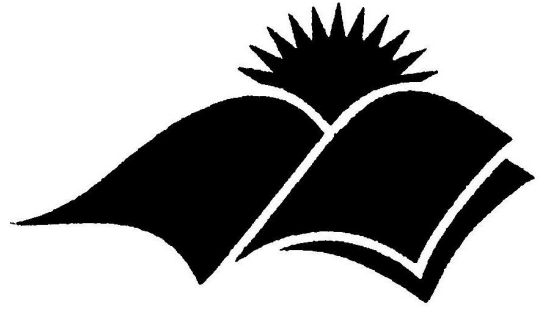


Historian



Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association

31 Pickwick Drive, Leamington, Ontario, N8H 4T5

(519) 322-0456 www.ekmha.ca info@ekmha.ca

Hours are 9:00 a.m. until 12 noon, Monday to Friday, holidays excluded

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Edited by Jill Nicholson

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Spanish Flu and the Windsor-Essex Region

By Jill Nicholson

Over the past year, coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic has dominated the media. Many of us have closely followed the daily reports of cases, vaccine approvals and future outlook. A look back at another pandemic, the Spanish Flu outbreak in 1918 and 1919, provides some interesting comparisons. A look at the *Border Cities Star* in the Fall of 1918 shows the impact of the influenza on the local citizens.

Regular updates on the number of cases and death were regularly listed on page three of the paper. It was noted in the October 22 edition that the situation in the *Border Cities* was getting worse with 63 cases. The *Border Branch* of the Ontario Emergency Voluntary Health Auxiliary posted a variety of tips to prevent and mitigate influenza. Some sound very familiar to us today: keep your children in their own yard; keep off the streetcar; do not cough or sneeze in another person's face; if you have any symptoms, see a physician.

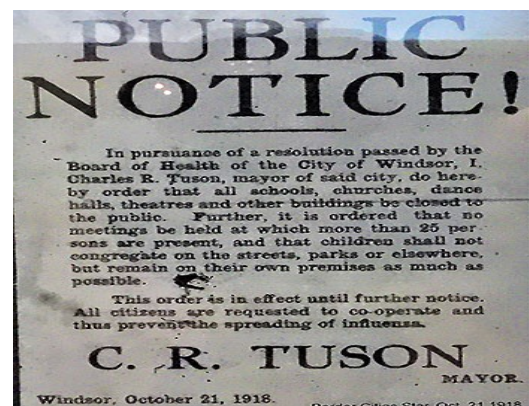
Some events and activities were too temporarily stopped or limited because of the Spanish Flu. Victory loan drives were postponed. The Bell Telephone Company put an advertisement in the October 17 edition to inform the community that a number of its staff had succumbed to the flu which affected telephone service. In addition, call numbers had increased because more people were home ill which slowed service. Bell asked its customers to use the telephone only when absolutely necessary to keep the lines open for emergencies.

A short article indicated that the diphtheria anti-toxin could be a good treatment for the Spanish flu.

Businesses pivoted to provide products to prevent influenza. The Riga Purgative Water Company in Montreal listed measures to be taken in order to prevent it and put a stop to its ravages – which included its purgative water. The White Clover Bakery

in Sandwich promoted its wholesome food to help prevent the Spanish Flu. The Preferred Accident Insurance Company informed its customers that disability from the flu or any other illness was fully covered by its policies.

A review of the *Leamington Post and News* in 1918 reveals little mention of the Spanish Flu. There are few articles on the effects of the Flu on Leamington and area residents. People would expect to get more detailed coverage in larger publications such as the *Border Cities Star*.



In the November 3, 1918 edition of the *Leamington Post*, there are two short articles on the Spanish Flu.

A returned soldier, Roy W. Raymond, was a victim of the Spanish flu which then developed into pneumonia. He did not bring the flu back with him since he was discharged in 1917 being medically unfit for further service. He left behind a wife and four children. The Leamington area was also under lockdown for a two week period at the end of October and the beginning of November 1918. Dr. Reid, the Medical Officer of Health, ordered closed churches, theatres, pool halls, etc. He had not closed the schools, but the School Boards decided to close them. The High School was closed for a week, but the public school was closed for two weeks.

Memories of Agnes Driedger (nee Dick) of her First Years in Canada

Written by her daughter, Elfrieda Driedger

My mother, Agnes, arrived in Waterloo, Ontario July 19, 1924 at the age of 22. This was six years after the first World War and just a few years after having experienced Civil War and Revolution, much political and social unrest, and famine in Russia. Arriving in Canada gave a feeling of freedom, hope, and a want to start a new life.

