serving an interim pastorate in Campo 67 in Mexico. By late April, George and Betty came to Leamington to see, first hand, where God may have called them to come and serve Him. Sensing God's leading, they accepted the invitation from the LEMC, and came to begin in the position of senior pastor in the middle of October, 2003, leaving their family and home in British Columbia. They served in our church for approximately two years; in May of this year, they returned home to British Columbia for personal reasons. Our congregation is currently seeking a new pastor to fill this position.

Today, there is an average of 275 people attending our Sunday morning worship services. When the congregation first began, most of those in attendance were fluent in Low German and for the first six years, sermons were mostly in German. As a variety of people began to attend, some of whom did not speak Low German, this became a challenge to combine both English and Low German into our worship. After trying several different service layouts, we now have a Low German service at 9:30 A.M., during Sunday School, and an English worship service at 10:30 A.M. Our congregation continues to grow, both in faith and in numbers. Due to a shortage of space for Sunday School classrooms and the need of an area to host special events and church functions, our church is planning an addition in the near future. We are currently in the fundraising stages of this project. The church is active with a variety of events such as Ladies Fellowship, Wednesday night bible studies, SEAN classes, baptism classes, men's fellowship evenings, prayer meetings, revival meetings, and many other events. The Lord has greatly blessed our congregation thus far and has promised to continue as we seek to serve and know Him better.

When I think about the future of the Mennonite community here in Essex county, I am very optimistic. I see the Mennonite population continuously growing and with this the many opportunities for both young and old. There is a variety of both educational and occupational opportunities around this area. I believe that if we have the same determination and strength in our faith, that our ancestors coming from Europe had, there is nothing that cannot be achieved.



*The writer was born in 1982 in Leamington, Ontario and is a member of the Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church. Helen and the Boschman family members speak Low German and English fluently.*



**Helen Boschman, Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church secretary.**



## 12) My Church - NLUM

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*Ed Petryschuk*

**I**t was at the age of 25 that I graduated from University with my second degree, became engaged and then married, was tossed into the work world and into a setting which was completely foreign to me - a Mennonite congregation. I had made many commitments in such a short time period and I was not sure how I would manage to keep them all balanced in my life.

My Sunday School years were spent in the small Hillman United Church across from where I grew up on Concession 2. When I became a teen, I decided on my own to no longer attend church and filled my Sunday mornings with sleeping in and sports. When I turned 19, I was signed by the Toronto Blue Jays baseball team and was off playing professional baseball for the following three years in Alberta, New York, and North Carolina. During those years, I can recall attending the baseball chapel services and listening to the traveling baseball pastor preach. He was very interesting and thought-provoking — too bad half of my team could not speak or understand English!

Although I had grown up knowing some people who attended the North Church, I had never attended a service there until I started courting my wife, Sandra, in 1981. In 1983, we became engaged and got married and it was then that I started attending services more regularly. I felt apprehensive and nervous, not quite knowing what to expect and what would be expected of me. It wasn't too long into our marriage when I received a call from Cornie Driedger, leading minister of the church, (now Uncle Cornie to me) asking if I would be interested in attending catechism classes. It took me a few days to get back to him with an affirmative answer. I remember feeling very nervous during my first classes. Most participants in the class were younger than me and what worried me most was that I would show my ignorance in Biblical theology. My only goal of this class was to come out of this experience with a better understanding of Sandra's upbringing. I hoped that this newfound knowledge would help further strengthen my relationship with my wife, however, what I gained from the class was much more than that. Throughout the experience, my nervousness dissipated and I started to question and think of spiritual matters that, in the past, I didn't even realize existed. Sandra and I would spend hours discussing topics that we had discussed in our classes. Gradually, throughout this period, my personal relationship with God was awakened and I became baptized in 1984. It was then that I also joined the North Leamington United Mennonite Church.

It didn't take long for me to feel comfortable about being in the pews of this church. There were specific members of this church who made a point of going out of their way to make me feel a sense of belonging. I don't even think that they realized that this was what they were doing but I will be forever thankful for these people. They sincerely seemed to take an interest in my life.

In my first year of marriage, I became an usher in the church. It was not an onerous task and it was a great way for me to feel like part of the church and become acquainted with more church members. In our fourth year of marriage, Sandra and I were asked to take on the role as Youth Leaders. I felt that since we were asked, the congregation and leaders of the church were already placing confidence in us and trusted us to help guide and lead the youth of the church. This further made me feel that my decision to join the church had been a good one.

Our son, Ryan, was born in 1987. At his dedication service, the NLUMC congregation promised to watch over our son. I felt honoured that so many people would pray for us and support our newfound parenthood.



The following three years were difficult as we gave three unborn children to God, however, we were overwhelmed with joy when we were blessed again with our second child, Kelly, who was born in 1991. Again, our families, friends and our congregation were steady support through all of this.

I am amazed at and continue to be thankful for all of the people who dedicate their lives to help bring our children, Ryan and Kelly, closer to God. The Sunday School teachers and DVBS volunteers have without question made a positive impact on our children's lives. Sandra's direct involvement in the children's programs at church and my indirect involvement in the Sunday School has kept me in touch with not only the activities of the children but also has kept me in tune to Ryan's and Kelly's faith journeys through the years. Now that Ryan and Kelly are in Youth and Junior Youth, I am also so very thankful for these programs and the people who help run them. The more people that can help parents through the teen years, the better! With so much help from Sunday School volunteers, DVBS staff, pastoral staff, and the support and modeling of Christian lifestyle from our parents, relatives and close friends, I have always felt that our children are surrounded by the spiritual guidance necessary to become children of God. As our children grow in Christ, I further develop my faith and relationship with God along with them.

On October 3, 1993, my father suddenly passed away. Not only was I overwhelmed with the support of cards and prayers but also at the number of people attending the funeral home and funeral service and many from our church. And what still tears me up to this day, is the picture captured in my mind forever of six huge combines pulling into our fields to complete the harvest for my mother and my family. My relatives from outside of this community could not believe the support systems built around us.

In the past 21 years, I have built some very close relationships with people in our church. Sandra's family members have been a wonderful loving support for me. Sandra and I have also developed some great friendships with couples around our ages. My present relationship with our pastoral leadership has had a great impact on how I feel in this congregation, as well. Serving on Church Council for the past three years has opened my eyes to the commitment level of so many members of our church. I respect them for their dedication.

I feel blessed to have had this support system my whole married life. Attending NLUMC is much more than just showing up on Sunday morning for a service. Members continue to ask me questions and take an interest in my life and our children's lives. I am totally at home in the pews. It is now my duty as a member of this church to make others feel comfortable as they enter the doors, just as I did over twenty years ago. It is my wish to support others as they go through difficult times and are in need of prayers. It is my pleasure to celebrate major events in their lives.

I committed to many things 21 years ago. Was I ready for these changes in my life? God must have felt I was. My marriage has lasted and my relationship with Sandra has deepened over the years. She is my best friend. My work world has changed shape and location a number of times but I feel that I have gained a lot through my experiences, I continue to try to better myself and I am proud of my accomplishments. AND church? I feel that I have come a full circle in my church life — my baptism and now my son was baptized this year. I was elated with joy and pride at this event. Twenty-one years ago, I really thought I was joining the church for my wife and my future children. I now know that I am a better person having been influenced and supported by the people within this Mennonite congregation. This congregation has witnessed and touched every major event that has taken place in my married and adult life and I will be forever grateful for their support.



*The writer was born in Leamington, Ontario, and is a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church.*



**The Petryschuk family: L to r: Sandra, Kelly, Ryan and Ed.**



# 13) The story of Esther Friesen Dyck

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*Esther Friesen Dyck*

**M**y family left Sommerfeld, Manitoba in 1923 to live in Mexico. We settled in the village of Weidenfeld in the Santa Clara Colony. We were called Sommerfelder because we came from Sommerfeld, Manitoba. There were no restrictions about clothing or vehicles in our area, and we lived much like our people in North America.

My great-great grandfather, Peter Friesen, was concerned about the education of his grandchildren. He asked MCC to help by sending teachers to Mexico. They sent Daniel Peters, who started a school where my dad and uncle attended. That school was closed because the colony didn't want a good school (education) for their children. In later years, the General Conference opened a school in Quinta Lupita, near Cuauhtemoc, and one in Steinreich. I attended this school from six years of age to 14 years. Then I went to Quinta Lupita to finish my secondary school education. At first, I boarded with the Daniel Peters family. Later, when a boarding house was built across from the school, called the *Kinderheim* (children's home), I boarded there. The *Kinderheim* had two hallways, with a large kitchen separating the girls and boys rooms. We had to take turns helping in the kitchen by washing dishes, clearing tables, sweeping floors and, on Friday, washing floors. We never really knew what we had missed by being separated from our families. At the *Kinderheim*, we did not have farmwork to do like at home, we didn't tend the cows before and after school, like the children who did not go to boarding school. When we went to bed, we would sing German hymns like: *Müde bin ich, geh zur Ruh*, and *Weil ich Jesu Schäflein bin*. We went home every weekend. We rarely got to go to church because our parents would have to spend Sunday driving us back to the *Kinderheim*, which was about 60 kilometres away.

Our school was less strict than the Old Colony Schools. Boys and girls were not separated in the school or on the playground. We studied Spanish, German, Religion, Mathematics, History and Nature. We started our day with breakfast at 8 A.M. Then we walked across the street to school, which started at 9. We'd return to the *Kinderheim* for lunch and then return to classes until 3:30.

I was 19 when I married David Dyck. For the first year, we lived with my parents, and for the next four years, we lived with my grandmother.

In June of 1993, we decided to come to Canada because of economic circumstances; it was very dry in Mexico and there were no crops.

Our children were all born in Mexico. Amanda was nine, Adolf six, and Angelica was two and one-half years at the time of our leaving.

Today, I work full-time at Biobest where we produce bumble bees and deliver them to greenhouse operations. My husband assembles huge machines in a factory. Our children are in university and UMEI.

We first attended the Leamington United Mennonite Church with my parents. My husband David immediately felt at home there because it reminded him of his home church back in Blumenau, Mexico. As a result, our family made the decision to go there, and we are happy to be members here to this day.



