

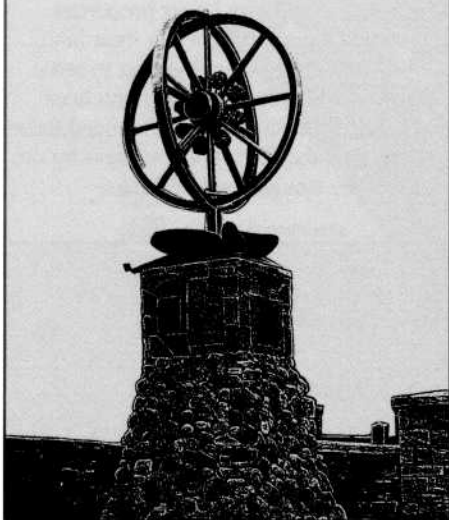
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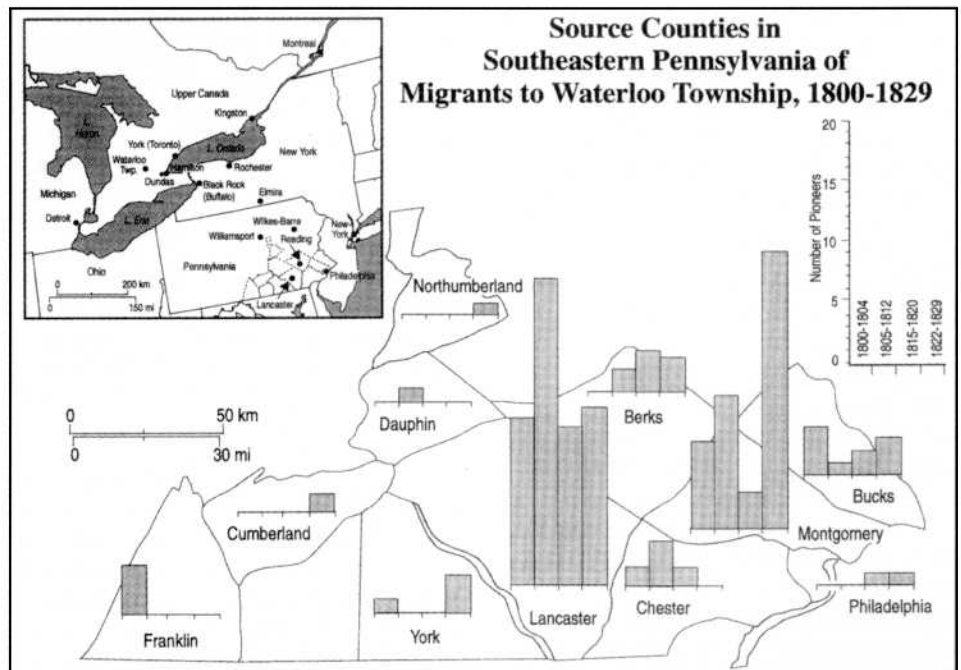
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BUILDING COMMUNITY ON THE FRONTIER: the Mennonite contribution to shaping the Waterloo settlement to 1861

by Elizabeth Bloomfield



Four main phases of migration have been detected, with four in ten pioneers coming from Lancaster County and three in ten from Montgomery County. Compiled from PIONEER database of information about founding families, heads of which migrated to Waterloo Township before 1830 and resided there at least 10 years. Sources of information included Ezra Eby's Biographical history, family histories, and the 1831 assessment rolls.

Mennonites who migrated to Upper Canada at the very beginning of the nineteenth century established a distinctive settlement in the area that became Waterloo Township. This essay surveys the Mennonite presence in the region up to 1861, a year for which we have good information and which represents peak numbers of rural settlers.¹

The Mennonite pioneers established themselves on the far inland frontier of Upper Canada – beyond the edge of colonial white settlement in 1800 and on its margins for at least 30 years. Mennonites, as the term is used here, loosely include all the families and individuals of generally Anabaptist origin who migrated from or by way of southeast Pennsylvania to Block 2 of the Grand River Tract in the period between 1800 and 1830. If not already related at the time of migration, most would become connected by kinship or marriage during the first two or three generations. The River Brethren (Dunkards or Tunkers) are included; as well as people of Mennonite origin who later changed their religion.

The Waterloo settlement became the staging point for migration to surrounding townships (notably Woolwich and Wilmot) and the core of the Mennonites' Waterloo District Conference. It was also the heart of the area constituted as Waterloo County in 1852 for administrative and judicial purposes. The Waterloo settlements continued to have the largest concentration in the province of people who counted themselves as Mennonite.

In what ways did the founding Mennonite families shape the development of the frontier community? The word "community" is so frequently used that it can mean almost anything or nothing. Here I use the phrase "building community" in three senses to form a structure for this essay. All are significant in understanding the Mennonite experience in the Waterloo settlement.

Community, in its most general sense, means all the people who live in a place or settlement and who are usually linked by their everyday business contacts and needs for shared services. Building such a community involves laying the foundations of

