

MENNONITES IN THE NIAGARA PENINSULA

Interviewee: (Rev.) H.P. Epp
 Interviewer: Anne Marshall
 Language: English
 Topics Covered:

Pioneers

The first Mennonites came to Canada from Pennsylvania in 1874, mainly because of the Civil War in the States and they wanted to remain under British rule. They settled in Vineland and farmed. They worshipped in houses. They had a pretty solid community. Early settlers did not provide assistance at first, because they had to work hard to get established.

Own Experience in the Early Years

Mr. Epp came to the Peninsula in 1960, called by the St. Catharines U.M. Church to serve as pastor. They bought a home from a real estate agent, a member of their congregation. The church and the Niagara Credit Union assisted him. Mr. Epp also taught at Niagara District High School for a few years. The sense of community is very strong, however, when people become too wealthy, this discourages the sense of community. Mainly ministers took over the leadership, such as: Rev. Jansen (Waterloo); Rev. Koop; Rev. Franssen; R. Dyck; R. Epp (no relation of H.P. Epp). There was very little opposition to the leadership.

Kind and Degree of Organizations Today

The church was big - scattered all over Ontario. There used to be only one Mennonite organization where representatives from each church would go. Now each church has its own organization. The churches are held together by a Conference of United Mennonite Churches of Ontario. Participation has been maintained or possibly increased over the years. There are now missions organizations, welfare organizations, and a Christian education branch.

The difference between U.M. and M.B. is not in faith, but in practice (form) i.e. baptism. M.B. have closed communion, U.M. have open communion, where even non-Mennonites are welcome.

Ethnic Persistence

Ethnic ties are still very important, but this importance has decreased, because the Mennonites have been here so long, and also due to intermarriage.

The U.M. and M.B. and First Mennonite all join in their voluntary services. The Old Order Mennonites do not directly involve themselves in this.

It is difficult for young people to become interested in Mennonite identity (at least the high school age). Once in university and college they seem to experience a sense of awakening.

Mennonites have always thrived on hardship. This holds the group together. The importance of non-resistance is growing. In London, Mennonites have a rehabilitation center for juvenile delinquents and a halfway house for the older ones.

Individual's Background

Born: 1916, Siberia

Mr. Epp came to Canada with his parents in about 1925 because of the collectivization of the land in Russia. His father was an ordained minister as well as a farmer. It took his father about 1½ years to get his passport. The Russian officials believed that he was a counter revolutionary and had been convincing people to leave Russia.

They did have language problems upon their arrival in Canada because none of them understood English.