*The writer was born in Mexico in 1963 and is a member of the Leamington United Mennonite Church. Esther speaks English, Low German and some Spanish.*



**Esther Friesen Dyck**



# 14) South Point Conservative Mennonite Church

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*Cornelius Loewen*

**G**od wants all people to be helped and to come to the recognition of the truth, according to John 3:15-16. Our dear Lord Jesus came down to earth because of love and mercy for sinners. He came so that all people who fear Him and are willing to act righteously are pleasing to Him and shall have eternal life, Acts 10: 35. Jesus came to this earth, preached and taught people about the Kingdom of God. He healed the sick and fed the hungry. Finally he died the bitter death on the cross and shed His valuable blood for the payment of all our sins, Matthew 27. He rose on the third day to eternal life, Matthew 28. We can see the good message in Matthew 28: 5-10. When Jesus wanted to go to Heaven, He commanded His followers to preach the good message to all peoples to the end of the earth, Matthew 28:18-20. So now we are the messengers of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5: 20, because through Christ we have become reconciled with God, 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21. Therefore we keep His commandments in obedience and love, 1 John 5. God wants us to show our faith and love through our works, James 2:14-26. We show love by acting according to His commands, 2 James 6. Whoever does not act according to God's word is a liar, 1 John 2:4, but those who keep His word, in them God's love is made complete, 1 John 2:5.

Menno Simons lived about 400 or 500 years ago. He was a priest of the Catholic church and studied the Bible. He noticed more and more that his church was not keeping or preaching and teaching all the commandments of God. He noticed that some commandments were falsely taught and that sin was tolerated in the church. Because the church did not want to change or cleanse itself, but wanted to maintain its old customs, Menno Simons insisted on building a pure church with the true word of God and God's commandments. Therefore Menno Simons was forced to leave the church, and with a small group, established a new church or congregation. As best they knew, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the Bible, they studied the Word of God and His commandments and tried to put the church on a new foundation, separated from sin and united with God. This group was called Mennonites after their leader, Menno Simons. That is where the name comes from.

Then, in the last hundred years, in several Mennonite churches, not all commandments of God were practiced or preached. Sin was tolerated and not all churches were in agreement. So it was that in about 1960, a number of brothers and ministers noticed that a number of churches were no longer the pure people of God, as they should be. But it was the deep longing of the brothers and sisters to look after their own, and others' souls, in order to be admitted into the eternal and beautiful Heaven, to be with Jesus and all His chosen people. So the brothers and sisters gathered to study the Bible to return to the pure biblical foundation and therefore this church was called the Conservative Mennonite Church.

Christian Practices in the South Point Mennonite Church

Because we are all sinners, we need Salvation - Romans 5:12

God gave us the gift of salvation - John 3:16, 17, Galatians 4:4,5

Jesus paid for our sins - Isaiah 53:5

The Holy Spirit calls us - 1 Colossians 15:34, Revelations 22:17

We are all sinners - Romans 3:23

We must repent - 2 Peter 39

Jesus wants to save us - John 3: 17-18

We must acknowledge Jesus as our Lord - Romans 10: 9-10

Look for Jesus - Luke 19:8-9



When we are born anew, then all the old is gone and we have a new life - 2 Cor.5:17  
 We are to live a Holy life - 1 Peter 1: 14-16  
 To live a Christian life - Acts 2: 41-42  
 Eternal life is assured when we follow God - 1 John 5:13  
 We should be doers of God's Word - James 1:22  
 We are to study the Bible - 1 Timothy 4:13  
 To pray continually - 1 Thessalonians 5:17  
 Pray and fast - Matthew 6:17-18  
 Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit - John 14:16-17  
 To live by the Spirit and not give in to our sinful nature - Galatians 5:16-17, 22-23  
 The work of Jesus on earth - Matthew 5,6,7  
 To practice being godly - 1 Timothy 4: 7-8  
 To be watchful and to pray - 1 Peter 5:8

### **Commandments of God**

Baptism - Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:17-18, 37-38  
 Holy Communion - Luke 22:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, John 6:54-56  
 Washing of feet - John 13:4-5, 15-17  
 Head covering- 1 Corinthians 11  
 The Holy Kiss - 1 Corinthians 16:20, 1 Peter 5:14, 2 Corinthians 13:12  
 Anointing - James 5:13-16  
 Christian marriage - Ephesians 5:23-25, Mark 10:6-9, Luke 16:18, 1 Corinthians 7:17

Sins that are forbidden at Southpoint Conservative Mennonite Church and therefore not allowed Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-6, Colossians 3:5-9  
 Drinking and smoking - 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:2, Titus 3:14, Isaiah 52:11, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

God shuns sins and His church does likewise. When a member of the church commits sins and does not desist, he or she will be put in a ban by God and the church. It is necessary that we wash away our sins in the blood of the Lamb - Revelation 7:9-17

*The writer was born in Jaquies, Chihuahua, Mexico in 1956, and is a member of South Point Conservative Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ontario. Cornelius speaks English and German.*

German-English translation by Gisela Schartner





### **South Point Conservative Mennonite Church**

This newly built church is located on Fox Run Road, Wheatley, Ontario.



# 15) From Mexico to Bolivia to Canada

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*John Hildebrand*

**I**n 1976, when I was 15 years old, our family moved from Mexico to Bolivia, near Santa Cruz. We were among the first Mennonite families to move there. The Bernhard Peters family had already gone there in 1968, and so we called it the Bernhard Peters Colony. Today Bolivia has 45 Mennonite colonies; the largest has a population of 6,000. It should come as no surprise that my Spanish is better than my English.

In May of 1989 we came to Leamington with our ten children. And in November of 1991 we returned to Bolivia with our twelve children. I was never a farmer but we did have several hundred head of beef cattle. Some of the pasture land in the far side of our colony was low lying, and when it flooded there wasn't enough for the cattle to graze on. These animals became thin for lack of food. I bought the cattle, inoculated them, fattened them up, and sold them. During our first years in Bolivia I bought farm machinery: round balers, square balers, old binders, and New Holland and John Deere machinery. For this I went to Kansas and Oklahoma in the USA about six times a year, and sold it in Bolivia. One year I bought two containers of tools and equipment in the USA, mostly new, and by the time I got through customs, it cost me \$14,000. I unpacked and sorted the old equipment first, and then put the new equipment back into one container and locked it up for the night. In the morning the container doors were open and everything had been stolen. Because of this we went broke. A good part of the money was borrowed. I spent \$3,000 to find the stolen goods. I never recovered a thing and for the next while I needed to pay interest on the borrowed money. I paid the interest as long as I could. The lenders were complaining because they wanted their money.

I tried to borrow money in the bank, and filled out all the papers, but the money didn't come through. They told me that there were lawyers who would lend me money. The bank said to go ahead and borrow it from the lawyers and in 30 days they'd have the money for me. And then I could pay the lawyers off. We were paying high interest. But the bank gave the money to the lawyers and we never got it.

I went to Santa Cruz to the bank's head branch to ask why my loan wasn't coming through. They checked my forms and said that it had been sent to the bank long ago. I discovered that the lawyers had gotten it from the bank and lent it out at a high interest rates of 8% per month. Some lenders would even lend it out at 10% per month. In 2001 when I went to Mexico on business with a friend, I was told there was very little work and housing available in Ontario. But while we were in Mexico, a farmer from Tupperville, Ontario, had his German-speaking employee call to say that they needed help in Tupperville and Dresden, Ontario. The farmer needed a large family to work on his cucumber and tomato farm. I called back to Tupperville, and talked to the farmer and he hired our family. Because the balance of my family was back in Bolivia, I borrowed \$4,000 to fly them to where I was in Mexico. My brother-in-law lent us a van and we traveled to Tupperville.

Today I have most of my debt paid back. We decided to return to Leamington even though our parents on both sides, and most of our siblings are in Bolivia. I have a few siblings in Leamington. We were here only one month when my mother-in-law died in Bolivia.

We spent two weeks in Bolivia in 2004 to celebrate my father-in-law's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, along with my parents' birthdays, who both turned 80 that year. We took our oldest and youngest daughters along. Our youngest daughter is nine and unable to speak. She attends school in Essex and understands the English language well.



We live well, but frugally in Ontario. During our first years here, I wanted to go back to Bolivia but I was afraid they'd put me in jail because I still owed money on my debt there. Our 3 boys and a girl got work at Nature Fresh, Leamington, in the greenhouses for the winter. At first, when we still lived in Tupperville, I drove them from Tupperville in the morning and picked them up in the evening which came to 100 Kilometers daily. When our married children moved to Leamington our children could stay with them during the work week. So I'd just bring them on Monday and pick them up on Saturday. We have eleven of our 14 children here, eight grandchildren here and eight grandchildren in Bolivia.

In December of 2001, after paying \$850 dollars rent monthly, we decided to buy a five bedroom house in Leamington for \$85,000. This is where we live today. The payments are only \$700 per month. We plan to rent this house out and buy a house in the country with a larger yard.

I spend most of my time driving for others, assisting them with their driver's licences and other documents. I make many trips to the Toronto airport and back. I also service the four private school busses to keep them in good running order.

It is going well in the Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church. 839 members attended our Communion Service recently.

*The writer was born in Mexico in 1961 and is a member of Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church. John speaks Low German, Spanish and English.*

Low German - English translation by Walter Koop.



# 16) Establishing a Mennonite Church in Croton

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*Ruben Enns*

**T**imes were hard in Mexico in 1992. Our family was in much financial distress. To start with, we didn't have our own farm, and one of our children had recently died soon after birth. And we were tired of trying to make ends meet.

So, in November of that year, we decided to move to Ontario, Canada. There was much talk about the money that was to be made there. My sister had moved there before us and they were doing well. They had a house for us so we decided to give up in Mexico and give it a try in Ontario. It was difficult to leave our family and friends. Some of our family members were also in Bolivia and Alberta. Our grandparents especially, didn't like the idea of our leaving our native homeland; they thought that we should try longer in Mexico.

We ended up buying a small Ford Escort, squeezed what belongings we had into it, and off we went to Wheatley, Ontario. We found Ontario very different from what people had told us. But we were here, and didn't want to back out now. We arrived on a Saturday night, so we stayed at my wife's brother's house for night. He had come down from Mexico with us.

The following week we moved to my sister's house, and that week we had to adjust to some serious cold weather. My first job was stripping tobacco for \$4 per hour on a farm in Erieau. One of the painstaking jobs we had to do was weather-proofing our house. We nailed plastic to the outside. Another big adjustment was the language. We knew barely any English. In all, we liked Ontario better than Mexico because we were better off financially and we liked the climate here better.

By 1999, we had settled in Dresden. In July, some brethren came from Hensall, Ontario, to hold church meetings in a community center they had rented. We were invited to attend and pretty soon they held meetings every two weeks. We almost always went. One Sunday evening the community center wasn't available, so we rented the United Church building in Croton, Ontario. Soon meetings were held every Sunday morning and we attended regularly. We bought the church building in Spring of 2000. A minister from Rainy River, Ontario moved to Croton, along with his family, and lived here for six months until we were established, and then they moved back.