The first four months were spent with Mennonite people who lived on a farm in the Elmira area. Here Agnes helped with the house and garden chores and milking cows. Some of the first impressions were the well-laden table with the most delicious foods. She remembers the many pieces that were baked every week and the hearty breakfasts which included home fries, sausage, pies as well as porridge and bread. It was good to have enough to eat after having had so little the past few years, especially to have bread again.

In November, Agnes found employment doing housework for a family in Waterloo. Fortunately these people could speak some German, but their children spoke English. So with trial and error, she soon learned a new language. There were also many other new things to learn in this new country. Living in the city was new. Waterloo at the time had a street car. Learning to commute by streetcar while unable to speak English was a challenge. Learning to cook new foods was another new thing. She earned three dollars a week plus room and board at her first job. Eventually she worked for another family and received an increase in pay. After about a year and a half of working, she had earned enough to pay off her travel debt (Reiseschuld) to this country. Then she saved and bought a new set of clothes including a stylish coat and hat.

In June of 1926, Agnes travelled to Pelee Island to visit her sister. While there, she met her future husband, Jacob Driedger. Her first impression of Pelee Island was the poor and rather primitive housing that people lived in as compared to the city of Kitchener where there was running water and electricity. Her sister's family as well as other Mennonite immigrant families would gather Sunday afternoons to have good times. They usually enjoyed much singing and music-making

on the few instruments they had, like the guitar and violin. A local teacher, Mr. Pegg, had a small mission hall which he had offered to this small group of Mennonites to use for their Sunday services. Agnes noticed that the people were a very close knit fellowship. She enjoyed the island so she decided to stay. She found employment with a family of a wealthy fisherman whose wife was sick and needed help.

In May of 1927, Agnes married Jacob Driedger. They were married in Mr. Pegg's small mission hall. All of the Mennonites from the Island were invited. This was the first wedding for them on the Island so everyone was excited. Bishop Jacob Janzen came from Kitchener to perform the ceremony. It was a rainy day but this didn't dampen their enthusiasm. They drove to the church in a car, a grey Dart of older vintage. The bride was dressed in traditional white. The dress had been made by a friend in Kitchener. The groom had gone to Sandusky, Ohio to buy a suit for the occasion. Yes, it was a memorable occasion.

In the fall of 1927, the Driedgers moved to the mainland to a farm in Gosfield Township. They were one of the first Mennonites to live in the area■

Oak Street Leaves March 1995 p. 15



Agnes and Jacob P. Driedger on their wedding day

My parents, David Ediger and Anna Wiens, were born in the Crimea: Father in 1881 and Mother in 1882. My siblings were Maria, Anna, Louise, David, Helena, Jacob and Elsie. My first memory is of attending a worship service of our Millerovo Mennonite Brethren congregation, held in private homes with my parents in about 1925.

I was the youngest child, born in 1922 in Millerovo, Russia; my siblings and I all managed to leave Russia and today I am the only sibling still living.

By 1929, the communists had taken over Mom's kitchen. They used it to cook for large crews, so we moved to Einlage on the west side of the Dnjepr River. Here I attended school for seven years with teachers Mr. Kohler, Mr. Janzen, Mr. Wiebe and Mr. Schartner. Most students were Mennonite; we took one Russian language class daily. Our teacher had us memorize many German language poems. Father worked in a collective office and Mother stayed home with my siblings. We owned the house we lived in; a long building with a two acre lot with a large garden. Our area had a new electrical system: as a result the original old town of Einlage was under water. Church services were not allowed.

In 1936, the Russian picked my Dad in Einlage and took him to Dnepropetrowsk; he was imprisoned there for three years. Mother was allowed to visit him on a monthly basis and supplied him with food and clothing. During these visits, she stayed nearby for a night. During one visit, Dad told her that he was going to give in and sign the paper which blamed him for a crime he hadn't committed. When Mother came the following month they told her that she could not see him. Next month she received the same answer and discovered that Dad had died during the previous month, in 1939. No funeral service was held; he was buried in a mass grave. Mother was 57 at the time and I was 14.

One of my brothers worked at the electrical station which was in the process of being built, and my sister was employed at the restaurant for workers. I needed to cross the river to work at the Saporozhye steel

factory where I repaired electric motors. We had classes during the mornings. The job paid little; mother was home and Helena and Louise had already married in Einlage.

