

# Historian



Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association

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

Fall 2023

Edited by Jill Nicholson

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## Paul, Klassen, Evolving Entrepreneur

by Jill Nicholson

The Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association is pleased to publish its second article on Mennonite businesses in the local region. The entrepreneurial career of Paul Klassen will be highlighted here.

Paul Klassen's parents were Frank and Katharina (Unger) Klassen. They came to Canada in the mid-1920s with the exodus of Mennonites from what is now Ukraine to Manitoba to flee from the harsh treatment and lack of freedom after the Russian Revolution.

Paul Klassen was born in Winnipeg in 1925 and moved to Leamington at an early age. He had three sisters, Hedy Klassen, Frances Klassen Siemens and Ruth Klassen.

He married his wife Faye Noble Klassen in 1960 and had two children, Bruce and Karrie. He had one grandchild, Sydney Klassen, and many nieces and nephews.



Faye and Paul Klassen's wedding photograph

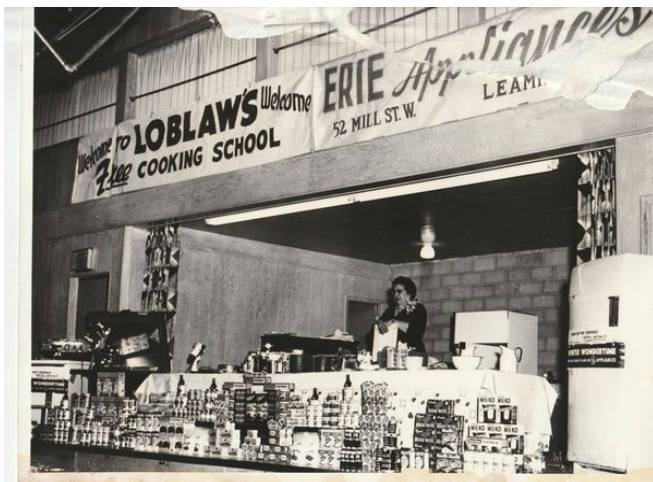
His life as an entrepreneur started early. In order to make a better life for himself, he sold produce in Ruthven. In 1952, after he had had some success, he invested in the establishment Pyramid Cannery along with nine other businessmen. The canning factory was located at the north end of Victoria Avenue in Leamington. The group sold the business in 1958 to Boese Foods Limited located in St. Catharines Ontario.



In the late 1950's he decided to move into the retail sector. He purchased Erie Appliances on Mill Street West In Leamington and his wife Faye joined him in this endeavour after their marriage. Leamington was a growing community and the new homes needed new appliances. Mr. Klassen saw an opportunity to offer needed goods to the public. Here, he discovered his gift of the sale and could sell anything to anyone. He was also a great promoter of the business. For example, Erie Appliance sponsored the Loblaws Cooking School which was held in the auditorium of the Leamington United Church in the 1950s.



Paul Klassen congratulating the winner of the stove at the Loblaws Cooking School at the Leamington United Church on December 16, 1953 (Leamington Post)



The business also was a big supporter of local sports, especially baseball which played a big part in the life of the Mennonites of the district.



The 1960 Erie Appliances Team  
(Name later changed to Pyramid  
Canners)

Back Row l to r: Cornie  
Driedger, Jake Hamm, Art Unger,  
John Driedger, Bill Tiessen, Martin  
Tiessen, John H. Dick & Herb  
Hamm

Front Row l to r: Rudy Brown,  
Dennis Cornies, Ernie Driedger,  
Ernie Brown, Ron Derksen, John  
Willms & Ron Enns

## Batter up on Monday

LEAMINGTON — The Leamington and District Softball League has arranged its 1964 playing schedule. Doug Sellars president, said it opens Monday and runs through to Sept. 3.

Mr. Sellars also reported that all players in each of the six teams have signed contracts and all have been approved. Games will be played at Leamington Fairground.

In the opener, Erie Appliance, the team claiming first spot last year, meets second place Sportsmen Hotel. Game time is 8.30 p.m.

Schedule: May 23, Erie Appliance, Sportsmen Hotel; May 25, Tann's, Legion; May 29, Co-op, Kingsville, May 30, Tann's, Co-op; June 1, Kingsville, Erie Appliance; June 3, Sportsmen Hotel, Legion, June 6, Legion, Erie Appliance; June 8, Co-op, Sportsmen Hotel, June 11, Kingsville, Tann's; June 12, Sportsmen Hotel, Erie Appliance.