In June of 2004, our church was established as one of the Conservative Mennonite Churches of Ontario (CMCO). Currently there are 11 families attending here at our newly established Faith Haven Conservative Mennonite Church. It was the name we had given it. Six families are local, two families have moved here with two more families moving here yet this year. God willing, three more families will move here next year.

We have a private school here, as well. I am on the school board of the Croton Christian School. We have grades one through eight with two teachers.

I usually work on a farm during the summer and during the winter months I have a trucking job. We are thankful that the Lord has helped us settle here and to establish our church and school.



*The writer was born in Mexico in 1964, and is a member of the Faith Haven Conservative Mennonite Church in Croton, Ontario. The Enns family speaks English and Low German.*



**The Enns family**

In front we see father Ruben and mother Martha, on their laps are little Abe and Anna. In the back are John, David, Helen, Korny, Peter and Benny.



# 17) The Life of Cornelius and Justina Dyck

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## *Cornelius Dyck*

I, Cornelius was born to the family of Peter and Aganetha Dyck in 1973. My birth took place in the city of Sainapuchic, Chihuahua, Mexico. I was the sixth of ten children. My oldest sister passed away at the age of eight months from lymphoma, a severe lung disease. Due to the fact of poor transportation and lack of money, they couldn't get her to the doctor in time to save her.

Our Dyck family immigrated to Canada in 1978, when I was five years old. We lived in an old barn at my grandparents Jacob and Susana Dyck in Port Burwell, until we found our own place.

I attended school from kindergarten to grade eight. The last three years I attended a private church school. When I reached 17 years of age, I went to Bible Study at our church, the Wheatley Old Colony Church.

My father had a job working at a nursery for a few dollars per hour. Times were tight but we managed to make ends meet. Dad finally got a job at the Imperial Leaf Division of Aylmer, Ontario. As a seasonal worker here, he was making more money. He started there in 1979, and finished in 2001. We boys needed to get jobs as soon as we were old enough to be hired to help with the payments and other needed things for our family.

In 1987, at age 13, I had my first job as a seasonal tobacco worker. Two years later, I was hired as a construction worker. When I was 19 years old, I worked at North Star Windows of London, Ontario for \$7.50 per hour; I worked there for two years. Then my former tobacco boss encouraged me to come back to work for him again; he said he could get me a winter job if I returned, so that is what I did. Then in 1996, I got work in a steel wholesale business as a shop labourer, and then as a shop supervisor. In 2000 I went into a fabricating operation. Two years later, I got a job as a truck driver, hoping that it would bring in more money, but it didn't turn out the way I had planned. So I upgraded my licence and started to drive for a company called RAM in Cottam. After that, I needed to look for a place to live in Essex County. I first found a house in Leamington, and eventually I found one in the country. And now I am owner and operator of a truck.

October 30, 1994 was a big day in my life, when I married Justina Neufeld in the Old Colony Church in Aylmer. Today we have four lovely children: Elizabeth, William, Martin, and Franklin. Justina and I are thankful for our family and look forward to the future.

*The writer was born in Mexico in 1973, and is a member of the Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church.*





### **The Dyck family**

In front we see father Cornelius and mother Justina with little Franklin on her lap. Their daughter Elizabeth is beside William. Martin is standing in front center.



## 18) Some Reflections on my Experience as Pastor

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*Menno Epp*

“**W**hat are we doing here?” I asked Irma as we arrived on the edges of Leamington on that hot and humid day in August of 1984. “Good question”, she responded, also somewhat apprehensive of our decision to have left Foothills in Calgary to move across country to accept an assignment that grew larger as we neared our destination. In anticipation of this major transition in our life we had purchased a house at 34 Sherwood already in June of that year. That summer we had a moving company take our goods to that location - thanks to the generosity of LUMC. While this was happening we were attending the Mennonite World Conference held in Strasbourg, France.

With the memorable and invigorating European tour behind us it was time to face the realities at 34 Sherwood and 78 Oak Street. At Sherwood we were greeted not only by our household goods but by innumerable crickets who had left their home in the adjacent corn patch and entered the garage and house as the movers unpacked. It took us more than one night or day to bid farewell to these sleep-disturbers. Did they not know that we needed all the rest we could get to face our assignment at 78 Oak? Undoubtedly they meant well!

The people of LUMC too were facing a transition. They were building a new edifice. Eventually they would say good-bye to their aging sanctuary even as they embraced their labour of love, a project that invited their joyful and voluntary participation. Their invitation for me to join them at their coffee breaks as they worked on the new sanctuary was a wonderful way to become acquainted. So, every morning at approximately 10 A.M. I would carry LUMC's picture book across the yard from the old office to discover a new face and with it relationships to others in the community of faith. The same routine happened in the afternoon.

The answers to the question, “What are we doing here?” began to take on form. The picture book became for me the symbol of the community of faith that gathered regularly to hear words of instruction and encouragement from another book - the Bible. That picture book served as an object lesson of the many relationships, some painful, many beautiful, that described this community I had come to be part of. A third book, namely the hymn book, would continue to enhance LUMC's worship of our Lord, the Christ.

The days and weeks and months and years in this large congregation were filled with pastoral care, preparations for preaching and teaching, counseling, participation at funerals, weddings, anniversaries, and meetings. This was a schedule punctuated with experiences that included pain, stress, brokenness, celebration, disagreement, forgiveness and reconciliation, fulfillment and satisfaction, and so much more.

Leamington and LUMC was to become also the setting for my deepest pain. Like so many in our mutual pilgrimage, illness and death invaded also my life. I lost my companion, wife, mother to our children, my participant in ministry, to cancer. What a blow! During the course of my grieving my brother Henry who is now suffering from Alzheimers, asked, “Menno, as pastor you have cared for so many, who will care for you?” I responded, “We receive care as we care for others.” To this day I am proud to have been cared for by the congregation I served. To this day I am grateful for the four-month leave-of-absence I received to go to Jerusalem to reflect, to rest, and to test my progress in grieving. In this setting I learned to sing Psalm 125:2, that has often accompanied my daily meditation: “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds and protects his people both now and forevermore”.



As healing was taking place in my life, Elsie, who had lost her husband in 1986, and whom I had known since our Calgary days, but now living in Saskatoon, and I agreed to join together in marriage (1993). She also joined me in our ministry at LUMC. To this day I am grateful to LUMC and the wider community for accepting Elsie into their life. In this relationship we would continue at LUMC until my retirement in 1998.

The question, "What are we doing here?" now changes somewhat to read, "What have we done here?" Humbly I leave the answer to history and, more importantly to God, who made Himself known to us in the good pastor - the shepherd of our souls - Jesus, the Christ!

*The writer was born in Lena, Manitoba in 1932, and served as Pastor of Leamington United Mennonite Church 1984 to 1998.*



**Menno and Elsie Neufeld Epp.**



# 19) Looking Back at My Yesterdays

*Johnny Loewen*

**I** was born in Pedro Juan Caballero, Paraguay, near the Brazil border, in 1985. My father and mother are Frank and Katharina Loewen, who were both born in Mexico. My parents moved from Mexico to Paraguay in 1980 and settled on a farm of 200 acres. They farmed and had dairy cattle.

In 1992, my parents wanted to try something new, so they decided to come to Ontario. When my dad was young, his family had come to work in Ontario for a few summers. A couple of Dad's brothers had settled in Ontario, so we decided to give it a try. Here my parents worked on a few farms for four years. Then they returned to Paraguay because they still had their farm and all possessions down there.



**Johnny Loewen**

So our family returned to Paraguay for another three years, but things got a little tough. We grew corn and soya beans and had several years of poor crops because of the drought, so we came back to Ontario. We had come for just a year or two, but ended up staying here for five years before going back. We sold our stuff in Paraguay at an auction and permanently settled down in Blenheim, Ontario.

My mother, father, brother and I work in the Blenheim area. My brother and I are employed at R J Equipment who manufacture tomato planters. Our youngest brother attends school. We enjoy a comfortable lifestyle here.

Our Blenheim Old Colony Mennonite Church bought land in Charing Cross; here we plan to build a new church.

**The Lord's ways aren't always our ways  
But looking back at my yesterdays  
And I see how I've been blessed  
I must admit, His ways are best**

*The writer was born in Paraguay in 1985, and is a member of the Blenheim Old Colony Mennonite Church. Johnny speaks English, High German and Low German.*



## 10) Mennonite in Essex County

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*Greg Trepanier*

**I**n some ways, those of us who are Mennonite by choice, and not by birth or heritage, sometimes feel a little like foreigners when it comes to participating in some of the cultural aspects of the Russian Mennonite traditions. I don't speak German, but I do enjoy farmer sausage and noodles (*Wareniki*) or perogies, especially with cream gravy. My wife Anne, is a great cook, and I have grown to love the richness of the German/Russian/Mennonite traditions. I do love to sing, and pacifism fits with my deep sense of personal values. So does a church tradition where community is highly valued.

Essex County has been home territory for many generations in my family. I was raised in a home with French Canadian origins, with the very familiar local names of Trepanier, Marentette, Paquette and Hebert. My grandparents were born in Essex County in Staples, McGregor (near Paquette Corners), Windsor and St. Joachim area. I was born at Hotel Dieu Hospital in Windsor in 1956. The Trepanier name is very common in the Belle River area with the family name stemming from the children of four brothers who came from Quebec to farm on the French Line (Essex County Road 31) near St Joachim. Most Trepaniers in Essex County can trace their roots to these siblings and their ties to Quebec and ultimately France at Canada's inception as a European colony. My mother's family name "Marentette" is traced back to the original family that settled along the South shore of the Detroit River in what is now known as Windsor.

I believe it was Francis Godet dit Marentette (1720-1785) who was first in my family to settle in Essex County. He served as a lieutenant in the militia at Fort Ponchartrain (in what is now downtown Detroit) who retired from service there and settled on the South shore of the Detroit River in about 1765-1768 (based on the birthplace of his children recorded in genealogical records\*). This is the family who settled the strip farm for which Marentette Avenue in Windsor is named. The first child of Francis and Jane (nee Parent) Godet dit Marentette, born on what is now the Canadian side of the river in their "new" homestead, was James Godet dit Marentette born 1768. Francis Godet dit Marentette was the 4<sup>th</sup> generation Canadian; and I am the 11<sup>th</sup>.

We give children roots and wings when we pass on our heritage, and allow them to explore new horizons. My family gave me the roots of my culture. English was the language in our home due to the assimilation of city-living French-Canadian folk. I was raised within my family's Roman Catholic faith practice, and attended church regularly and catechism instruction in the Separate School system in Windsor. I participated in the sacraments of the church, sang in youth and adult choirs, and was active in my faith community with a growing thirst for integrity in my faith expression. With this home base, I was ready to explore options at the age of 17.