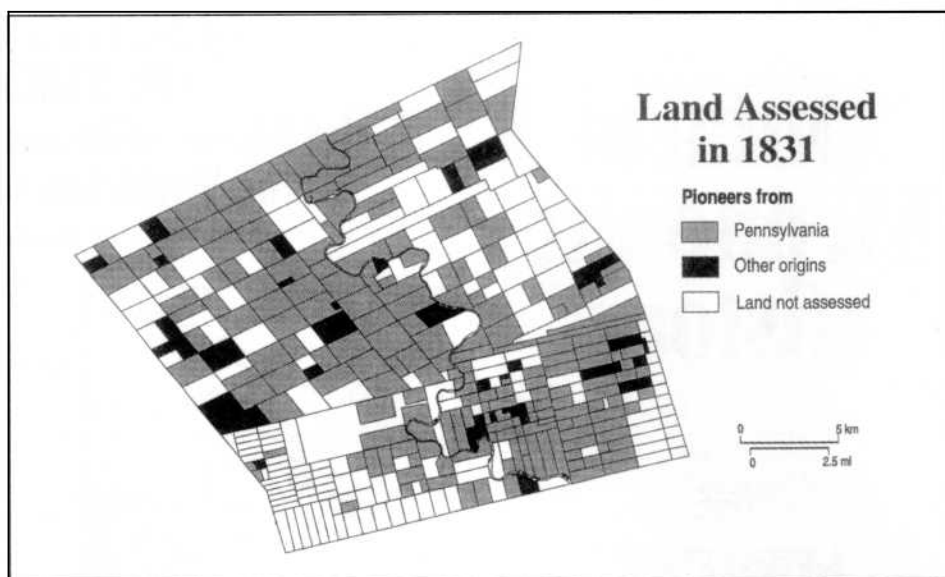
the basic economy, society and polity, as well as the infrastructure of services shared by all people in a locality or region. In these processes, the first permanent settlers, such as the Mennonite families who came to Waterloo Township before 1830, would have a larger role than those who come later.

Community can also have a narrower and more specific meaning. It may be used of a group of people united by a sense of identity or historical consciousness, but living within a larger society that does not share those traits. Building this kind of community, and protecting its distinctive culture or faith against weakening tendencies, involves strategies to foster the group's shared ethos and mores, and to set boundaries against the values and beliefs of other groups or the anomie of the larger society. From the 1830s, as people of other backgrounds and faiths settled in the township, Mennonites and the other religious groups tended to stress the differences that separated them from their neighbours, at least in part of their lives.

Community-building can also have a more creative meaning of efforts by people to share each other's burdens, even across sociocultural boundaries. Such efforts, also illustrated in early Waterloo Township history, may be marked by evolving co-operation among individuals and families of different backgrounds, through an active and intentional process that may involve tension and conflict between the ideal and the practical.

Building Basic Economy and Services

Above all, the Mennonites built and shaped community in the Waterloo area by their critical mass: they migrated and settled in sufficient numbers in the founding period to have a lasting impact on the region's landscape, economy and society. Without the solid investment in 1803 by the group of interrelated families from Lancaster County in what became called the German Company Tract (GCT), the Mennonite presence in Waterloo County might be a mere footnote to local history. Descendants of the German Company shareholders – especially the Erbs, Ebys,



Almost two-thirds of the township was assessed to some owner or occupier, and nearly one in four acres of this assessed area for occupied. Pioneer families from Pennsylvania accounted for 70 per cent of Waterloo Township's population and owned 87 per cent of the assessed land area. Compiled from PIONEER database and 1831 assessment rolls.

Webers, Brubachers and Schneiders – continued to be the leading local landowners. Their block purchase and role as founding pioneers ensured the survival of a substantial enclave of German-speaking settlers in a distinctive society and culture.²

The method of allocating German Company Tract lots left enduring traces in the landscape, cadastre and road network – described in about 1880 as “a system of the most regular irregularity.”³ The large lots were of odd shapes, compared with the rectangular patterns of nearby townships, and there were no formal road allowances. Lot sizes and shapes and road alignments evolved informally. Extended families of Mennonites settled close to one another for support in meeting the challenges of pioneer life and to share in religious practices. As in southeastern Pennsylvania, “farm buildings were located primarily with reference to economy in hauling crops to the barn and convenient access to water, hence they might be some distance from the road.”⁴ The patterns of dispersion were irregular, in contrast to the regularly surveyed townships more typical of Upper Canada. The coarse mesh of the original large lots, which tended to be subdivided among family members, meant

that actual property boundaries soon departed from the order of original surveys, though large farms continued to be more typical than in nearby townships.

Waterloo Township was settled mainly by those already experienced in pioneering on the North American frontier. The Mennonite settlers, whose families had been in Pennsylvania for up to three generations, were able to bring stock, seeds, tools and farming methods appropriate to a forested land in a similar continental climate. They knew how to read the vegetation cover and to prefer land that was heavily stocked with hardwoods – oak, maple, hickory, beech and black walnut – as evidence of richer soils. Immigration by whole families, including adolescents and young adults, gave many Pennsylvania pioneers an advantage over single males from other backgrounds who tried to hack farms out of the bush. A good many Mennonites also brought capital with which they could buy larger properties and some labour to help clear their land.⁵

As Mennonites were the first to settle in the township, their farming practices and patterns of settlement influenced those of later arrivals. Their solid success by the early 1830s was praised by Adam

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Fergusson in his efforts to attract Scottish immigrants to nearby Nichol Township. He was "delighted with the cultivation" and noted that "springs and brooks were to be seen in abundance." A typical farm he described as "from 200 to 300 acres, laid out into regular fields, and not a stump to be seen. The ploughing was capital, the crops most luxuriant, and the cattle, horses etc. of a superior stamp, with handsome houses, barns etc and orchards promising rich returns. Waterloo satisfied me above all that I had yet seen of the capability of Canada to become a fruitful and fine country."⁶ By the 1840s, the township's farmers were regarded as highly successful, "distinguished by their industry and thrift; by their large houses, with harness, ox yokes, and hoes, forks, and other implements hung on pegs under the flaring eaves; by their bank barns...; and by their carefully cleared fields and their first-rate husbandry."⁷

Waterloo Mennonites contributed most to the development of farming in Upper Canada by introducing the bank barn. Their Pennsylvania and Swiss backgrounds were reflected in the styles and functions of their farm buildings, especially the barns, but also the Mennonite Georgian farmhouses built of logs, stone or brick. Typically the first simple log barn was replaced after about ten years by a bank (Swisser or Sweitzer) barn. Larger, more substantial and more versatile than other pioneer farm structures in North America, the two-level barn could house various livestock in the lower-level stable, with space on the second floor for storage of hay, straw and implements, and for the

threshing of feed grains which were then stored in the feed bins of the granary located in the forebay. The forebay or "overshoot," the second-floor extension projecting over the front stable wall for 4 to 20 feet, is the most distinctive feature. Access to the upper level of the barn was provided by banking the barn – building it into a hillside or constructing a gentle ramp that allowed farm machines and wagons to be driven up to the back of the barn with their loads of hay, straw and feed grains.⁸