June 13, Legion, Kingsville; June 15, Sportsmen Hotel, Tann's; June 18, Erie Appliance, Co-op; June 19, Tann's, Legion; June 20, Kingsville, Sportsmen Hotel; June 22, Erie Appliance, Tann's; June 25, Legion, Co-op; June 27, Legion, Tann's; June 29, Kingsville, Co-op.

July 2, Sportsmen Hotel, Erie Appliance; July 4, Sportsmen Hotel, Co-op; July 6, Tann's, Kingsville; July 9, Erie Appliance, Legion; July 11, Erie Appliance, Kingsville; July 13, Legion, Sportsmen Hotel, July 16, Co-op, Tann's; July 18, Tann's, Sportsmen Hotel; July 20, Co-op, Erie Appliance; July 23, Kingsville, Legion; July 24, Tann's, Erie Appliance; July 25, Legion, Co-op; July 27, Sportsmen Hotel, Kingsville.

Aug. 8, Kingsville, Tann's, Aug. 10, Co-op, Sportsmen Hotel; Aug. 13, Erie Appliance, Legion; Aug. 15, Sportsmen Hotel, Legion, Aug. 17, Kingsville, Erie Appliance, Aug. 20, Tann's, Co-op; Aug. 22, Co-op, Erie Appliance; Aug. 24, Legion, Kingsville; Aug. 27, Tann's, Sportsmen Hotel; Aug. 28, Kingsville, Co-op, Aug. 29, Erie Appliance, Tann's; Aug. 31, Co-op, Legion, Sept. 3, Sportsmen Hotel, Kingsville.

Windsor Star, May 21, 1966

Paul's interest in the growth of the community moved to real estate and land development in the early 1970s. They first joined the Wm. Arnoff Ltd. Realtor office in 1970. Along with his wife Faye, they bought out the Arnoff office and established Klassen Real Estate Inc. in Leamington. He also started or developed a couple of new subdivisions in Leamington including Pickwick Estates near the Leamington Mennonite Home, Oak Park, Plumbrook and Cherry Lane Estates near Robson Road. Homes in the Cherry Lane Estates projects started at a cost of \$29,000. These developments provided single and semi-detached homes for many young families in the area.

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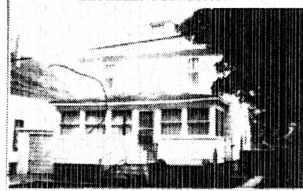


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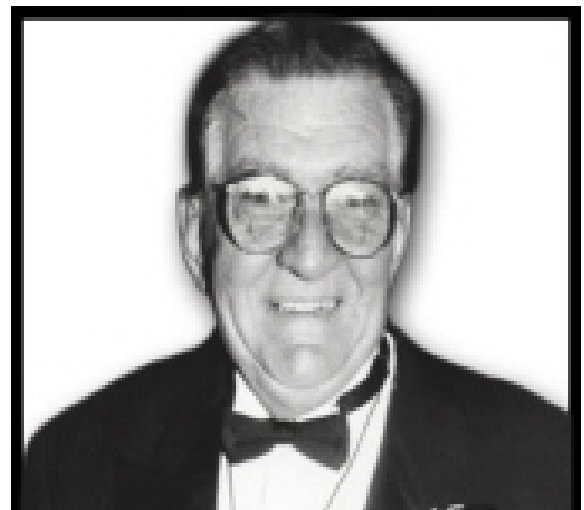
50 Mill West Leamington

In the early 1980s, Paul acquired the long-established Feldman's Mens and Boys Wear from the Feldman Family. He outfitted many men and boys from the area for special events such as marriages and graduations. Being community minded, Paul, through the business, also participated in many fundraising fashion shows to aid such groups as the South Essex Community Council and Ladies' Hospital for the Leamington District Memorial Hospital.

Paul's interests went beyond the business world. He and later Faye, became avid pilots and they flew to many fly-ins and PGA tournaments.

In 1999, Paul and Faye retired from entrepreneurship. They moved to Toronto to be closer to their new granddaughter and other family but returned often to Leamington to visit. In his later years, Paul resided in the Leamington Mennonite Home. He died in 2015. His wife Faye passed away in May 2023 in Brampton.

Paul Klassen made a significant mark in both the business and the community. His life was guided by his faith, his friends, his family and his airplanes. He has been missed by all those he knew.



## John J. Enns

By Louise 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 schools in several villages before settling in Neu-Halbstadt, Mototschna 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, 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 Constantinopol (now Istanbul) Turkey. Thus it was that, as an eighteen year old, he became a fugitive and never saw his family again.