On June 21, 1941, the war started. On Monday morning, August 18 of that year, I went to work. That afternoon, on my way home, the Russians stopped me half way across the bridge (Platina) because the German army was in Einlage already. Five days later, I decided to swim across the Dnjepr River. It was a 15 minute walk across the bridge and a 45 minute swim across the river. I put my documents and my small amount of cash under my cap, kept my head up and swam with the current to the island; on the way, I saved a fully dress drunken man from drowning. My friend Paul Rempel had crossed before me.

Our family lived on what our garden produced. In 1937, brother David (we called him Victor because Dad had the same name) was taken away at night. After three days, Mom went to check the jail; he wasn't there. Later we heard through the Red Cross that he had died of stomach problems in 1942. We stayed until the Russians came in October 1943. I had gotten work in the previous year as a German-Russian translator in Dnepropetrowsk in a garage where I stayed until 1945.

Mom and my siblings were taken to Poland. I went to Odessa, Romania, Hungary and Munich where I worked in a stove factory. The the boss said, "You have to return to Russia". The Russians were looking for their people. But I stayed in Munich. I had a bicycle and I exchanged clothing for food. In 1946, the first transport of our people went to Paraguay, I was in a refugee camp in Munich where a Neufeld from Holland came looking for people to go there. We went as far as the border but they didn't let us in because they already had more refugees than they could support. One evening, the Russians were there. We were told to speak only Low German. All 314 of us got into a train and went back to the camp in Munich, Germany. In 1946, MCC with Peter Dyck and C.F. Klassen came. We moved to Backnang near Stuttgart.

In 1947, Maria Peters, whom I had met in Munich, and I were married in the Backnang Sports Hall by Rev. Penner. At the reception, we ate a doughnut with an onion centre. This was to demonstrate what life could be like, they said.

On September 1, 1948, we sailed for Canada on the freighter General Stewart. The crossing took seven days; we needed to spend the night of September 7 in Halifax with all windows covered. Then the train took us to Vineland, Ontario. Maria's mother had left ahead of us and was already at her sister's in Vineland. Dick Dick, who lived on a tomato farm between Leamington and Wheatley took us in. It was September and we lived upstairs in their house. I got greenhouse work at Jacob Neufelds, parents of Eleanor, on Highway #3 west of Leamington, so we moved into a renovated tobacco kiln there. I received \$100 per month. We attended and became members of the Mennonite Church on Oak Street.

In September of 1952, I got work at the newly unionized Heinz Company where I had a wonderful boss named Fin Randall. In 1953 we built a new home on Hodgins Street. Maria worked with other Mennonite women in Harry Branton's packing shed at the railroad near Morse Growers. The forelady was Clara Kornelsen. In 1984, after 32 years, I retired from H. J. Heinz.

Our oldest child was born in Germany, the following two in Canada. Our daughter lost her life in a skiing accident in 1985 and my wife Maria died in 2002. Today I live in an apartment. I have two sons and three grandchildren who gladly assist me whenever I need help■

As told to Astrid Koop, 2008.



Old Einlage Bridge over
the Dnjenr River

EKMHA Dneproges Dam
Construction Postcard
Collection

A Festive Day at Grandmother's

By *Katjuscha Dyck Thiessen*

Grandmother was the soul of the family. No festivity or birthday passed where the whole family with children and children's' children were not gathered in her house. Near the drawing room where the good furniture and carpets were, was the "Middle Room" as it was called by everyone, a comfortable large room "living room" as one would say now. This was the room in which everyone most liked to congregate. Here stood the piano too.

At that time children were raised entirely differently from now, they were not allowed to disturb the adults while visiting. In summer we children played outside, watched by nursemaids, but in winter the whole troop had to stay in Grandmother's bedroom. This room was still partly furnished with old furniture such as a wooden sleeping bench with a cover. In the daytime it served as a bench for sitting, at night the cover was opened and inside lay pillows and feather beds for sleeping. Grandmother liked to sleep in this sleeping bench as was her old habit. She also had a fine bed with a white bedspread and many pillows with lace pillowcases. A masonry built-in glass cupboard for dishes rarely used was also in this room. In the middle of the room stood a table and around this we children sat and stood and spent our time with those couple of toys and books that were for us. It was a noisy place because there were not less than fifteen to eighteen children there. The very small children sat on the sleeping bench on the lap of the nursemaids; the older ones crawled on the floor and were teased by older ones so that they yelled continually. The children who could read brought out the book about the witch "Die Krabeltasche", The Crawling Pocket (or bag). That was so scary!! When this was finished Grandmother's large (Luther) Bible with numerous pictures (by famous painters) was next in line. (I now own this Bible) The old testament was so interesting with the departure out of Egypt through the desert with the many snakes, Daniel in the Lions den, etc. The time seemed very long; in the end we listened for the adults going into the dining room for supper. As soon as that moment arrived Ker Huebert crept unnoticed into the dining room where at Christmas the boxes of chocolates and confections stood on the little table. The naughty rascal stuffed his pockets full and when the rest of us came the best was gone. In the dining

