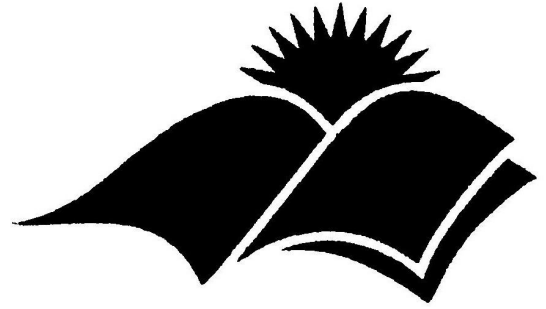


# Historian



Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association

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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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## Baseball/Softball and the Mennonites

Edited by Jill Nicholson

Baseball in Southwestern Ontario is a favourite summer tradition. The Mennonites who arrived in the area in the 1920s eagerly adopted this sport as an activity that the youth could do together and that all the community could rally around.

Many thanks to the memories of the local residents who played or watched baseball or softball, in particular to Ernie Dick.

Stories about local Mennonites playing baseball are not centred only in the Leamington area. A group of Leamington men, completing Alternative Service during World War II played in a league at Montreal River competing against a team from Kitchener-Waterloo and Niagara.

John H. Dick recounted to his son Ernie a story about a game held in late May when the teams had to clear the diamond of snow. John H. Dick wrote his team's, the Leamington "Dynamites". line-up in his Dale Carnegie book (now in the EKMHA collection). Paul Warkentin (a retired minister) recalls the team sang "I've Been Working on the Highway" (based on the song, "I've Been Working on the Railroad".)



Baseball Game At Montreal River  
(Mennonite Archives of Ontario)

WHO WON THE PENCILS			
Best Speech	Best Speech	Most Improvement	Special Award
1st	George Douglas	John H. Dick	Pete Anthony
2nd	Paul Warkentin	John H. Dick	John H. Dick
3rd	Paul Warkentin	John H. Dick	John H. Dick
4th	John H. Dick	John H. Dick	John H. Dick
5th	John H. Dick	John H. Dick	John H. Dick
6th	John H. Dick	John H. Dick	John H. Dick
7th	John H. Dick	John H. Dick	John H. Dick
8th	John H. Dick	John H. Dick	John H. Dick
9th	John H. Dick	John H. Dick	John H. Dick
10th	John H. Dick	John H. Dick	John H. Dick

HUMAN RELATIONS AWARDS

Russ Bow  
A.E. McDermott  
George H. H. Bow

BOOK WINNERS	
Book Title	Author
Dick Douglas	Pete Anthony
Ron Warkentin	Tom Smith
John H. Dick	Ron Warkentin

CHAMPIONS

Prepared Speech: John H. Dick  
Impromptu Speech: Ron Warkentin  
Highest Award for Achievement: Pete Anthony

John H. Dick baseball game line-up from Dale Carnegie book (EKMHA collection)

After the war, the former Alternative Service participants set up a Sunday afternoon league at the United Mennonite Educational Institute (UMEI) located north of Leamington. The players shared bats, catcher and first baseman mitts. They purchased different coloured jerseys for each team that belonged to the league. Two fresh leather balls were purchased at the beginning of each season. The spectators had picnics on blankets under the trees. Cold pop was available for purchase.

Around 1957, the fathers of young boys organized a Sunday afternoon softball league. The highlight of the summer was a Sunday School picnic featuring a game between the Dads and the sons. Sometimes a girl might make a brief appearance, but it was rare. No one seemed to keep score with substitutions made every inning so that everyone could play.

Leamington Mennonites were invited to put together a team for a softball league under the lights in Kingsville's Lakeside Park. The team was organized and managed by Cornie Dredger sponsored by Erie Appliances and sporting yellow and black sweaters. The team moved to a league in Leamington which played at the fairgrounds and at the Leamington High School.



The 1960 Erie Appliances Team (Name later changed to Pyramid Cannery) Back Row l to r: Cornie Dredger, Jake Hamm, Art Unger, John Dredger, Bill Tiessen, Martin Tiessen, John H. Dick & Herb Hamm Front Row l to r: Rudy Brown, Dennis Cornies, Ernie Dredger, Ernie Brown, Ron Derksen, John Willms & Ron Enns

In the 1970s, Mennonite teams and players were prominent in the Leamington District Fastball League.