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 3 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 Aelt. Rev. J. Klassen. Shortly thereafter they moved to Leamington, Ont. where they lived the rest of their lives, raising a family and attending the Leamington Untied Mennonite Church.

John and Agnes Enns were active members of this church until their death. My father, in particular, held a variety of positions in the church and did so with much love and dedication, always supported in his endeavours 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 Willm's church choir for several years. He directed the youth choir for three years during World War II. He sang in the male choirs of the church for forty years. In 1978 he organized and directed for approximately ten years, the Opportunity

Choir, a choir of seniors. 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 Vorsaenger, (song leader), and assisted in obtaining pianists and organists for the church services.



Members of the Opportunity Choir , Founded in 1978. John Jacob Enns in the second row to the right.

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 forties and fifties as secretary and then a 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.

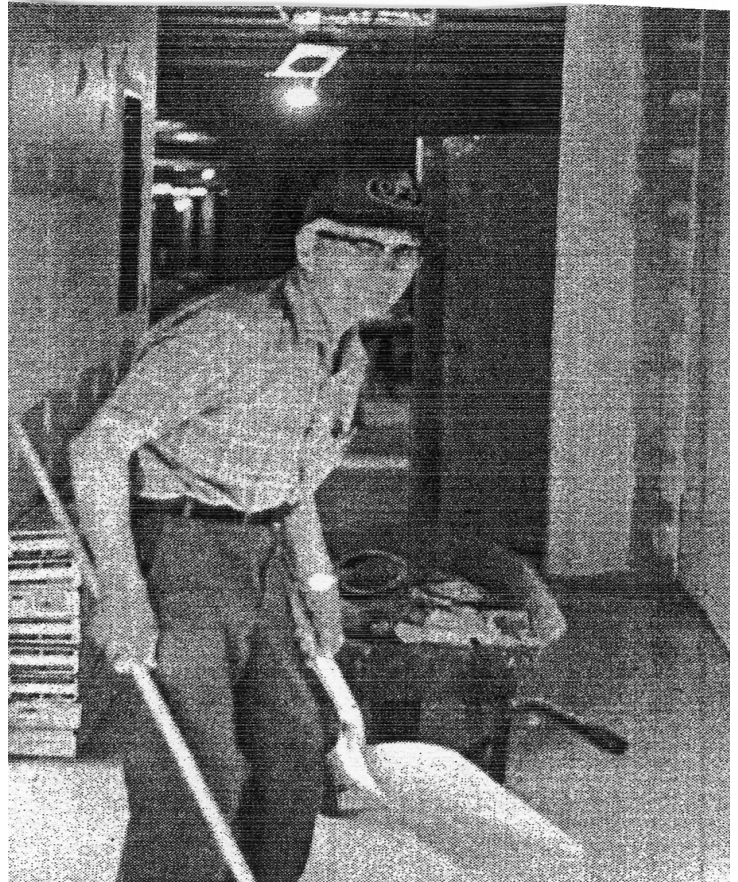


**Leamington Mennonite Home's first Building Committee:**  
L to r: Jacob J. Dick, George B. Konrad, Jacob Toews Jr., Ernest Driedger, Peter R. John J. Enns, Nick J. Cornies, Cornelius C. Neufeld, George Hildebrandt.

In the early fifties, Father was asked to help church members purchase cemetery plots 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 Apts. 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 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" and he and many others built articles for sale to raise money for the Home.

He was thrilled to be able help during the building of the "new" Leamington Mennonite Church in 1984, the oldest church member to be do so.



Photograph- Church Building - "A Labour of Love"

On April 21, 1990, John J. Enns was presented with a plaque by the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association in recognition of his contributions to the Mennonite Community. He was very humbled by this honour and accepted it in 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 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 in Your mercy and shall rejoice in Your salvation. I shall sing to the Lord because He has blessed me so richly."



**WOODWORKING CLUB ACTIVE**

The Woodpeckers, a group of local senior citizens working out of the Leamington Mennonite Home on Garrison Avenue, recently received a grant from the federal government to help purchase equipment for their woodworking shop. Here club president John Enns, center shows MP Bob Doolittle, left the new table while Dave Mathies holds a work he recently finished. The club plans to sell its work at the semi-annual bazaar held at the home. —Leamington Post Photo

Leamington Post February 21, 1979

*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**

- Travelogues – Winter 2024
- Super Soup Night – January 20, 2024, UMEI
- 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.**

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

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Memberships valid from January 1<sup>st</sup> to Dec 31<sup>st</sup>  
Tax receipts will be issued for memberships and donations.  
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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, receipted.



*Hauling Ice blocks on Pelee Island, 1930*