

MENNONITES IN THE NIAGARA PENINSULA

Interviewee: Abram Wall
Interviewer: Anne Marshall
Language: English
Topics Covered:

Pioneers

The first Mennonites in Ontario went to the Waterloo-Kitchener area. They drifted into the Niagara Peninsula because there was always work here on fruit farms.

Arrival and Integration of Newcomers

From 1948 on, the Mennonites began to come in masses. At first, only nominated immigrants could come - father, mother, husband, wife, children (under 20 years and not married) and grandparents (over 65 years) - and sponsored immigrants - married brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, uncles and aunts. Independent applications would not be taken yet at that time. They were taken after 1950.

Most of the Mennonites that came after the 2ND World War, came to St. Catharines.

Thomas Reecer was a great leader and father figure to many. The settlement of Reecer in northern Ontario was named after him.

The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization assigned a special debt collector. In 1945 the last transportation debt was paid off to the C.P.R. The C.P.R. told the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization that whenever a third movement of Mennonites would occur, they would be allowed \$180,000 credit immediately. This sum represented interest. This movement took place after the 2ND World War.

The Russian and Danzig Mennonites are of Dutch origin. The Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites came from Switzerland and Germany.

Own Experience in the Early Years

Mr. Wall first arrived in the Niagara Peninsula with his wife, three sons, father, brother in 1928. They had first come to Alberta from Russia in 1926. Mr. Wall was held up in London for a short period. Here, he had to wear a badge when he went downtown, to identify himself as an immigrant.

Mrs. Wall's parents were Lutheran. Mrs. Wall became a Mennonite even before she married. She had grown up in a Mennonite settlement. However, Mr. Wall's grandfather would not go to the wedding, because she had been Lutheran.

Mr. Wall first worked for Abe Culp in Vineland, driving tractor for 18¢ an hour. He bought his own farm finally, and after a little difficulty, received credit.

Mr. Wall became chairman of the Relief and Immigration Comm., in 1947 and maintained the position until 1964. He did not receive wages. He only received \$20 a month - ridiculous.

Leaders

Mr. Wall mentioned some great leaders during the early years: Bishop Jacob Jansen (Waterloo); Mr. Weins; N. Drereger (Leaminton); John Bish (Vineland); Sam Coffman (Vineland); Thomas Reecer; J.B. Martin (Waterloo); Bishop Swan; William Hildebrant (Jordan); Jacob Dyck (Niagara).