Though most Mennonites took up land for farming, some brought experience as millers, blacksmiths, ploughmakers or carpenters, with skills that were vital to the economic survival of the community. All the township's water-powered mills in operation until the mid-1830s were begun and owned by Mennonite entrepreneurs. Most significant were those of John Erb at what became Preston (1806), Abraham Erb at what became Waterloo (1808), Philip Bleam at what became German Mills (1812), and Jacob S. Shoemaker at Glasgow Mills which became part of Bridgeport (1829). Early millers did more than grind grain, saw wood or card wool: they were also merchants, stocking the pioneer farmer's essential supplies and providing him with credit.⁹

Mennonite landowners contributed to developing the community infrastructure of roads, fords and bridges in the founding period. They provided materials and labour to improve informal roadways as "statute roads," at least 70 of which were approved between 1819 and 1840. They served as overseers of highways (or pathmasters), fenceviewers, town

wardens, poundkeepers, assessors, clerks or collectors in the rudimentary system of township government before 1850. However, the highest local offices – justices of the peace or members of the Legislative Assembly – were usually filled by non-Mennonites. John Erb and George Clemens were notable exceptions as justices of the peace.¹⁰

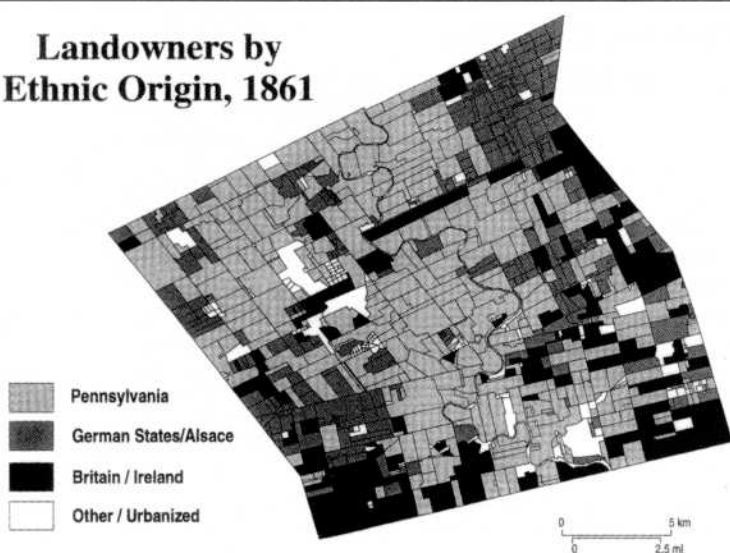
Founding Mennonites, settling in sufficient numbers on a compact block of territory, created a viable settlement of their own families. By their success, they also attracted other settlers – mainly German-speaking – who brought complementary resources but also the potential, eventually, to dilute the Mennonite character of the Waterloo settlement. Most of the non-Mennonite settlers came without money and worked as day labourers for the large Mennonite landowners, gradually putting aside some funds to buy smallholdings, or giving up and moving on to new frontiers. Smaller numbers of non-Mennonites brought education, craft skills or capital.

The first large group of landless labourers were German-speaking Catholics who emigrated from Alsace and Baden between the late 1820s and the early 1850s. They formed a distinctive and lasting cluster on the "back lots" in the northeast corner of the township that was called "Rotenburg" or "Little Germany" by the mid-1830s. According to oral tradition, the Alsatian Catholics who had "scanty means" and were "quite inexperienced in bush life," worked at first as labourers for members of the Jacob Schneider clan in the Upper Block east of the Grand River. These well-established Mennonite farmers were "uniformly kind, neighborly and hospitable" in giving "valuable advice, employment and credit." As they gained experience and the funds to buy or rent smallholdings, the Alsatian Catholics gradually built up a cohesive community in what became New Germany (now Maryhill). Smaller clusters of Catholics settled in the northwest corner and around the hamlet of Williamsburg.¹¹

Landless immigrants from other German states, especially Lutherans arriving between the 1820s and the 1850s, combined day labour for established farmers with cultivating gardens or keeping a few animals and chickens on their rented smallholdings. They began a lasting tradition of "one horse farmers" in contrast to the large and well-established Mennonite farm properties. Some also practised crafts or trades – as tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, storekeepers or innkeepers.

Smaller numbers of more prosperous immigrants also arrived in the 1820s and 1830s, attracted by the solid Mennonite

Landowners by Ethnic Origin, 1861



After 60 years of migration and settlement, Waterloo Township was a mosaic of communities of various ethnic backgrounds and religions. Though only one in four township households was Mennonite, these were overwhelmingly rural and landowners of Pennsylvania Mennonite origin still owned well over half of the township's land and were the most prosperous and solidly established group. Compiled from 1861 manuscript census, 1861 assessment rolls, Tremaine's map and PIONEER database of founding settlers.

settlement and use of the German language. Non-Mennonite arrivals who had already lived elsewhere in North America brought enough capital to set up enterprises on their arrival – such as Friedrich Gaukel and Otto Klotz who established the leading hotels in Berlin and Preston, Jacob Beck and Jacob Hespeler who started foundries, and Heinrich Wilhelm Peterson who founded Canada's first German-language newspaper in Berlin in 1835. Some of these, with more education and command of the English language than their neighbours, were able to obtain appointments in government and local administration, as were several settlers of British background who also dominated the professions of law and medicine. The need to relate to higher governments and the legal system put a premium on the English-language abilities of men who had been born English or had received more education than most. Immigrants from England, Scotland and Ireland took up land along the eastern and southern edges of the township, mainly in the 1830s when the neighbouring Guelph and Dumfries townships were being opened to settlement.¹²