Ken Segedin was a local fastball star in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1970 season in the Leamington District Fastball League was a memorable one for him on the Sun Parlour Co-op team. He won five awards that season as the most valuable player, leading hitter (.569 batting average) and top home run hitter (13).



**FASTBALL STAR** — Ken Segedin, shortstop for Sun Parlour Co-Op, was chosen as the most valuable player in the Leamington District Fastball League during the 1970 season. Segedin holds half a dozen batting records for the league, five of which he set this year. He is seen here with his trophies as the most valuable player, leading hitter (a .569 average) and top home run hitter (13).  
— Photo by Master's.

The 1972 junior fastball season ended with many awards for the Mennonite A and the Mennonite B teams.



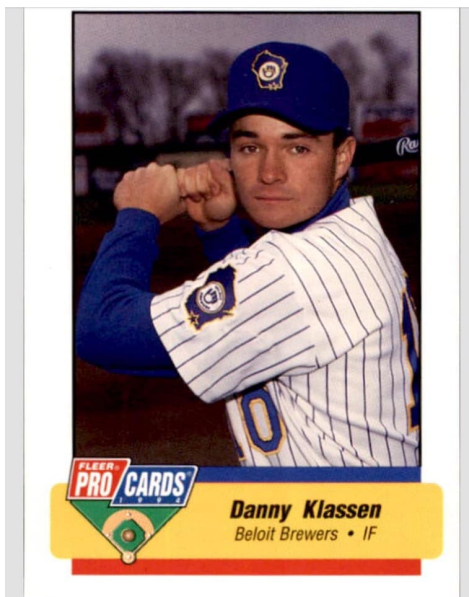
**FASTBALL TROPHIES**  
Leamington Junior Fastball League wound up the 1972 season Saturday night at the United Mennonite Education Institute with a banquet and presentation of trophies. Those honored, left to right: Herm Dick and Bill Dredger, coaches of Mennonite B, league pennant winners and playoff champions; Bill Penner, an outfielder with Mennonite B who was chosen the league's most valuable player; Peter Neufeld, of Mennonite B, the best pitcher; Danny Adams, of Baptist, who tied with Dave Konrad, of Mennonite A, as the leading hitter. Konrad currently is attending college in Ohio.  
— Post and News Photo.

The Essex-Kent Mennonite community also produced a number of baseball players who made a mark on the sport.

Danny Klassen, a Leamington native, is a former major league baseball infielder. He played four seasons with the Arizona Diamondbacks starting in 1998 and one season with the Detroit Tigers. Klassen was part of Team Canada during the 2004 Summer Olympics, which finished in fourth place. He was named to play for Canada at the 2006 World Baseball Classic. During that tournament, he injured himself and took the 2006 season off. In 2008, he played for the Houston Astros organization and retired at the end of the season.



*Danny Klassen (Wikipedia)*



Daniel Warkentin, from Leamington, is currently playing in the United States College league as an infielder first at Parkland College and then at Eastern Michigan University. In 2022, he had a career year, earning a batting average of .291 including 52 hits and 15 home runs for 41 RBIs and 106 total bases.



*Daniel Warkentin*

Over the years, baseball and later fastball played an important part in the social life of Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties. During their time at the Alternative Service Camp at Montreal River during World War II, baseball was a pleasant diversion from the hard work and isolation. After the war, those players came home and started leagues to continue the fellowship and fun with other Mennonites. Through the leagues, the Mennonites became well-known in the general public as exceptional athletes and led to becoming an important part of community activities. Baseball skills also allowed some Mennonite players to earn fame in both the American college ranks and on to Major League Baseball.

# In Memory of Bruno Penner

*By Gisela Schartner*

Bruno Penner, a member and many times chair of the Essex Kent Historical Association from the early nineties to 2000, died January 7, 2023 at the age of 93. Enthusiasm and curiosity are two words that come to mind when trying to describe Bruno. As his children and grandchildren attested in their eulogy at his funeral, Bruno was always happiest when engaged with them in a building project or science experiment.

This youthful enthusiasm and energy he brought to all his pursuits. When he was well into his seventies, he joined several of us in driving to Windsor University for special interest classes. We explored topics such as comparative religions, creative writing, music appreciation amongst others.