room stood a long long table where, after Grandfather's death, the oldest son and son-in-law had the right to sit at the head end. That was my uncle Huebert. Against the wall sat the uncles according to age: Jasch Dyck, Jasch Wiebe, Heinrich Janz, Grandmother and Aunt Paula at the lowest end. The wives of my uncles sat opposite them. There was roast duck with stuffing, potatoes with clear fat, canned watermelon and pumpkin pickles. For dessert, snowballs with vanilla sauce.

The adults ate long and a lot and conversed without end, at least so it seemed to us children. Finally they stood up and went into the Middle Room to play music. Now this was the time when the children rushed into the dining room to the table, and the cold roast duck with potatoes and cold gravy tasted splendid. Most times I was soon satisfied, for out of the Middle Room rang wonderful tones, and because I was a lover of music from an early age, I crept very softly to my Mama and could not get enough of music. There was Aunt Tina Dyck, a wonderful pianist and Huebert's Jasch played "Ase's Death" by Grieg and "Intermezzo" by Mascagni on the cello. These lovely family feasts continued until the Revolution in 1917 when we all had to flee (to the Crimea) until the German troops took over the Ukraine in 1918 and for a short time restored order. We returned to our homes but when the robber band of Machno came, Grandmother finally had to leave her home and knock around here and there wherever she found lodging. Never did we see Grandmother despondent in this time of horror, she believed firmly in God's guidance and comforted us. She always found things to do and viewed work as a blessing for the people. Her prayer was she did not want to lie helpless on a bed for long. Her prayer was heard. After a couple of days of illness in 1922 her soul glided over to the wonderland that is prepared for those who believe■

Written by Katjuscha Dyck Thiessen (cousin to Cornelius (Ker) Huebert, Victor Huebert's father) about their grandmother (Katharina Dyck who married Henry Huebert, Victor's grandfather). Katjuscha was born to Abram Dyck, Katharina's brother. She later married Franz Thiessen and lived in Chilliwack, B.C. where she died in 1995.

This article was originally written in German, translator unknown.

Altona, Manitoba

*By Lauren Nicholson,
Summer 2020 Student*

Altona was a Mennonite settlement founded in 1895 in southern Manitoba and is the seat of the Rhineland municipality that held a population of 3,434 at its height. The settlement featured six different congregations: the Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church, the Altona Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church, the Altona Mennonite Church, the Altona Reinlander Church, the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church and the South Park Mennonite Brethren Church. Altona was dependent on diversified farming production. Crops, like sugar beets, corn, sunflowers, and grains were crucial to the area. They were also known for quality poultry flocks, registered herds of Shorthorn, and Holstein cattle. Prominent local industries in the 1950s were sunflower oil, The Altona Farm Machine Shop that produced custom farm machinery and attachments, D.W. Friessen & Sons Ltd, and much more. Service industries in the 1950s also included four grocery stores, one druggist, two barbers, two jewellers, three shoe repair shops, two clothing shops, two restaurants, one theatre, one dairy, etc.



Mennonite Settlement Monument and Altona Centennial Monument

One of the area's most prominent churches was the Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church and began its service in 1885 when the Chortitza ministers from the Manitoba Mennonite East Reserve held service in the school in Alt Altona. This group became Bergthaler, led by Johann Funk. In 1895, services held at a school built in Altona, but a church building was erected at Hochstadt outside of town, as was the custom. The Mennonite Educational Institute moved to Altona, and services were regularly held there in 1908. The church