A young English-speaking French-Canadian RC boy left Windsor (the wings part) to attend Bible College in Saskatchewan. This was admittedly not my family's preference, but they did not stand in my way. At Bible College, I met my future wife of Manitoban Russian-Mennonite Brethren heritage and learned about an evangelical-fundamentalist expression of Christian faith. Our common faith found expression in many different denominational affiliations while we moved through our transient young adult years to pursue educational and career goals. Together we attended independent, Baptist, Associated Gospel, Presbyterian churches, in addition to a Mennonite Brethren Mission outreach project in Winnipeg. We eventually found a home in Windsor Mennonite Fellowship after settling back in the Windsor-Essex County area. In each faith tradition we participated, we were offered nurture and companionship in our Christian walk.



My interest in participating in a Mennonite community was driven out of a desire to explore the heritage of Anne's family. Participating in a Mennonite fellowship allowed us as a family, to be connected to our roots. I was an "Anabaptist" having been re-baptized as an adult by choice, following in the footsteps of church reformers. This was much less dangerous for me, though not without significant personal challenges to my family relationships. We have taught our children Christian faith from a Mennonite perspective. The story of my family by marriage is rooted in the migrations that have brought them through many cultural and geographical transitions. Farm and country lifestyle, German language and a tight-knit church community of common ancestry was not part of my experience. I was, however, welcomed into an extended family with its warmth and uniqueness. I now participate in, and appreciate a rich faith community that values service to humanity, pacifism, good music and good food! I enjoy singing with the Soli Deo Gloria singers—a local choral group associated with United Mennonite Educational Institute—and have always enjoyed singing with quality choral groups. We have called Kingsville home for 16 years, and travel 40 minutes by car to Windsor to participate in our faith community. I don't speak Low or High German, though I can sing German phonetically. I recall hearing Latin in the liturgy of the Mass (prior to the Second Vatican Council when vernacular languages were not allowed to be used in Roman Catholic Churches around the world) and now sing Latin frequently in many classic choral works. Am I an outsider or an insider?

What is Christian community? How does it relate to place, language, food or cultural tradition? I am a Christian. I practice my faith from a Mennonite perspective. I live and work in Essex County, close to my home city of Windsor. We relate as a family to a community of faith who are a diverse people. We desire to express our faith in worship by lifting our voices together and honouring God as our Creator, Lord and Saviour who welcomes us from anywhere, in any language. We relate to the world in service and seek peace both spiritually politically and personally. Anne and I bear the responsibility of giving our children roots and wings. Essex County has been the place for our roots, and where their wings will direct them becomes their responsibility.

\* Rev. Fr. Christian Denissen, Genealogy of the French Families of the Detroit River Region 1701-1911 (Detroit Genealogy Society, 1976) ed. Harold Frederic Powell, vol. 1 p. 754.

*The writer was born in Windsor, Ontario in 1956 and is a member of Windsor Mennonite Fellowship.*



**Greg Trepanier**



*Francis Gaudet*

PROVINCE OF UPPER CANADA.

GEORGE THE THIRD, by the Grace of GOD of the United Kingdom of GREAT BRITAIN and IRELAND, King, Defender of the Faith :.....To all to whom these Presents shall come.....GREETING :

KNOW YE, that We of Our special grace, certain knowledge, and mere motion have Given and Granted, and by these Presents do GIVE and GRANT unto *Francis Gaudet* of the Parish of *L'Assomption* in the Township of *Sandwich* in the County of *Essex* in the Western District, Yeoman his heirs and assigns for ever; All that parcel or tract of Land situate in the Parish of *L'Assomption* in the Township of *Sandwich* in the County of *Essex* in the Western District, in our said Province, containing by admeasurement *Two Hundred and Six Acres* be the same more or less being

*Lots Number Eighty Eight in the Second and Third Concessions of the said Township of Sandwich*

together with all the woods and waters thereon lying, and being under the reservations, limitations, and conditions hereinafter expressed; which said *Two Hundred and Six Acres of Land* are, bounded, and bounded, or may be otherwise known as follows: that into lay

Commencing in front of the said Concession at the North East Angle, of each of the said *Lots* respectively; Then East Sixty Eight Degrees East One Hundred and Eighteen Chains Twenty Links more or less to the Allowance for Road in front of said Concessions; Then South Sixty Eight Degrees West Sixty Chains Twenty Links more or less to the limit between *Lots* Number Eighty Eight and Eighty Nine; Then North Twenty Eight Degrees West One Hundred and Eighteen Chains Twenty Links more or less to the Allowance for Road in front of said Concessions; Then North Sixty Eight Degrees East Eighty Chains Twenty Links more or less to the place of beginning in each *Lot*.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said parcel or tract of Land hereby given and granted to the said *Francis Gaudet* his heirs and assigns for ever; having nevertheless to Us, our heirs and successors, all Mine of Gold, Silver, Copper, Tin, Lead, Iron and Coal, that shall or may be hereafter found on any part of the said parcel or tract of land hereby granted as aforesaid; and saving and reserving to Us, our heirs and successors all white Pine Trees, that shall, or may now, or hereafter grow, or be growing, on any part of the said parcel or tract of land hereby granted as aforesaid.

Provided always, that no part of the parcel or tract of land, hereby given and granted to the said *Francis Gaudet* and his heirs, be within any reservation heretofore made, and marked for Us, our heirs and successors, by our Survey General of Woods, or his lawful deputy, in which case this our Grant for such part of the land hereby given and granted to the said *Francis Gaudet* shall upon a survey thereof being made, be found within any such reservation, shall be null and void, and of none effect; any thing herein contained to the contrary notwithstanding.

Provided also, that the said *Francis Gaudet* his heirs or assigns; shall and do within three years erect and build, or cause to be erected and built, in and upon some part of the said parcel or tract of land a good and sufficient dwelling house for the said *Francis Gaudet*; and if he or they shall not lawfully possess of an house in our said Province) and be therein, or cause some person to be therein resident for and during the space of one year, thence next ensuing the building of the same.

Provided also, that if at any time or times hereafter, the said *Francis Gaudet* his heirs or assigns shall come into the possession and tenure of any prison or persons whomsoever, either by virtue of any kind of title, conveyance, enforcement, or exchange, or by gift, inheritance, descent, devise, or marriage, such person or persons shall within twelve months next after his, her, or their entry into, and possession of the same, take the oath prescribed by law, before some one of the Magistrates of our said Province; and a certificate of such oath having been taken shall cause to be recorded in the Secretary's office of our said Province.

In Default of all, or any of which conditions, limitations, and reservations, this said Grant, and every thing herein contained, shall be, and We hereby declare the same to be null and void, to all intents and purposes whatsoever, and the land hereby granted, and every part and parcel thereof, shall revert to, and become vested in Us, our heirs and successors, in like manner as if the same had never been granted; any thing herein contained to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding.

AND WHEREAS, by an Act of the Parliament of Great Britain, passed in the Thirty-Eighth year of his Majesty's reign, intituled, "An Act to repeal certain parts of an Act passed in the Fourteenth year of his Majesty's reign, intituled, "An Act for making more effectual provision for the Government of the Province of Quebec in North America, and to make further provision for the Government of the said Province," it is declared, "That no Grant of Lands hereafter made, shall be valid or effectual, unless the same shall contain a specification of the lands to be allotted and appropriated solely to the maintenance of a Protestant Clergy within the said Province," in respect of the lands to be thereby granted; Now know ye, that We have caused an allotment or appropriation of *Twenty Nine Acres and Three Tenths* to be made in

*the Parish of L'Assomption in the Township of Sandwich in the County of Essex in the Western District* a certain Parallelogram near the Center of said Township, bounded to the Westward by the Settlement of *L'Assomption* To the Northward and Eastward by vacant lands, and to the Southward by lands reserved for the Crown. The side lines of said parallelogram being East and West *North and South*

GIVEN under the Great Seal of Our Province of Upper Canada: Whereas Our truly and lawfully loved Son, *James W. Ross* Esquire, our Lieutenant Governor of our Province of Upper and Lower Canada, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty-four, in the year of our said Majesty's reign, did

By Command of His Excellency }  
*James W. Ross* }  
*P. B.* }  
*James W. Ross* }  
*P. B.* }

Entered with the Secretary  
5th September 1854  
*James W. Ross*



Land Deed of Marentette family  
5th September, 1854



## 21) The John Enns Family and the Bergthaler Church

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*Tina Enns*

I am a daughter of John and Agatha Enns. My great great grandparents all came from Russia to the Canadian prairies in the late 1800s. Some settled in Manitoba, others in Saskatchewan. Of my great great grandparents, all eventually moved to Mexico except Jacob and Justina Teichroeb.

Now I will introduce you to my four sets of great grandparents: Teichroeb, Enns, Fast, and Dyck.

Firstly, my great grandfather Heinrich Teichroeb of Saskatchewan, married Elizabeth Enns there. After having five children together, Elizabeth passed away, and great grandfather married Agatha Friesen. This couple had six children together, one of whom became my grandmother, Katharina.

Secondly, my great grandparents Jacob and Anna Enns were born in Canada. In 1924, they moved to Mexico and had a family of 14 children.

I believe that my other two sets of great grandparents were born in Mexico, namely Abe and Nancy Fast, and Johan and Nancy Dyck.

My grandfather Cornelius Enns, the son of Jacob and Anna, was born in Mexico in 1938 and married Susana Fast, daughter of Abe and Nancy Fast, in 1958. Grandmother Susana was born in Mexico in 1937. They had a family of 15 children, including my father, John, and owned and operated a small store. In 1977, the family moved to Aylmer, Ontario, Canada. Grandfather Cornelius Enns became Bishop of the Old Colony Church in 1989. He passed away in 2003 of a heart attack. They have 46 grandchildren and a total of 77 descendants.

My grandfather Johan Dyck, the son of Johan and Nancy, was born in Mexico in 1926. He married Katherina Teichroeb, daughter of Heinrich and Agatha, in 1947. Grandmother Katherina was born in Mexico in 1925. They had 13 children, three of whom died at birth. Grandfather Johan passed away of prostate cancer in 1974, in Mexico. They lived a poor life, and often didn't have enough money. In 1980, Grandmother Dyck moved to southern Ontario with her six unmarried children. Today, Grandmother lives in Leamington, and has 118 descendants.

My father, John Enns, son of Cornelius and Susana, was born in Mexico in 1964, and came to Canada at the age of 13. He finished his schooling in Aylmer at 16 years of age. My mother, Agatha Dyck Enns, was born in Mexico in 1963, and came to Canada when she was 17. All of her schooling took place in Mexico.

My parents married in 1982, and lived in the Aylmer area where their first two children, Tina and Susie, were born. Then they moved to Leamington where Benny, Sara, and Esther were born. Sara died of Cerebral Palsy in 1992.