A physics teacher by profession, he also had a keen interest in philosophy and music and we spent many happy hours discussing books and any variety of topics on our way to and from Windsor.

Also for several years Bruno, his wife Freda, my husband George and I had seasons' tickets to the Windsor Symphony and enjoyed our Friday morning trips to the Assumption Church on the University campus.

As chair of EKMHA, Bruno displayed the same enthusiasm and interest in our ideas on how to keep the Association going and raise the funds to pay our monthly fees for the archives room. It was his idea to have a special soup evening, where men would be invited to present their favourite soups. We would get as many soups as possible and have a little contest to see which was the most popular. The contest idea has been abandoned, but the Super Soup evening continues. Upward of a dozen different soups, now mostly cooked by women, are sampled, along with homemade buns and brown bread. This is followed by a variety of pies and as long as Bruno was able a humorous skit, which he composed and often acted in. During his tenure, our publication committee under the leadership of Astrid Koop was very active and published at least half a dozen books depicting life in the various Mennonite congregations of this area.

At the same time Bruno and Victor Kliever, pastor of North Leamington Mennonite Church, planned a monument to the Mennonite Community. We were of course aware that the Italian Community had established a decorative fountain in front of the town library and felt it was time for the Mennonites to also have a commemorative presence. John Wiens, another longtime member, came up with the design for the marker and was also the builder of the monument. We were given permission to locate the marker at the south end of Garrison Park where it is easily accessible to residents of the Pickwick area and the Mennonite Home. The monument was dedicated on November 5, 2000.

Following his terms as a member and chair, Bruno became actively involved in creating a website for EKMHA and continued that involvement until his nineties.

On April 8, 2018 he received a well-deserved 25 year volunteer service award from Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Laura Albanese. While we miss Bruno and his warm smile, we are grateful for the time we had with him, engaging in spirited conversation and trying to field his challenging questions.



Bruno Penner

# Bandits and Beggars

*By John Enns, born in 1901 in Tiegenhof*

Note: The events in this story occurred in 1918-1919.

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

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

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

And then there was "old" Matvey. He was a tall thin Russian, probably in his sixties. I never saw him working; he was supposed to be a sick man; he looked it, too, being so skinny. He would come to my mother and ask her for a "few crumbs to eat". My mother would say, "the same as usual?" "O dear lady, God

bless you, I could not ask for that much again." Mother would tell him to sit down at the table, while she went to the pantry. Then she would set a whole home-baked loaf of bread, a knife, and a large jug of milk in front of him. That is usually enough food for two or three men at a sitting but old "sick" Matvey would clean everything up in a half-hour and then be unable to find enough words after that to thank Mother.

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

*Nich dit...Nich daut*

Enjoying this newsletter? Help make the next one even better! Send submissions to [info@ekmha.ca](mailto:info@ekmha.ca)

**Upcoming activities at the Heritage Centre**

- Annual General Meeting – June 13, 7:00 p.m.
- Travelogues – Coming Fall 2023
- Call 519-326-0456 or email [info@ekmha.ca](mailto:info@ekmha.ca) for updates

**Support Essex-Kent Mennonite history! Become a member of EKMHA or renew today Visit [www.ekmha.ca/membership](http://www.ekmha.ca/membership) to join online or fill out and return the form below.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Fee (\$15 per person/group) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Donation to Heritage Centre (Optional) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive email about EKMHA news and events?  Yes please  No thank you

Are you interested in volunteering 1 hour/month or more?  Yes, send me info  No thank you

*Please make cheques payable to EKMHA and deliver or mail to:*

EKMHA  
31 Pickwick Dr.  
Leamington, ON N8H 4T5

Memberships valid from January 1<sup>st</sup> to Dec 31<sup>st</sup>  
Tax receipts will be issued for memberships and donations.  
[www.ekmha.ca](http://www.ekmha.ca) | [info@ekmha.ca](mailto:info@ekmha.ca)

Your support helps EKMHA continue its mission of preserving the histories of the Mennonites of Essex and Kent Counties. Membership costs only **\$15/year** for an individual, church, organization, or business.



*Summer Bible School at Mission Hall on Pelee Island circa 1947 (EKMHA)*