was able to serve those from Alt Bergthal, Hochstadt, and Alt Altona when it got a building in 1912. The building expanded in both 1919 and 1944, and a new, larger building was constructed to accommodate large gatherings in relation to the expanding Bible School. It was completed in 1954. Altona featured Elm Bible school, one three-room elementary school, and a senior high school whose enrollment in the 1950s was over three hundred. There was also an agricultural school, that only operated during the winter months, and a home economics course. The Bergthaler Mennonite and the Blumenorter Mennonite Church, both located in southern Manitoba, founded the Elm bible institute. The Bergthalers were from south Russia and immigrated to Canada between 1874-1876, and the Blumenorters immigrated in the 1920s. Classes started in 1929 in the Mennonite Collegiate in Gretna and were taught to twenty students by Johann Enns. The original purpose for the institute was to prepare its students for other ministries like evangelism missionary work, training in local congregational work, and bible study. The school closed from 1931-1936 due to complications like the great depression, at this point having added several more teachers, when P.P. Tschetter reopened the school. It was moved to Altona in 1940 under the direction of Abram A. Teichroeb, also a 1920s immigrant, until 1963. An Evangelical, nearly fundamentalist, belief system was emphasized in a time known as the Teichroeb era. The institute reached an enrollment of 109 students, its peak, in the 1950s, its constituency expanding to include the Rednerweide Mennonite churches, the Whitewater Mennonite Church and other congregations.



Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church

There was also a 30-bed hospital was completed on the 31st of May 1948. Only four doctors worked in the area at that time. The original hospital, known as Bethania Hospital, was organized in 1936 and was supported by private contributions given by individuals and community groups. This hospital was built when the Rural Municipality of Rhineland donated an entire block of land but was then replaced by the 1948 hospital because of a need for greater capacity. The cost of construction was \$227,500. The old hospital was remodelled into a nurses' home as part of these expenses.



Radio Station CFAM

Furthermore, the radio station CFAM, owned by The Southern Manitoba Broadcasting Company, organized in 1956, was meant to provide religious services, good music, agricultural information, and services for certain ethnic groups who spoke different languages. Good music refers to a lack of country or top ten music. It only operated for 1,000 watts, but this number was increased to 10,000 watts in 1958, allowing for 95 percent of the Manitoba population to tune in. It was the second most powerful radio station in the province. Twenty-eight shareholders owned the company, and the most prominent was Abe J. Thiessen. He was president and radio station manager, working with Walter E. Kroeker, who was a commercial manager, Dennis Barkman, production manager, and Les Garside was operations supervisor. The company eventually opened CHSM in Steinbach in 1964 under the presidency of Walter Kroeker. The company changed its name to Golden West Broadcasting in 1974, expanding outside of Manitoba ■

Cornelius Toews, My Story

Oak Leaves June 1995

I, Cornelius Toews, was born on a ranch in Artatash South Russian in 1910. It was a big and very busy farm. Everything went well until the war broke out and famine set in. My parents decided to emigrate to Canada. We finally landed in Quebec and the July 1924. The train took us to Kitchener-Waterloo and we stayed with the Menno Sherk family for one year. We were thankful to these people for taking us in. I was then 14 years old and was hired out to a farmer named Daniel Weber to help with the work. Work was plenty and it started at 5 in the morning until nine at night. After one year, my parents and a few other people decided to go to Reesor, near Kapuskasing, to homestead. The trains stopped in the middle of the night and we slept under the skies with a million mosquitoes accompanying us. There were no lights and no houses. Log houses were built and the work began clearing brush and finding a place to live.

I had the feeling I wanted to do something for the Lord. The urge was so strong and I prayed about it. One very cold morning, with a lot of snow around me. I had a beautiful experience. It seemed like I could look into heaven it was so beautiful. It only lasted a short time but I'll never forget it.

After my parents had lived in Reesor for eleven years, my parents decided to go back to Southern Ontario in 1936. My brother John and I stayed for another four years and "batched". We then also moved to Leamington in 1939. I met Jessie Toews and we were engaged in the fall of 1939. We were married the following year on the 2nd of June, 1940. We lived on Wigle Street for three years. Then we decided to farm. We looked around and found a little farm Wheatley. Because of the clay loam, we decided to build greenhouses.

In 1945, I was asked to teach Sunday School which I enjoyed very much. I was able to do that for twenty years and I was asked to teach German school every Friday night or Saturday morning. In 1955 in the month of May, I was voted into the ministry and was ordained by Rev. N. N. Driedger on November 18, 1956. I was able to preach for 35 years with the Lord's help. I enjoyed doing this work for my Lord and I praise Him for guiding and helping me through these years. We now live in Leamington and enjoy our retirement. We have three sons – Jake and Moira live in B.C., Fred and Beverly live in Leamington and Dave and Mary live in Ruthven. We have nine grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

Nich dit...Nich daut

Special thanks to the *Historian* team: Helen Brown, Victor Huebert, Lauren Nicholson

Enjoying this newsletter? Help make the next one even better! Send submissions to info@ekmha.ca

Upcoming activities at the Heritage Centre

- None are planned at this time.
- Call 519-326-0456 or email info@ekmha.ca for updates

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Dnjepr River near Einlage circa 1929