Places where non-Mennonite immigrants clustered became the sites of villages and hamlets. The larger centres such as Berlin, Preston, Waterloo and New Hope (later renamed Hespeler) were incorporated as municipalities during the 1850s. Smaller hamlets – such as Bridgeport, Lexington, Erbsville, Williamsburg, New Aberdeen, Doon, Blair, Pine Bush, Fisher Mills and Kossuth – also owe their beginnings to the clusters of European Germans and other non-Mennonites who were the main agents in village development after 1835.¹³

The Pennsylvania German dialect (also called Pennsylvania Dutch), introduced by the founding Mennonites, continued to provide a basis for co-operation in everyday business contacts between Mennonites and non-Mennonites, and for some social and political activities in the first two generations. It was fairly easily understood by non-Mennonites who also came from German principalities along the Rhine, including the Roman Catholics of New Germany whose distinctive inflections reflected French influences in their native Alsace.¹⁴

Fostering Mennonite Identity

Mennonite pioneers, as founders of the Waterloo settlement, built the community in the general sense of shaping basic economy, society and administration, and their success attracted settlers of other back-

grounds and faiths. But they also nurtured distinctive elements in their own religion and culture, especially as the numbers of non-Mennonites increased.¹⁵

Pennsylvania pioneers came from at least three different Anabaptist backgrounds. There were Tunkers or River Brethren as well as Mennonites from the two inter-District Mennonite conferences in Pennsylvania which followed different religious and cultural practices, even publishing separate hymnals. People from Montgomery and Bucks Counties belonged to the Franconia Conference, while Mennonites from Lancaster County were organized in the Lancaster Conference. The first pioneers in the Lower Block were served by Deacon Jacob Bechtel of the Franconia Conference, who arrived in 1800. The Tunker minister Abraham Witmer arrived in 1804 while Joseph Bechtel from Montgomery County was ordained a preacher in 1804, with Martin Baer ordained to help him in 1808.

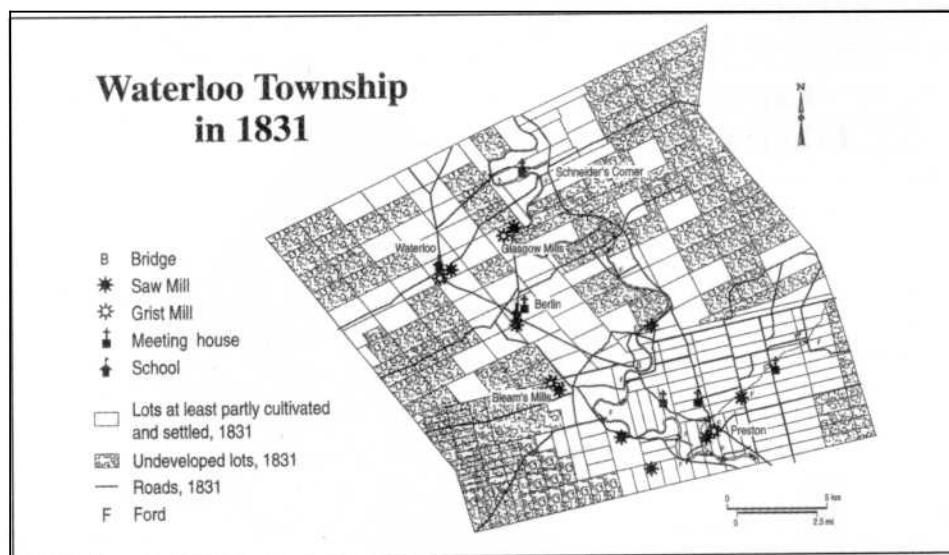
At first, Mennonites and Tunkers met for worship in homes or barns, as they had done in Pennsylvania, and as the Tunkers continued to do until the 1870s or later. The Tunkers' distinctive service was the love feast (or Liebens Mahl), held each spring and fall and attended by so many that it was called a "great meeting." Mennonites, though they did build meetinghouses, held the worshipping community to be more important than the building used for meeting and saw the conference as the primary unit rather than the

local congregation.

The early organization of churches as social units was affected by the law that only clergy of an Established Church could solemnize valid marriages or authorize the building of places of worship. Mennonites, like Baptists or Methodists, were labelled "heretics", "fanatics", and "dissenters" and "nonconformists." One practical effect of the restrictions was to encourage "union" or "free" buildings that served congregations of any denomination and were sometimes used for school classes or public meetings. The first building actually constructed for religious meetings in the Waterloo settlement was the "union" brick meetinghouse endowed by John Erb in 1813 for settlers living just north of his Preston mills.

As new Mennonite families settled the German Company Tract from 1805, those belonging to the Lancaster Conference became the most numerous group. By 1809, the Grand River community consisted of about 70 families, more than half from Lancaster County. To serve their needs, Benjamin Eby was ordained preacher in 1809 for the Upper Block in which his relations by kin or marriage owned much of the land, and Jacob Schneider was ordained deacon. Benjamin Eby was confirmed as bishop in 1812 of the District Conference (named Waterloo in 1816).

Benjamin Eby's administration of the Waterloo District for more than 40 years makes him clearly the dominant individual in Waterloo Township's first half-century.