Our family attended the Old Colony Church until early in 1993. At that time we began to attend the Leamington Evangelical Mennonite Church. In 2002, we began to go to the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Leamington. We still live in the Leamington area, and my father became Pastor of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Leamington on July 20, 2003.



Following is a short history of Leamington's Bergthaler Mennonite Church. The first meeting took place on January 5, 2002, with 14 men present. Here it was decided that they should help the Mennonites who didn't go to church. Their goal was, and still is: to reach the Mennonites who do not go to church; to preach the Word of God which is written in the Bible; and not to rely on the traditions of man.

The Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church was asked, later in January, if they would help with leadership and guidance. We here wanted our church run the way theirs was run in Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Bergthalers agreed to help and on February 22 to 24, 2002, Bishop George Buhler and Pastor Rueben Klassen came to Leamington to bring us services and to get to know us. The church started Bible Studies and singing once weekly, alternating at each other's homes.

Starting in April, a Pastor from Saskatchewan came to Leamington once a month to bring services. Sunday morning services at UMEI were also started with some of the men taking turns bringing the message when there was no Pastor. Sunday School was also started at this time with one class and six students, ages two to nine years. In the beginning there were about fourteen young people ages 12 to 19.

Our first Communion was held in early June of 2002, with Bishop George Buhler. In late September, retired Pastor Peter and Katherine Enns came to Leamington for nine or ten months to be our Pastor couple. In October of 2002, the first Youth Leaders were elected: John and Agatha Enns, and Henry and Lena Berg. They started having Youth meetings early in November, alternating in each other's homes, with about 23 youth, ages 13 to 20 attending.

Baptism classes were started in January of 2003, and four young people were baptized in April of 2003. On February 23 of that year, 11 couples became the first members of the Leamington Bergthaler Mennonite Church.

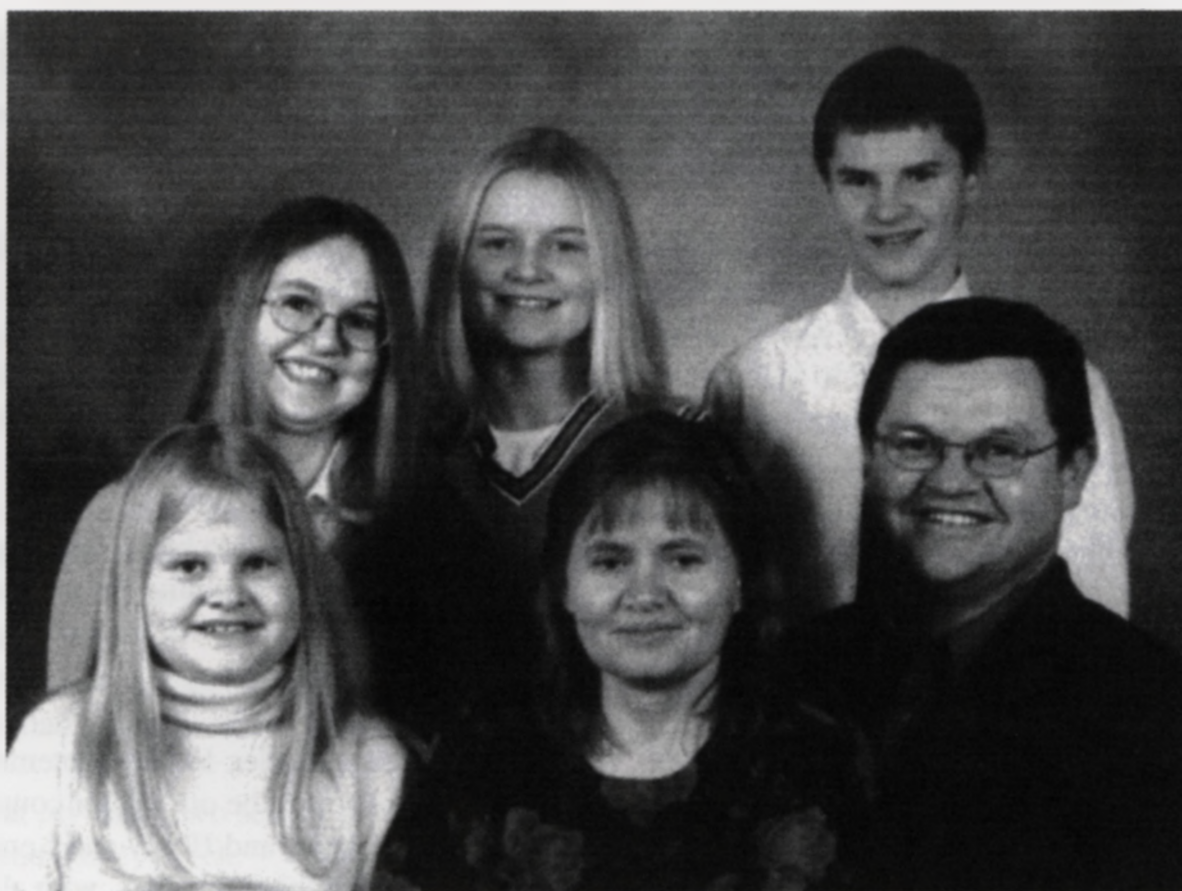
In April, 2003, two men were elected as the first Pastors of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Leamington: John and Agatha Enns, and Henry and Margaret Friesen. They were ordained as Ministers on July 20, 2003. On most Sundays, Pastor Henry Friesen brings a German message, and Pastor John Enns brings the English message. A Saskatchewan Pastor still comes monthly to give our Pastors a break.

The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Leamington has purchased a building which they will call home in January of 2005. The building is located on 413 Wilkinson Drive in Leamington. At the present time, we have 30 members, with about 28 families coming regularly. The youth leaders are Henry and Lena Berg, and Peter and Susan Letkeman. There are about 17 young people aged 13 to 20, and the Sunday School attendance has increased to four classes with a total of about 40 students ages three to 13.

The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Leamington hopes to continue to help the Mennonites in this community and to continue to grow in the Lord our God. Mark 16:15 says, And He said unto them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature".

*The writer was born in Aylmer, Ontario in 1983, and is a member of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Leamington. Tina speaks English and Low German fluently.*





**The Enns family**

John and Agatha with their children: Tina, Sue, Ben; Esther in front.



**Leamington Bergthaler Mennonite Church first transfer of membership in 2003.**

**L to r:** Pastor Rueben and Joyce Klassen, Frank and Anna Friesen, Peter and Susan Letkeman, Cornie and Justina Kroeker, Hein and Lena Berg, Bill and Tina Hiebert, David and Maria Sawatzky, John and Agatha Berg, Jacob and Agatha Sawatzky, John and Sara Unger, Pastor John and Agatha Enns, Pastor Peter and Katherine Ens. Absent are Pastor Henry and Margaret Friesen.



## 22) My Life

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*Mary Neudorf Peters*

I come from a family of seventeen children. My parents, Isaac and Katharina Teichroeb Neudorf were both born in Mexico, grew up there, and married in 1955. My parents lived in Mexico for the first five years of their marriage and had four children there. One child was stillborn. Because times were tough in Mexico and the economy was poor, they decided to move to Alberta, Canada in 1960. My dad heard that if he would work in Canada, he could make good money and this would help him to better raise his family.

They finally got to Alberta and soon found that it was not at all what they had imagined. They both became Canadian citizens which was a struggle in itself because of all the requirements needed. They suffered from cultural shock because suddenly things were different, no family or friends close by, the language was hard to understand and learn, the rules of society were not like in Mexico, and housing was poor. Finding employment was a challenge due to the language barrier; he was not a highly skilled person, and there was little money to do much of anything. When he did find work, it would be for a low wage and the boss would provide cheap housing for them. They could hardly make enough money for food. Mom suffered from depression and loneliness, she felt isolated at home by herself raising the children, with another one on the way. Dad worked from early in the morning to late in the evening, Because Mom didn't drive, it was hard for her to get out to learn about the community and what there was to offer to newcomers.

Contraceptives were against their religion; they believe that God wants them to have as many children as they can possibly handle. The winters were cold and she would have to go outside to get water and wood to heat the house. Chores were not as easy as they are now. After a few years in Alberta and three more children, they decided to take the advice from others to move to Ontario where it was easier to make a living. By this time they had seven children and the older ones helped Dad in the fields.

Education was never an important part of their lives; it was more important that the family worked together on the farm to learn how to make a living. My parents had four more children, and this is when I was born in 1966, in Leamington, Ontario. Life was somewhat easier in Ontario because there were other Mennonites that could support one other, and they could get to know each other in the Old Colony Mennonite Church.

When I was about four, my parents packed up and moved back to Mexico. That is where I went to school and made friends. We lived there for about three years and they decided that Ontario was more like home for them, so back to Ontario we went. We got to go to school; I thought it was fascinating to go to school on the bus. But we were teased a lot because of the traditional Mennonite dresses we wore, and our hair was up in braids. Our brothers had their hair cut very short and wore a different style of clothing. This was a very difficult time for us. During this time, my parents had three more children.

We moved to Seminole, Texas for about two years where I went to a Mennonite school and worked in the fields. Then we returned to Ontario for a short time. In 1979, when I had started grade 5, and was 13 years old, my parents decided to give it one more try in Mexico.

I was very disappointed that we had to give up our education. This was also the year that we lost a member of our family: my 19 year old brother, along with his friend, died in a car accident in December of 1979. We still returned to Ontario for the summer months to work in the fields until 1983.



Then my parents bought a house in the Tilbury, Ontario area. I was now 18 years old and had full time work in the fields or factory. I was now the oldest child at home because the others had married. In June of 1985, our family suffered another loss when my eight year old brother was struck by a car and died of head injuries.

After a few years, I decided to further my education. I started high school in 1988 and graduated in 1991. It was a decision that was hard for me to make, but I believed that it was a wise one even though it was difficult to go to a school with young teenagers. During this time, I met my future husband Jake Peters. He was born in Mexico and raised in Wheatley, Ontario from six years of age.

Jake and I were married in October of 1992 at the North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Jake had two children from a previous relationship and I had one child from a previous relationship. This was challenging, but the good Lord was always there to help and we had wonderful support from all over.

1992 was another year of sorrow when we lost a dear sister in a car accident. She was 19 years of age. Jake and I had a wonderful baby girl in 1993; our family seemed complete with two boys and two girls.

In June of 1996, Jake was diagnosed with colon cancer. With nine months of medical treatment he was cured. We moved into Tilbury in October of 2000 and decided to join the Tilbury Evangelical Mennonite Church which is very close to our home. We felt that this was what God was calling us to do. We are very much involved with the church and it has been spiritually fulfilling for us.

