

MENNONITES IN THE NIAGARA PENINSULA

Interviewee: Isaac High
Interviewer: Anne Marshall
Language: English
Topics Covered:

Pioneers

There was a shortage of land in Pennsylvania and after the American Revolution there was a big upheaval, so the Mennonites came to the Peninsula. They were able to sell their land prior to leaving Pennsylvania. "Mennonites had itchy heels." Most of them were farmers, some who also weaved or finished furniture. They brought their equipment with them from Pennsylvania. They knew enough about the land and the country before they came that they did intend to stay.

Ministers were chosen from the congregation. The Mennonites survived because of a strong sense of community. This is part of their way of life.

Own Experience in the Early Years

Mr. High owned the farm his parents had previously rented on 7th St. Louth, St. Catharines. He always worked on it, and also helped other farmers at times. He feels that there may have been an area where he could have made a greater contribution, but his field was restricted because of his limited education.

The Russian Mennonites that came to Canada had well-trained leaders.

First Mennonites went to the Minister seldom when they had problems.

Pennsylvania Dutch is not a written language.

Arrival and Integration of Newcomers

Mr. High acted as a sponsor for several families. They would provide a home for the newcomers for one year. The immigrants relatives had gone to Highs to ask them to be sponsors. The new immigrants had to work on farms or in mines. Russian Mennonites were willing to develop a sense of community with the First Mennonites. As people become more affluent, they became more independent. They are not as closely knit as were the pioneers.

Kind and Degree of Organizations Today

Today they are very highly organized. There are no differences between Mennonites as far as religion is concerned, just in the application. Mr. High is welcome in both the U.M. and M.B. Churches.

Ethnic Persistence

He feels the sense of Mennonite identity has been lost in his congregation of 60 members. He feels that the sense of community will be maintained.

Individual's Background

Born: 1910, St. Catharines
They moved from 7th St. Louth to Vineland - to the homestead of Isaac High's mother. The farm had been in the family for five generations.

Additional Information Not Included On Tape

I had the opportunity to talk with Mrs. High's mother's sister, Aunt Ellen, for a very few minutes. She was born in Pennsylvania, and presently lives in Indiana. She is 95 years old.

Aunt Ellen was to wear a full apron when she joined the church. She said she did not know what purpose it served but the church leaders said that it had to be worn, so all the women wore them. Aunt Ellen refused to wear one, since she said it did her no good at all. The church did not accept her rebellion readily but she never wore an apron and was accepted into the church. Several women took after her. Aunt Ellen is a very strong woman who claims that she depends on God too much.

Mrs. High's mother, born in Pennsylvania, wore a white cap and a black bonnet. Mrs. High wore a cap to please her mother, but never wore one after her mother's death. It would have broken her mother's heart to see her daughter take off her cap. There was always a pointed cape worn over the mother's dress. Mrs. High's cape was not pointed, and was tucked underneath a belt.