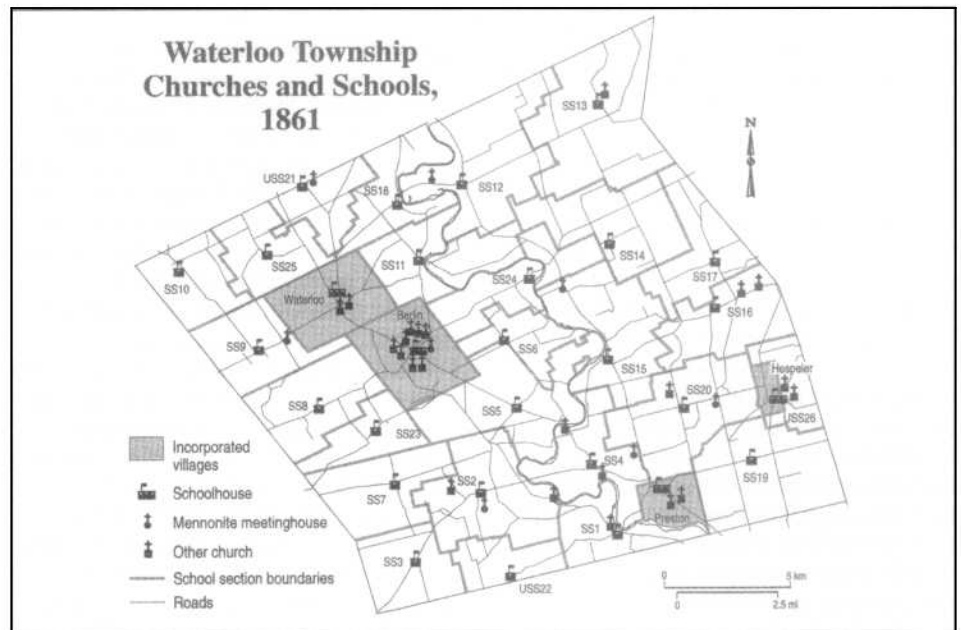


By the 1830s, there was a basic framework of main roads. The Great Road, with a bridge across the Grand River, connected the clearings around Waterloo and Berlin (and Woolwich Township to the north) with Preston and points south through Galt to Dundas. Other north-south roads linked Berlin with Waterloo and along the west bank of the Grand, and ran east of the Grand from Preston to Schneider's Corner (later Bloomingdale). Important east-west roads linked lands being opened up in Wilmot Township to the west with mills at Waterloo (Erb's Road), Berlin and Glasgow Mills (Snyder's Road), and Bleam's Mills (Bleam's Road). Only Mennonites had built structures that served as meetinghouses and most of these were used also as schoolhouses. Compiled from Gore District assessment rolls, road bylaws and land registry copybooks.

A figure of great influence and charisma, he was noted for his spiritual and practical leadership among the Mennonites. He is one of the rare public figures in whom little fault has been found. H.W. Peterson, his Lutheran contemporary, noted on first meeting Eby that he "prayed and preached well" and after he had known him for more than 20 years, that Eby was "an Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile... sincerely pious, humble, exemplary, practical and nonsectarian, and eminently successful in his day and generation, (and) beloved and respected by all who knew him." Another obituary tribute claimed that Eby was "one of the best, if not the very best, preacher of his age, among the Mennonites."¹⁶

Benjamin Eby had other roles as a community leader – among his fellow Mennonites and in the larger community. He was a landowner and farmer – assessed for 385 acres in GCT2 in 1831, of which 120 were cultivated – though he often hired others to do the heavy work, as well as a businessman who looked after estates of absentee landowners. He was a school-teacher, encouraging early education and literacy and teaching a German school himself for many years. He used his friendship with H.W. Peterson, and his encouragement of the German weekly *Der Canada Museum* and its printing press, to promote both literacy and spiritual growth. Mennonite services and other news were announced in the *Museum* and Eby had various works printed or reprinted, including hymnals, a church history and a catechism.

As its spiritual leader, Eby nurtured the Mennonite religious community, fostering congregations, encouraging the building of meetinghouses through the whole Waterloo District, and drawing upon both Franconia and Lancaster County traditions and practices. Though Mennonites from Lancaster County were accustomed to meeting for worship in homes, Bishop Eby took steps to obtain land for a building to serve as a meetinghouse close to his farm. From 1812 to the mid-1830s, he shaped Mennonite church government in the region in what has been described as a "moderate theocracy" – "an admirably conducted community... (in which) everything on which the people differed or needed advice was referred to the church for counsel, adjustment or adjudication" but "nothing was done to interfere with individual rights or private judgment."¹⁷ By 1825, about a thousand Mennonites in Waterloo Township were administered as part of the Waterloo District Conference by Bishop Eby, assisted by five ministers and six deacons.



By 1861, the township's eight Mennonite meetinghouses had been well-established for at least 20 years, all but Berlin's in rural areas. Other denominations had also put considerable effort into church-building, particularly in the four incorporated villages of Berlin, Preston, Waterloo and Hespeler. Rural schoolhouses tended to become the focal points and meeting-places for their local communities. Compiled from Tremaine's map, 1861 manuscript census, minutes and bylaws.

From 1828, the law was changed to allow dissenting sects to hold legal title to land and church buildings, and from 1831 dissenting ministers were permitted to perform marriages. After years of meeting more informally in homes or in "union" buildings, several Mennonite congregations started to establish their own regular places of worship or to replace earlier structures with purpose-built meetinghouses. Benjamin Eby's congregation in the locality known as Berlin built a large new frame meetinghouse in 1833-34 to serve also as the bishop's base for the Waterloo District. Its interior was laid out and furnished according to the more formal Franconia tradition with platform, bench and pulpit, though most members came from Lancaster County where a meetinghouse interior resembled a home. The Franconia model was followed in most other Mennonite meetinghouses in the district during the next 20 years.

By 1837, regularly scheduled preaching services were being held in nine localities in Waterloo Township, though on average each place had a service only once every four weeks. Eight meetinghouses were built by 1851, including Benjamin Eby's in Berlin. Two congregations formed in the Lower Block – Hagey (started around a union meetinghouse in 1824, with a new building in 1842), and Wanner (started as the Samuel Bechtel Appointment in 1829, with a new meetinghouse in 1848). The Schneider appointment (in the locality later called Bloomingdale) used a 1826 meetinghouse which also served as a

school. Cressman's Appointment (in the hamlet later named Breslau) had a log meetinghouse from 1837. The Weber congregation at Strasburg, where services began in 1833, had a meetinghouse by 1843. The Martin Appointment, organized in 1824 north of Waterloo on the Woolwich townline, had a meetinghouse by 1848. The congregation which began west of Waterloo in 1837 built a meetinghouse on Erb Street named for David Eby in 1851.