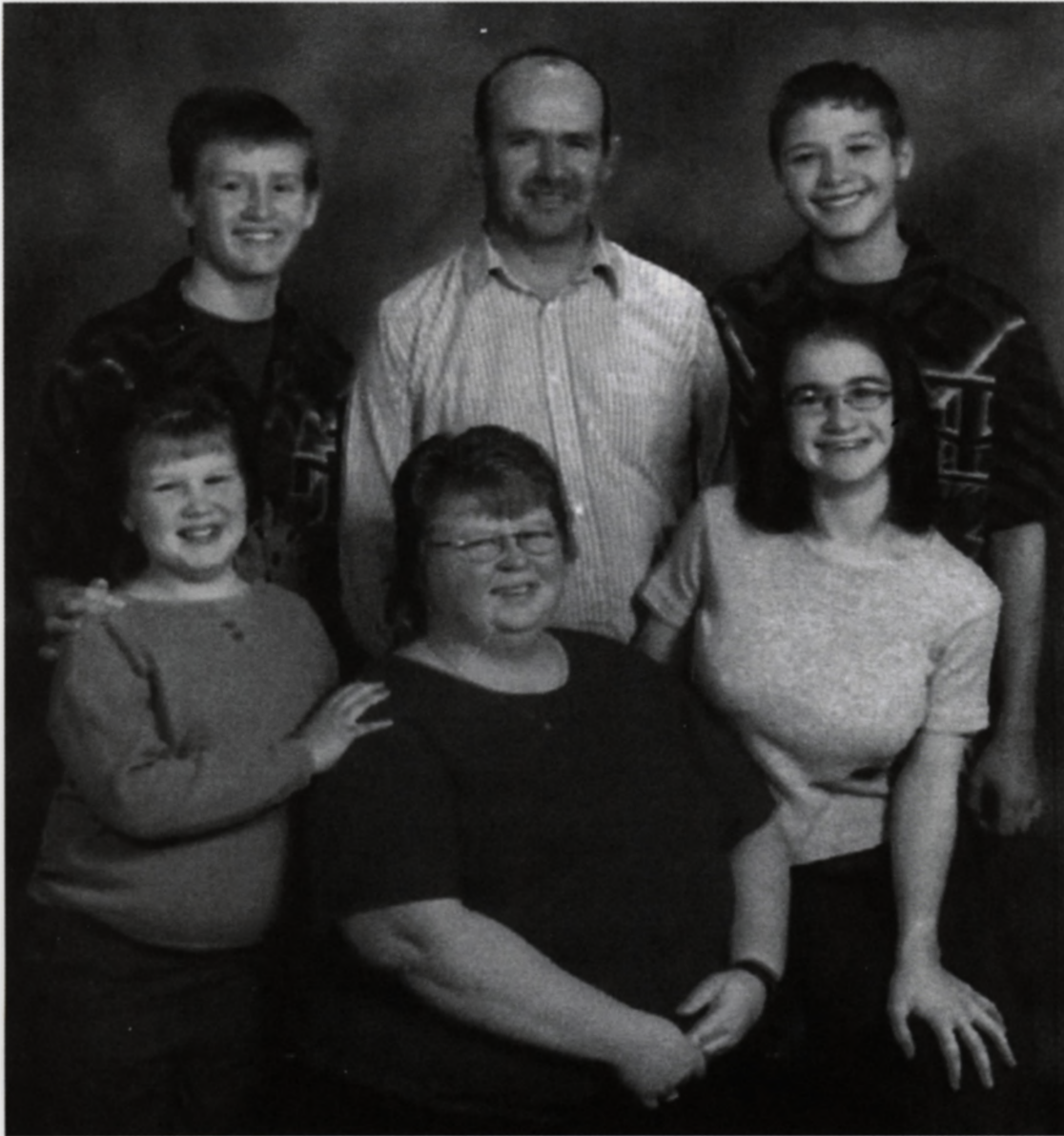
The children are almost grown up; our youngest is 11 years old. My father, who went through many struggles in his life, and worked hard to provide for his family was laid to rest in January of 2004. He had suffered a heart attack and died from a stroke two days later. His is missed by the family. I am enjoying my services at Mennonite Central Committee in Chatham, Ontario. This gives me an opportunity to help the Low German speaking Mennonite newcomers as we were helped.

Starting a new life in a new country is difficult; it is hard to adjust to all the new laws. But it is comforting to know that you have a place like MCC to go to for help and support. I believe it lessens cultural shock.

I am thankful for all the help that came our way through the years. May God Bless You All.

*The writer was born in Leamington, Ontario in 1966 and is a member of the Tilbury Evangelical Mennonite Church. Mary is fluent in the English and Low German languages.*





**The Peters family**

In the middle we see the parents Jake and Mary. To the left and right of mother are Crystal and Lizzie. Sons Cory and Jake Jr. stand beside their father.



## 23) Windsor Mennonite Fellowship: my Home Church

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*Julie Wieler Harder*

I was born in Saskatchewan. My parents' farm was 20 miles northeast of Rosthern, near Carlton, on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River. The prairies that I grew up on were not as flat as Essex County!

Tiefengrund Mennonite was my home church, where I was nurtured and taught, and baptized in 1977. As a General Conference church community of mostly Prussian Mennonites who had settled the land to farm, our strong German heritage was evident in our worship. We sang many German hymns, and I can still remember regular German services on Sunday mornings. Tiefengrund was also the home of Bishop Peter Regier, who invited leaders from Saskatchewan and Manitoba to his farm in 1902. Here they agreed to form the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, which later grew into Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

Let me fast forward past my high school years at Rosthern Junior College, my year in Germany with the Inter-Menno Trainee Program, the decision to attend Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas where I met my husband John, the births of our daughters Chani and Leah in the mid-80s, and our four years in Manhattan, Kansas where John finished a Master's degree in Statistics in 1992. When my parents heard that he was going to Detroit to interview at Ford Motor Company, my mom suggested, "You could live in Windsor!" I had never been to Windsor, but thought, "Well, maybe".

On our house-hunting trip we connected with Mathew and Becky Swora, who were church planting in Southfield, and were acquaintances of John's brother, Tom. We also spoke with Henry and Mary Janzen, and spent a day with a realtor in Windsor. We saw what we could and went home to Kansas. Our first offer on a house in Southfield fell through after some negotiating, and our second choice was 477 Lincoln in Windsor, the home of Arthur Boers and Lorna McDougall and family. Arthur was pastor of Windsor Mennonite Fellowship, but was soon leaving to take another pastorate. We moved in on Saturday, July 25, 1992.

We weren't even settled in but I wanted to connect with our new community, and was anxious to go to church on Sunday – if we didn't go then we'd have to wait for a whole week! I phoned Windsor Mennonite Fellowship, and as expected, I heard a recorded message that welcomed me, but didn't tell me what time the church service began. Hmmm. We decided we'd gamble on church starting at 10:00, found the address, and looked it up on a map. I remember that trip. We took Riverside to George, and then I watched the house numbers as John drove south. 1709 George, not a very typical looking Mennonite Church, but the sign identified it! It seemed very quiet, and we parked right next to the Janzen's blue Chevette. (We had a similar-looking blue Chevette in our garage at our new home! Was this already a sign of welcome?)

Inside the church we followed the hallway to the bright sun-lit sanctuary where Alfred Willms was half-way through his sermon. – the church service had begun at 9:30, and in we marched! I think Alfred even stopped to welcome us – he probably had a clue as to who we were since we'd bought their newly departed pastor's home.

After the service we stayed for coffee and met lots of wonderful people who are Windsor Mennonite Fellowship. Anne Trepanier, church chair, came over within the next week or two with some produce from her garden and helped to make us feel at home right from the start. I think Chani (7) and Leah (5) participated in the wonderful Vacation Bible School program already that first year.



The rest, as they say, is history. Chani and Leah were both baptized at WMF and John and I are very involved in committee work, worship leading, church cleaning, Sunday School and Bible Study teaching, etc. John's family is in Kansas and mine in Saskatchewan and Alberta, so WMF has become our family. The church community has welcomed us, cared for us, and nurtured us in our growth in Christ's love.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 3:11

*The writer was born in Rosthern, Saskatchewan in 1959, and is a member of Windsor Mennonite Fellowship.*



**Windsor Mennonite Fellowship**



## 24) Meat Canner - Leamington

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*Marlene Schmidtgall*

**W**hy would Leamington people spend four days canning meat when any canning factory could do the same in four hours?

It all started in 1999 with the opportunity to have the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Mobile Meat Canner make a stop in Leamington for a couple of days. The purpose was to can meat, a high source of protein, and send it to countries where there is a food shortage. This Meat Canner was a descendant of the canner that started operation in October, 1946, in Kansas, USA.

The Leamington Community canned meat without the Mobile Meat Canner in the late 1940s. One group slaughtered and hung the beef overnight, and then it was trucked to St. Catharines to be canned. Another group canned using glass jars and the MCC label In the Name of Christ, just like the one now, on one side, and the parents' address on the other side. One day a family received a letter from Tina asking, "Frank, are you my Brother?"

Some of the same volunteers that canned in the late 1940s were on the Committee and/or participated during canning days. Many volunteers have received food aid following World War II in Germany or in Mexico in the 1950s. This group will tell that they were grateful for the nourishment but the most important thing they received with the package was hope - there was someone out there that cared. The children of this group also were thankful and like to have the opportunity to give back. Most volunteers liked the hands-on way of being directly involved in easing someone's hunger. While doing something personally meaningful, this was also a good opportunity to socialize and meet new people with a common goal.

In 1999 the Meat Canner - Leamington Committee started with representatives from 10 Mennonite Churches: Leamington United Mennonite and North Leamington United Mennonite each had more than one representative, Meadow Brook Fellowship, Leamington Evangelical Mennonite, Evangelical Mennonite Mission, Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite, New Reinland, Reinland, Windsor Mennonite Fellowship, and Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Comber made up the committee. In 2004, Mennonite, Catholic, United, Lutheran, Mormon churches sent representatives to meetings, and 32 congregations from Essex and Kent Counties sent volunteers during canning days. The Committee was thrilled that they were working with a Community Group and not just with a Mennonite Group. Typically, there are 30-40 people attending five meetings per season. This group was very dedicated, and had a lot of good energy which came through in the meeting discussions, and got things done.

Some of the responsibilities that Committee members took on were Secretary, Volunteer Coordinator, Publicity, Inspection Liaison, Treasurer, First Aid Coordinator, Purchasing, Site Set Up, Site Tear Down, Electrical, Town of Leamington Liaison, Heinz Liaison, Dedication Ceremony Coordinator, Transport Coordinator, Housekeeping, Last Minute Detail Person, Church Bulletin Information Coordinator, Meal and Refreshments Coordinator, Thank you Coordinator, Lab Coats Washing, Security Coordinator, Lodging of Canners, Washing of Rags, Clean Up Crew (end of day), MCC Liaison, UMEI Student Representative, Immediate Past Chair, Assistant Chair, and Chair.