Bishop Eby was usually able to reconcile opposing factions within the Mennonites during the 1830s and 1840s, but these started to splinter into separate churches near the end of his life in 1853. The Reformed Mennonites, influenced in part by the doctrines of Evangelicals and United Brethren in the United States, called for a return to the theology and way of life of the founders and to distance themselves from "worldly churches." Through these disputes, Waterloo Mennonites generally followed the Eby's "non-sectarian" and "progressive" lead. But he could not prevent local followers of the "holiness" movement from breaking away as the New Mennonites – the forerunner of other breakaway movements among the Mennonites in the second half of the nineteenth century.

From the 1830s, religion and churches in Waterloo Township became more complicated with the arrival of settlers from more varied backgrounds, especially Roman Catholics and Lutherans. The earliest non-Mennonite religious services

were led by Methodists and the evangelistic emphasis and form of worship of the Methodists – and later the Evangelicals (also known as German Methodists) and United Brethren – continued to affect other denominations throughout the nineteenth century. Early congregations in Waterloo Township usually shared “union” or “free” meetinghouses in the various villages, such as in Preston from 1834, Berlin from 1836, Bridgeport from 1848 and Hespeler from 1850. Early church buildings were erected by the Lutherans in Preston in 1834, the Methodists in Berlin in 1841, the Catholics in New Germany and the Swedenborgians in Berlin in 1847, the Evangelicals in Waterloo in 1849, and the Presbyterians at Doon Mills in 1854.¹⁸

Differences between distinct denominational communities hardened after the early pioneer period. It was an era when most people “wholeheartedly professed the traditional doctrines of Christianity, regularly said their prayers, and participated in a variety of communal religious activities with a fervor seldom approached today.”¹⁹ People identified most strongly with their churches, doctrinally and also socially. In times of great business risk and uncertainty, people could usually trust their co-religionists. Churches provided opportunities for social interaction and recreation as well as worship, and for the organizing abilities of leaders with strong personalities. Women and young people belonged to special groups within the general sphere of the church. Sunday’s sermons were reported in daily and weekly newspapers and issues of doctrine and ethics mattered enough for churches to split over them. Local congregations also took pride and competed with one another in their church buildings. In a region as complex as Waterloo Township, with its distinctive ethnic and religious groups, separate denominational churches were symbols and focal points of cultural identity.

Building Community as a Creative Process of Evolving Co-operation

Brief historical overviews may mislead in suggesting that events in the past unfolded smoothly and inevitably or, by focusing on a community’s leading families, that frontier society was homogeneous and prosperous. But pioneer life was crude and brutish for most people, especially those without land or extended families. For every founding family that prospered, there were at least ten times as many who failed. We know less about the unfortunates and failures because they dropped out of township society, moving

on to other settlement frontiers or leaving few traces in the historical record.

Mennonite families suffered misfortunes, such as childbirth deaths of women, accidental work deaths of men, frequent deaths of infants and young children, and the scourges of cholera, typhoid and tuberculosis. Cholera epidemics of the 1830s – especially in July–August 1834 – could be devastating. Funerals were usually arranged by neighbours and friends, but the community was so demoralized in 1834 that, as Deacon Abraham L. Clemens wrote to his brother in Chester County in 1836, “the neighbours did not go out to assist one another as in any other disease so that there was no funeral held.”²⁰

Farming families in which the household head died as a young or middle-aged man often had to give up the farm and were among the first to move on to other townships or to take jobs in the villages.

It was more remarkable that, after John C. Snyder died of cholera in 1834 at the age of 42, his widow Catharine was able to continue running the large farm in GCT128 until her death in 1854. Two of her nine children were young men aged 19 and 17 when their father died; they worked on the home farm until they married and were succeeded by three younger sons. As the eldest daughter of Christian Shantz, Catharine had eight brothers and sisters married and settled in the region and one unmarried sister. She also sold portions of the farm, reducing it from the 480 acres assessed in 1831 to the 208 acres sold by her executors in 1856.²¹

Mennonites suffering misfortune could call on help from their extended families. But some Mennonites also reached out to meet the needs of people to whom they were not related. In one recorded example, a group of English families – the Woolners, the Hemblings and two families of Howletts from Suffolk – contracted cholera as they passed through Hamilton in 1832 on their way to the Bridgeport area. All but one of the parents and several children died. The remaining children (including six Hemblings aged between two and 14 years) were adopted by Mennonite households in the district and became assimilated into communities in Waterloo and Woolwich townships.²²

Mennonite farm families co-operated with one another and with non-Mennonite neighbours in “bees” to accomplish all sorts of tasks from logging, ploughing, house-raising or barn-raising, to sheep-shearing, wool-picking, quilting, apple-paring, corn-husking and threshing. The co-operative bee may now seem to us a comforting symbol of neighbourly and community concern and particularly asso-

ciated with Mennonite culture. Extended and interconnected Mennonite families, as the founding settlers in most rural localities of Waterloo Township, did take the lead in such community efforts. And Mennonite families continued to take part in co-operative bees, as they also tended to remain farmers, longer than rural people from other backgrounds. But bees were organized among non-Mennonite farm folk as well, in the Waterloo region as well as more generally. Nor should we imagine that such customs and traditions meant any perfect state of communal co-operation and caring for the less fortunate.

Bishop Benjamin Eby set an example for his community in his concern for the well-being of both Mennonites and non-Mennonites. His efforts for general German education and literacy have been mentioned. He also took the initiative in trying to organize a “Waterloo German Society” to care for the “poor, sick, all otherwise suffering Germans, native or alien, without denominational distinction.” He supported petitions to help particular non-Mennonites, such as John Nahrgang’s deaf and dumb children in 1836, and was in favour of the Common Schools Act of 1843. His belief that “part of the Church’s mission was to make the entire social order more Christian” seemed dangerously Universalist to his fellow ministers.²³

Mennonite community leaders may have been less sensitive to suffering that resulted from some of their own profitable activities. Perhaps they were generally less forgiving of social problems such as alcoholism, mental illness or marriage breakdown. A few fragments of evidence are suggestive.

Local millers such as John Erb, Abraham Erb and Philip Bleam processed surplus grain into hard liquor which was plentiful and cheap. According to David B. Snyder, grandson of the first Joseph Schneider of Berlin, “whiskey was a common thing in those days. My grandfather was not a temperance man and had a good share of it... Like Abraham Weber, Joseph Schneider would “give his workmen a glassful when they wanted it.” The next generation – Joseph E. Schneider, Jacob Shantz and Christian Eby – were “strictly temperance” and would not follow “the custom...always to give (whiskey) to the hired help during harvest and haying time.”²⁴ Like owners of stills such as Samuel Eby in Berlin, the Mennonite millers and large farmers effectively encouraged consumption of crude alcohol by poor Indians and landless labourers. Hired helpers at harvest time were plied with whisky. Most “bees,” in which neighbours co-operated on all sorts of farming

tasks and were usually followed by “sprees” or country dances, were floated on liquor and included keen rivalry for rewards such as a jug of whisky. Community leaders seemed unconcerned with the disastrous effects of liquor on the Indians. Perhaps Indian Thomas McGee explained this in his personal account of alcoholism in Waterloo Township when he noted that “some white men say Indian he got no soul.”²⁵

The 1828 trial of Michael Vincent, for murdering his wife, provides some rare insight into Waterloo Township’s early social structure and problems of poverty and depravity. Vincent, who laboured at logging and clearing land, was described at the trial as “a miserable person of intemperate habits, who frequented still-houses and other places where liquor was to be had without attending even to the wants of his family.” There were five Vincent children, ranging from the eldest aged 8 or 9 to twins who were about 6 months old at the time of their mother’s death. A former neighbour testified that the Vincent cabin was dark and meanly furnished and that Vincent habitually treated his wife very cruelly. Detailed press accounts of Vincent’s trial depict him as a villain with no hint of insight by community leaders into the living conditions of poor landless families on the frontier. But the Waterloo miller and distiller Abraham Erb and his wife Magdalena, who were childless, adopted Rachel Vincent, one of the children orphaned by the murder.²⁶

A generation later, the will of Mary Clemens (1820-1867) is rare evidence of one woman’s effort to help other women who were from different backgrounds but all in perilous circumstances and not properly supported by husbands or fathers. Born the second daughter of Abraham and Mary Cressman, Mary outlived two husbands – first the Rev. Christian Eby (1821-1859), son of Bishop Benjamin Eby, and second Jacob M. Clemens (1813-1866). Mary left \$500 each to two women and a girl. Her first beneficiary was another Mennonite – Nancy Groff Clemens (1822-1897), the daughter of a prosperous miller and distiller, but whose husband had long since deserted her and was incarcerated in the Toronto Asylum. Christina Meuser’s legacy was to be paid to her “free of the control of her husband” who was a Lutheran farmer on a small property. Fanny Beasley was Mary’s Roman Catholic servant aged 14; interest on the legacy was to be used for her education and support until she married or turned 21.²⁷

In their first generation in Upper Canada, until the early 1830s, Mennonites predominated in shaping the basic economy, landscape and services of the Waterloo settlers’ community. Through their role as founding settlers of a solid block of territory, their pioneer culture and economic power continued to dominate the settlement even after they became outnumbered by later Lutheran and Catholic settlers from the 1830s. The Mennonite bishop, Benjamin Eby, exercised remarkable leadership among both Mennonites and non-Mennonites for about 40 years. But, from the 1830s, the increasing numbers of non-Mennonites who settled in the Waterloo area sought to express their different community identities in separate church buildings and activities.

The Mennonite presence in Waterloo Township was weakened by other factors during the 1850s. The passing of Bishop Benjamin Eby in 1853 meant the end of his long era of community leadership among Mennonites and non-Mennonites. The economic expansion associated with railways and industry stimulated the growth of villages and towns and, by attracting new migrants from other backgrounds, diluted the Mennonite strength in the community. Mennonite families also continued to move on to newer settlement frontiers, in nearby townships and also much farther away. In township government after 1850, Mennonites tended to be less active than their earlier community-building roles. Rural localities become more divided by their religious differences, as members of various denominations identified with their separate churches, and rural schools took over as focal points for general community loyalties.

By 1861, Waterloo Township had become a large region with a complex mosaic of cultures and communities. Mennonites headed fewer than one in four of all township households, 85 per cent of them in the rural areas. But they had the largest landholdings and households, the highest property assessment and the most solid houses, in contrast to the wealth and living conditions of most Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Their role as founding settlers and their culture and way of life through two generations continued to give them a lasting influence on the township’s society and economy.

Notes

1. An illustrated version of this essay was presented at the annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario on 14 June 1997. It is based on research for my book *Waterloo Township*

through two centuries published by the Waterloo Historical Society in 1995 (and reprinted in 1997). I am particularly grateful to Dr E. Reginald Good who facilitated my use of the resources of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario and Mennonite Historical Society at Conrad Grebel College and also shared his special knowledge of Mennonite and aboriginal history. To save space, detailed bibliographical endnotes are avoided here, except for sources of direct quotations. Most endnotes refer to relevant sections of *Waterloo Township through two centuries* where more detailed documentation is cited. Several research reports publish compilations of primary information. These include *Founding families of Waterloo Township, 1800-1830*, with profiles and analytical tables of 150 families who came to Waterloo Township, mainly from southeastern Pennsylvania, and a detailed list of township property-holders in 1831 from the Gore District assessment rolls. *Families and communities of Waterloo Township in 1861* reconstitutes township society by uniquely linking three sources – the manuscript census, assessment rolls, and Tremaine’s map. *Grassroots government: biographies of Waterloo Township councillors* publishes biographies and summary tables of men elected to the Waterloo Township council or employed as clerk or treasurer. *Waterloo Township schools 1842-1972* is an illustrated survey of education in the township’s 31 schools.

2. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.22-5, 31-42.
3. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.24-5, 404-5. See also Elizabeth Bloomfield et al., *Waterloo Township cadastre in 1861: “a system of the most regular irregularity”* (Guelph: University of Guelph, Department of Geography, Occasional Papers in Geography No. 21, 1994).
4. S.W. Fletcher, *Pennsylvania agriculture and country life, 1640-1840* (Harrisburg, PA: Historical and Museum Commission, 1950), p.371.
5. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.58-68.
6. Adam Fergusson, *Practical notes made during a tour in Canada, and a portion of the United States in 1831* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1833), pp.127, 281-2.

7. Quoted in R.L. Jones, *History of agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), p.53.
8. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.69-70.
9. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.71-2, 79-80, 83-9.
10. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.75-6, 91-106.
11. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.50-1.
12. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.52-6.
13. *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.77-90.
14. The virtual disappearance of the dialect by the mid-twentieth century led to efforts to record and practise it. The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario, formed in 1951, publishes the Canadian-German Folklore series of monographs and also meets annually for members to practise speaking the dialect. See Kathryn Burrige, *Pennsylvania German dialect: a localized study within a part of Waterloo County, Ontario* (Canadian-German Folklore v.11, 1989); Henry Kratz and Humphrey Milnes, "Kitchener German (part 1), a Pennsylvania German dialect: phonology," *Modern Language Quarterly* 14,2 (1953): 184-198; Henry Kratz and Humphrey Milnes, "Kitchener German (part 2), a Pennsylvania German dialect: phonology," *Modern Language Quarterly* 14,3 (1953): 274-283; Manfred Martin Richter, *The phonemic system of the Pennsylvania German dialect in Waterloo County, Ontario* (University of Toronto (Ph.D thesis, *Modern Languages*, 1969).
15. Early Mennonite church organization is outlined in more detail in *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.120-8.
16. Peterson's early opinion of Benjamin Eby is quoted in A.E. Byerly, "Henry William Peterson," *Waterloo Historical Society* 19 (1931), at p.257; and his eulogy is from the *Guelph Advertiser* 7 July 1853, also quoted in A.E. Byerly, *The beginning of things in Wellington and Waterloo Counties, with particular reference to Guelph, Galt and Kitchener* (Guelph, 1935), pp.43-44. "A.E.Y." is quoted by Ezra E. Eby, *A biographical history of Waterloo Township and other townships of the county: being a history of the early settlers and their descendants, mostly all of Pennsylvania Dutch origin: as also much other unpublished historical information chiefly of a local character* (Berlin 1895-6, updated with indexes and commentary by Eldon D. Weber, 1971), p.28.
17. A.B. Sherk, "The Pennsylvania Germans of Waterloo County, Ontario," *Ontario Historical Society, Papers and Records* 7 (1906), p.105.
18. Origins of non-Mennonite churches in the township are surveyed in *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.128-133.
19. John Webster Grant, *A profusion of spires: religion in nineteenth-century Ontario* (Toronto, 1988), p.3.
20. Letter from Deacon Abraham L. Clemens to Jacob Clemens of Chester County, Pennsylvania (Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Hist. Mss. 15.12).
21. Mrs O.A. Snyder, "1824 barn boards," *Waterloo Historical Society* 62 (1974): 31-33; Eby, *A biographical history of early settlers* #s 6909, 5905-5973; Gore District assessment rolls, 1831.
22. William Hembling was adopted by Isaac C. Shantz, Jeremiah by Isaac Eby, Lucy by Jacob Shantz, Jacob by Jacob Erb, and Sarah by Deacon Samuel Eby (who also adopted Jacob Woolner Jr). Jacob and Sarah Hembling both died of scarlet fever in 1840. Eby, *A biographical history of early settlers* #s 3705-3712, #8353.
23. "Deutsche Wohlthaetigkeits Gesellschaft," *Canada Museum* 28 March 1840; "Organisation der Deutsche Gesellschaft," *Canada Museum* 4 April 1840; E. Reginald Good, *Frontier community to urban congregation: First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, 1813-1988* (1988), p.59.
24. "Reminiscences of David B. Schneider," Joseph Meyer Snyder Family Fonds, Hist. Mss. 1.168, Series 8, Mennonite Archives of Ontario. Editor J.M. Snyder noted on the original typescript of this part of the interview "Do not put that in".
25. The testimony of Thomas McGee, reformed alcoholic, is quoted by the Rev. Peter Jones in the *Christian Guardian* of 1829, and reproduced in *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, p.129.
26. The account in *Waterloo Township through two centuries* (pp.96-9) is based on detailed press coverage in *Canadian Freeman* 8 and 11 September 1838 and *Gore Gazette* 6 and 13 September 1838, and on Robert L. Fraser, "Vincent, Michael," *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography* (1981): 203-206. Evidence for Abraham Erb's adoption of Rachel is in "The will of Abraham Erb," facsimile in *Waterloo Historical Society Archives* at Kitchener Public Library.
27. Mary Clemens' will is reproduced and discussed in *Waterloo Township through two centuries*, pp.224-5.

People and Projects

East Zorra Mennonite Church, near Tavistock, celebrated its 160th Anniversary on the weekend of September 20 to 21. The weekend also included a building dedication with its celebrations.

Bethel Mennonite Church, near Elora, celebrated its 50th Anniversary on the weekend of September 12 to 14. At that time a commemorative history, "A Light At The Crossroads," by former pastor Art Byer was available for purchase.

Erie View Mennonite Church, Port Rowan, celebrated their 50th Anniversary of incorporation this year.

Hidden Acres Camp, near Shakespeare, celebrated its 35th Anniversary this summer. On August 24 they held a reunion for all staff persons from past years.