Representatives from the Committee kept their home Churches updated about decisions and also held Fundraising Events. The money raised covered everything from the cost of meat, cans, use of the canner, to



shipping the cans to their destination. Sample cans were quality tested at Heinz and the leftovers from these cans were frozen and used for fundraising meals. Other events have included breakfasts, film nights, Gospel Fests, Fashion and Talent Shows, in addition to events with guest speakers Kevin King of Material Resources Coordinator, MCC, Akron; Brenda Wagner, MCC East Coast Resource Generation; Peter Dyck, Author and MCC Volunteer. Fundraising Goals have always been met and any surpluses were saved for the next year.

This spring, the portable Meat Canner pulled into the Heinz Tomato Grading Station with trained Canner Operators staffed by MCC. Setting up the unit began on Saturday, along with meals and breaks, and everything was ready for canning by the afternoon. Sunday there was a dedication service which was held at Meadow Brook Fellowship, and has been held at Leamington United Mennonite Church, Faith Mennonite Church, St. Paul's Lutheran Church and St. Joseph's Catholic Church, and has also been part of an Ecumenical Palm Sunday Service. Tours have been available for Sunday Schools on Sunday morning, then for everyone else an hour before Dedication Service and during canning days. On Monday the fun (canning) began. Volunteers arrived for their shifts that ranged between 4 to 5 hours. They were put to work, had their photo taken, a few were asked to be part of media (TV, newspaper, radio) interviews and in the middle of all the activity, given a break and a meal. Good food and fellowship made the breaks a highlight. This project has been blessed by the quality of the volunteers. Over the years, things have not always run as smoothly as planned, and problems developed such as a broken pump, and labeling room bottlenecks that put us back time-wise. Many volunteers have immediately signed up for another shift. Some individuals come eagerly when called at the last minute and asked to help. When all the meat had been canned, the next step was to tear down the unit and the unit headed to Guelph, Ontario, the next stop.

Being a part of this project has been a personal growth experience. Meeting new people and watching how they handle the various situations that get thrown at them during canning and planning has been a learning lesson. The Committee, as a whole, was outspoken, which was challenging at times, but in the long run was appreciated because the goal that everyone shared was to have a good year. Other opportunities were to try new things and be creative while fundraising.

A couple of unexpected rewards for me personally, was the support from the group when my father, Alex Schmidtgal, died in April of 2003. And hearing personal stories about life after World War II in Germany, gave me a greater insight into my mother's life at that time. Mom, Erika Dyck Schmidtgal, died in April of 1993. Seeing two of my aunts as active members of the Committee and watching them get things done, proved to me that being a role model never ends.

The first two years, my responsibilities on the Committee were Fundraising and Treasurer, then the next five years as Chair. It takes many people working together to make this project run smoothly.

Why are we canning for four days in Leamington? We want people who receive the cans to know that individuals have dedicated their time and money to show that they care. We as Committee Members and Volunteers often reflect on who is benefiting more - we, the volunteers, or the recipients of the cans.

Together We Can.

*The writer was born in Leamington in 1957, and is a member of Leamington United Mennonite Church. Marlene speaks German and English fluently.*





**Labeling Trailer, 2002:** Left: John Woelk, \_\_\_\_, Ed Brown, \_\_\_\_, Bill Martens.  
Right: Jake Tiessen, Hildegard Fiss, Elsie Kroeker, Helen Brown, Jutta Rahn.



**Food for relief: MCC label**



## 25) We have been Blessed

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*Isaac Bergen*

I was born in Mexico, grew up and spent my childhood years there. In 1979, at the age of 17 years, I came to Canada. I was part of a large family of 14: four girls and ten boys. One older sister was living in Ontario before we moved here. My father had lost his farm in Mexico due to poor management, and needed to look for another way to provide for his family. The decision was made to move to Ontario and see what kind of work would be available for us there. We traveled in a pickup truck and there were 11 children still at home, so we were a little bit crowded on our trip.

For the first two months we handpicked tomatoes and then I was hired at Olsonite in Tilbury in October of the same year. I worked with plastic molding machines; toilet seats were the finished product. In June of 1987 I had an accident at work. I was polishing a mold, and a faulty switch was triggered and the mold came down and crushed my lower right arm. I was off work for five months and returned in November. I worked there for a total of 22 years. The factory closed its doors in 2001. Currently I'm employed at Centoco Plastics in Windsor in the same line of work.

When we came to Ontario we attended the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Wheatley where I stayed for 20 years. Most of my family members left that church long before I did, and attended various churches in the Leamington area.

In 1980, I received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour and was baptized in 1981. I married Anna Dyck in August of 1981, and we have been blessed with six lovely children: three boys, and three girls, ranging in ages from two years, to twenty-two years.

I served as a *Vorsänger* (songleader) for 10 years, and as treasurer for four years at the Old Colony Church. My wife and I were also actively involved in the private school for ten years.

Disapproval of some of the teaching in the church and school caused us to question where the church was headed. Our desire is to live out true Biblical teaching. We left the Old Colony Church in 1999. We are now attending the Pilgrim Church in Comber where I was ordained as deacon in February of 2004.

For several years we rented the Seventh Day Adventist building in Leamington for worship services. Our desire was to have a building of our own and the opportunity came up to purchase the Catholic Church in Comber. In June of 2005 we (the Pilgrim Church) started meeting there on Sunday mornings for church services and on Wednesday evenings for Bible Study.

*The writer was born in Mexico in 1961, and is a member of the Pilgrim Church in Comber. Isaac speaks English and Low German fluently.*





**The Bergen family**

**Back, L to r:** Susan, Billy, Frank, Evalina.

**Front, L to r:** Caleb, mother Anna, Adrianna, father Isaac.

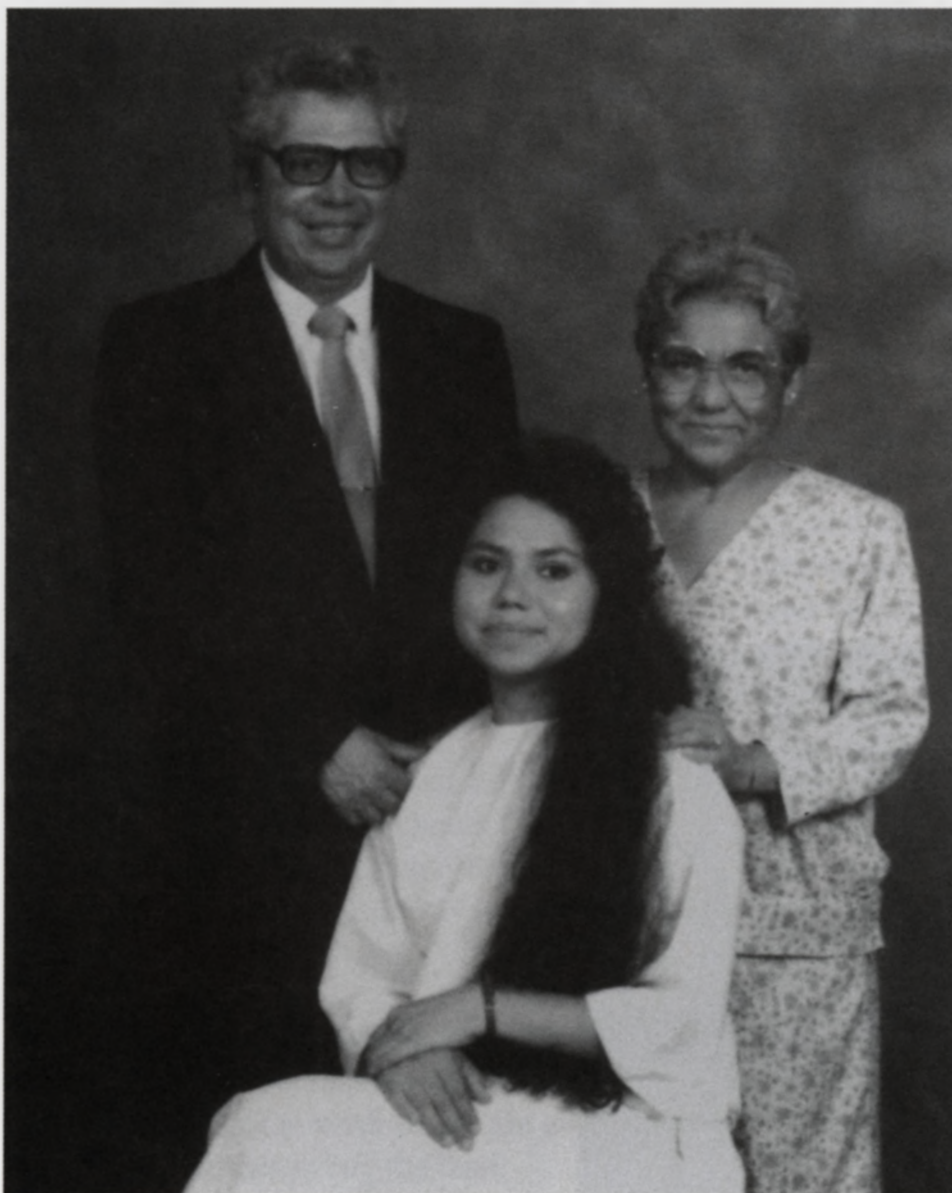


## 26) Arriving in Canada

*Consuelo Molina Guzman*

**W**e arrived in the city of Windsor at 4 P.M. on February 12, 1986. There were two people waiting for us at the airport: Abe Konrad and George Langeman. I didn't know them at the time, and didn't speak the English language, but with sign language we were able to communicate. They took us to a Mr. Flaming's house, and we lived there for three months. In May of the same year, we rented a house in downtown Leamington on Askew Street.

I was recommended as a seamstress in the fabric store owned by Mr. Paterson. At that time, it was the only fabric store in Leamington. When Mr. Paterson sold the store, I had no job, however, the members of the North Leamington Mennonite Church brought me material to sew for them in my home. Helga Enns and Darlene Martens, who were the Sunday School teachers, collected money and bought me a modern sewing machine, and a widowed member gave me his late wife's regular sewing machine, as well. With these great gifts I was able to work day and night at home.



**Domingo, daughter Carol, and Consuelo Guzman.**

Time passed and Mrs. Santos, who was custodian of NLUMC resigned from her work and I was asked by Marie Dick and Agnes Langeman if I would be interested in taking Mrs. Santos position. I accepted, and with great pleasure I spent 15 years working at the church.

Then, at 77 years of age, I realized that I was not getting any younger! The work became very difficult for me, and I retired from this job. At the present time, I'm retired and enjoying life at home. I am very pleased with my work for the church, and for it's members.

*The writer was born in 1926 in San Salvador, El Salvador, and is a member of North Leamington United Mennonite Church. Consuelo is fluent in English and Spanish.*



## 27) We Are Thankful for Our Church

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*Johan K. Bartsch*

I, John, and my wife Susanna, came to Chatham, Ontario on February 18 of 2000. Firstly, we lived at the Jake Bartsch's place for two months. Following this, I worked building greenhouses with my brother Jake in Chatham for three months. Then we started working on a Chatham farm owned by the Bradys, getting ready for planting tomatoes and tobacco. Susanna and I had five children at that time: three boys and two girls. Later we were blessed with three more boys, all born in the Chatham Public General Hospital, bringing our children to a total of eight.

When the tomato season was over, I started working on DeBrower's pig farm in Blenheim. After five months, I began work for Bob Chinnick, who has a cash crop farm in Chatham. I stayed here for three years.

At about that time, my wife Susanna became sick with Leukemia and she needed to spend from September 7, until October 5 in the London Hospital. Here she underwent Chemotherapy treatments. When she went into remission, she was supposed to have a bone marrow transplant, but she decided against it, and, in ten months time, the Leukemia returned. She needed to spend another month in the hospital. Then Susanna decided to go on natural medication. The doctors are very surprised and we are very pleased that her health has improved. She is doing well.

I learned to speak the English language on the farm and during the long times spent in hospital. We go to the Dresden Old Colony Mennonite Church where Peter Friesen of Leamington is pastor. I am currently president of Church Council, and we are very grateful to our church for supporting Susanna and me through this very difficult situation.

Since I wrote this story, my wife Susanna left this earth to be with her Saviour. My children and I have moved to a new house, and I was recently married to Susanna Reddekopp.

*The writer was born in Mexico in 1974 and has recently become a Pastor in the Dresden Old Colony Mennonite Church. John speaks Low German and English.*



**Johan at work on the farm.**



## 28) It Took a Lot of Prayer and Courage

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*Eva Enns*

**I** was born to George and Nely Enns in Chatham, Ontario. My parents were both born in Mexico. My father is one of eight siblings; my mother has five. I have two sisters and two brothers.

In July of 1986 my parents took the bus from El Paso, Texas, to Detroit. They arrived in Detroit on the evening of August 1, 1986. From there my Uncles Peter Neustaeter and Jake Friesen came to pick them up from the bus stop. This was the first time they had ever made a trip to Ontario.

They had never made such a long journey before. They arrived empty handed, nothing to start off with; all they owned was a little bit of clothing. They settled in Leamington, but didn't really plan to stay there, and soon moved to Blenheim. My father started work on a farm since he had farming experience in Mexico. My mother stayed home to be a full time mother.

It was difficult learning the language; they knew no English at all. Father learned some English on the farm where he worked, and Mother went to Harwich Raleigh Public School with us where a lady there helped her. From there she went to a school in Chatham at the MCC office. They had a daycare there, and she could leave us there when she went to classes.

We girls went to school in the early 1990s in Blenheim and there we had German classmates who helped us learn the English language. If we were in need of help that the teacher couldn't help us with, a German lady who worked there would help students like us. After several years there, our parents decided that they would prefer having us in a private school where we were among our own people. And that is where we enjoyed the rest of our school years before we graduated.

Here in Canada we get some of the holidays that the English people get. On celebrations like Christmas, Easter, Good Friday, and a few others like Christmas Eve, very few people work. This is a free country where people can choose which days they want to work, and many even work on Sunday, the Lord's Day, but they don't take it seriously anymore.

This land is full of beautiful scenic parks and tourist places. I've been on many field trips, for example: Spencer Gorge, Rock Glen Falls, Black Creek, Casa Loma, and Niagara Falls, to name just a few.

A congregation has been started here in Blenheim, Ontario, in 2002. The congregation is expanding so they will have to start their own church. They had several meetings at one of the Brothers in the Lord's place. He is a member of the Old Colony Mennonite Church. After several meetings, they agreed to rent a hall in Blenheim where they would have church services for a few months to see if it would be possible to start their own congregation.

In the beginning, there were about 30 couples who attended every Sunday. After many months of services in the hall, they had another meeting, where they decided that it would be best if they bought their own land to build on. They got to work on it right away. It took some time to do all the legal work and get the legal documents in order to buy the land.



About a year later, they finally had everything in place. Now they needed to pay for the land and start on the building. It took a lot of prayer and courage before they could finally stand on solid ground and where help from the other congregations was no longer needed.

It will be worth it all when we have our own building. Now, just after a few months of service, they started a Sunday School for children where many attend, since they don't enjoy sitting still in church. They even had a few Christmas and Easter programs.

Today, after two years, the attendance has increased greatly. We have not yet started to build because we still have a debt to pay. The Lord willing, within the next few years we will be able to start. Everyone has been a great help in recognizing God's leading in this undertaking.

*The writer was born in Chatham in 1988, and is a member of the Blenheim Old Colony Mennonite Church.*



**1986 photo: the Enns family's first Canadian home located at Point Pelee, Ontario.**

**L to r: Margaret Enns, Nely Enns holding baby Anne, Ruben and little Helen Enns.**



## 29) In Memory of Mom/Oma

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*The Anna and Nick Wiens children*

**A**nna Reimer Wiens, the fifth of eleven children, was born May 3, 1901 in Wiesenfeld, Ukraine to Jacob and Helena Neufeld Reimer. Following attacks and murders by anarchists, the Wiesenfelder abandoned their village and made the 240 km trip to Waldheim, Molotschna.

In 1920, Mother traveled by train from Waldheim to Halbstadt (Muntau) to be treated for a ruptured appendix. Food was scarce; grain was exchanged for the train ticket. Fortunately, she came under the treatment of Dr. Tavonius. At the time, Dr. Tavonius could offer our mother little hope for a complete recovery, and he felt that she would likely not be able to have children. Following a lengthy stay at the Molochansk hospital, Mother was released. Several days later, Dr. Tavonius inquired whether the little girl he had treated for a ruptured appendix had died in her home, or whether she had died on the way home from the hospital.

On June 11, 2003, at the age of 102, our mother, the "little girl" died and was buried in Leamington, Ontario, Canada, next to her husband Nickolai. In her lifetime she married, came to Canada in 1925, and raised 8 children. Dr. Tavonius and the Molochansk hospital never sent a bill for the medical services rendered.

At present, the dedicated staff of the Molochansk hospital continues to serve the people who live in the area. The needs for medical equipment are great. Hospital administrators and doctors become discouraged with the lack of support from government levels.

The Wiens family decided to raise funds in order to alleviate some of this need for medical equipment. They undertook this project as a memorial to Dr. Erich Tavonius.

Son Harold reports: "The response to this project was good, and we raised about 10,000 dollars. However, just as the funds were coming in, a family from Leamington donated a large sum of money, and an ambulance was purchased immediately."

This was actually very good news because the hospital had two pressing needs: an ambulance to replace the one which no longer ran, and an emergency room in dire need of upgrading. FOMCU - Friends of the Mennonite Center, Ukraine - an offshoot of MCC and the organizations through which we worked, approached us and asked whether the funds we had raised could be used to upgrade the emergency room.

A few weeks ago in Ukraine, Diana and I (Harold) viewed the newly renovated facility and were completely overwhelmed by what we saw: an ambulance ramp and roof have been built, and properly functioning emergency doors have been installed. The area has been electrically rewired with new lighting. The plumbing has been upgraded to provide sanitary toilets (not that common in Ukraine). They now have hot water for sinks and showers. The walls have been changed and floors replaced. The facility was painted and some furnishings and a refrigerator were purchased.

Upon our visit, the staff greeted us with hugs. They wear clean uniforms, take pride in their work, and demonstrate a high level of morale. They offered us tea and coffee, cookies and chocolates.



On the wall is a plaque upon which is written in English and Ukrainian:

**To honour Anna Reimer Wiens (1901-2003)  
Emergency rooms refurbished  
by Wiens family Canada 2004**

All of these renovations were accomplished with 7,000 dollars, US. However, these changes are merely a part of a larger, ongoing story. FOMCU, the organization through which we worked, and which supervised this construction, provide funds for various medical, educational, and social needs. They are also the same organization that supports the work of several local Christian Churches. This fact is not lost on the Ukrainian people. These small churches have established Sunday Schools, Awana programs for children, and summer camp ministries. Last summer two of the churches in existence only a few years, baptized 18 people. Although supported by Mennonites, these churches, to the best of my knowledge, do not identify themselves with any particular Christian denomination.

Last year, when we began this fundraising project, there were times when I thought that the whole idea would not amount to much. Nevertheless, with Diana's encouragement we continued, and today I see this effort as a small piece of a much larger puzzle. Can you imagine how the medical and social assistance offered to the people of this area - including the work we have supported - provided credibility to the Christian witness of the people of these churches?

Molochansk still resembles a disaster area. Positive changes are evident, however, and the term Mennonite is gaining respectability. The town has a large new vertical sign. On one side is written Molochansk, and on the other, in equally large letters, is written the town's former name: Halbstadt. This town was the center of Mennonite life when our ancestors lived there.

I snuck into the auditorium of the old Halbstadt *Zentralschule* (high school) that Gerhard Reimer of Kingsville and probably a few other relatives attended. I also snuck into the old Willms house and saw the dining room, large enough to seat 200 guests. I managed to get a photograph. I hope the ghosts of the past will understand.

If Christian organizations continue to improve the lot of the people in this part of the world, Christianity will be seen in a different light and the Christian witness will continue to gain credibility.

We do not continue these efforts for the purpose of placing plaques in memory of dead relatives. Rather, we want to continue to support the witness of Christian people in the former homeland of our parents and grandparents. As Doctor Paul Toews stated, perhaps the greatest contribution of Mennonites to the people of the Ukraine is still ahead of us. Perhaps these contributions are a way for us to remember our ancestors and to forgive the wrongs committed against them.

*Jake Wiens, born 1929 in Killarney, Manitoba, is a member of Meadow Brook Fellowship, Leamington, Ontario. The Wiens family includes Nettie and Abe Dyck, Irene and Alden Clark, Jake and Louise, John and Gertrude, Harry and Eva, Anne and Harvey Neufeldt, Harold, the writer of this account, and Diana, 24 grandchildren, and 56 great grandchildren.*





**Anna and Nickolai Wiens**

**Plaques honouring Leamington donors**













