

# **Anabaptist-Black Interaction in Upper Canada: An Initial Reconnaissance**

**Timothy Epp, Redeemer University College**

To be brothers and sisters in the Lord we must understand the dynamics of black/white relations and its implications in Christian faith. An examination of the historical nature and development of black/white relations is necessary for understanding the status and reality of their relation today. (Brown, 1976, p. 98)

In this article I will address Hubert L. Brown's challenge in his groundbreaking book, *Black and Mennonite*, by undertaking an initial reconnaissance of Black-Anabaptist social interaction in Canada. While Brown's call for an historical analysis of black-white relations in the United States has been met by numerous writings, his challenge is difficult to answer for Canada based on available resources. Still, in order to answer such sociological questions as what social factors influenced Mennonite-Black relations, or what these relations suggest about the cultural, ethnic, racial and religious identities of those involved, a preliminary inventory of historical evidence is required.

## **Social Identity**

In his discussion of Mennonite identity, Donald Kraybill notes that “all knowledge, including ethnic identity, in one way or another is a social product, a socially constructed reality which reflects the social forces and processes operating in a particular milieu” (Kraybill, 1988, p. 154). He continues: “Mennonite identity is...molded by the group’s... social interactions with other groups....Ethnic identities are negotiated identities, diplomatic treaties that emerge from the group’s internal and external bargaining” (p. 158). In other words, the history of a people is constituted through social interaction with others and the continual negotiation of collective and individual identities.

My current research focuses on the social history of interaction between Anabaptists (Mennonites, Tunkers/River Brethren) and Blacks, both in the United States and in Canada, including the Underground Railroad and patterns of settlement in Canada West (Ontario). While recognizing and valuing the unique lived experiences of ‘Black people’ (those who identify or who are identified as “colored”, “negro”, or “Black”), including those of struggle and liberation, we must also recognize that Black history is socially constructed and interwoven with the histories of other cultural and religious groups. The interaction of Anabaptists with Blacks has reflected, re-enforced, and at times challenged, deeper conceptions of ethnic/racial/religious identities as well as societal norms of Black-White interaction.

While a number of works have analyzed Mennonite-Black interaction in the American context (Bechler, 2001; Brown, 1976; Nolt, 2011; Nolt & Lehman, 2007; Ostwalt, 1994; Ostwalt & Pollitt, 1993) my task here is to complement these studies by focusing on the Canadian context of migration and settlement. My findings thus far suggest that Blacks and Mennonites may have shaped each other’s histories in significant ways. Census data from 1851 indicate that in the mid- to late-nineteenth century Anabaptists and Blacks in southwestern Ontario were immediate neighbours. Moreover, in several instances, Anabaptists hired Blacks as farm labourers, in at least one case a Mennonite family adopted a Black child, and in several cases Blacks and Anabaptists married.

## **Anabaptists and Blacks**

An historical survey of Anabaptist-Black relations in the United States indicates the racialized complexity of these relations. This study begins with the fact that while Mennonites faced persecution, migration and liberation, their empathy towards the suffering of others,

including African-Americans, was checkered. Some Mennonites were slave-owners (Lehman, 1990; MacMaster, 1985; Schlabach, 1989; van der Zijpp and Steiner, 2009), while others opposed slavery.

The earliest-known petition against slavery in North America seems to bear some Mennonite influence. Drafted in Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1688, the document was signed by four men, one Quaker and three former Mennonites attending a Quaker meeting-house, one of whom later returned to the Mennonite denomination. Sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois referred to these individuals as “Mennonite Quakers”, noting that “from that time [1688] until the Revolution the body slowly but steadily advanced, step by step, to higher ground, until they refused all fellowship to slaveholders” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 21).

Mennonite opposition to slavery in the United States evolved over time. For example, Richard MacMaster writes that Mennonites signed petitions to Congress in opposition to slavery during the 1830s, and were in opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 (MacMaster, 1985). However, Mennonites seldom joined abolitionist societies, especially those which were more militant (Nolt, 2011; Nolt & Lehman, 2007; Stauffer, 1992). In fact, Mennonites were not always as open in their opposition to slavery as the members of some other Christian denominations (i.e., Quakers). In her statement to the United Nations World Conference Against Slavery in 2001 Iris de Leon-Hartshorn of the Mennonite Church USA concluded that since their arrival “in North America in the seventeenth century [Mennonites] have been a part of the dominant gang while claiming to be separate from it.” Perhaps they claimed to be “concerned about issues like racism and missionary conquest, [but] they have, more often than not, been about the business of quietly acquiescing in the racism of the surrounding culture, therefore participating in it” (De Leon-Hartshorn, 2001, para 2).

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, Mennonite churches began outreach initiatives in areas such as the Welsh Mountains in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (Bechler, 2001), but some of these initiatives appear paternalistic in retrospect. The African American Mennonite Association, which emerged to meet the concerns of Black Mennonites in the United States, nevertheless grew to include over fifty congregations (African American Mennonite Association, n.d.).

### **Interaction in the United States**

While most of the research on Black-Anabaptist interaction focuses on the American context, the histories of both Mennonites and Blacks are international narratives, connected by processes of migration to Canada and settlement in Upper Canada, later Canada West, and

later still, Ontario. Mennonites, Tunkers, and Blacks sometimes came from the same areas and counties in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Evidence exists of contact between Anabaptists and Blacks within these areas, but much of it is circumstantial. In his study of the Pennsylvania Dutch, William Parsons notes that there was “close contact” and mutual awareness between Blacks and Mennonites in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Pennsylvania, but little daily social interaction: “with very few exceptions, they owned no slaves.... Pennsylvania Dutch and blacks lived in close contact in the southern tier of counties in the state [but] they ignored each other in daily affairs.... Pennsylvania Dutch held no animosity toward blacks.... In fact, to some degree, a feeling of sympathetic understanding existed. The poor German on the same rung of the social ladder...” (Parsons, 1976, p. 204-5). When asked if they as African Americans were happy, one man responded, “Yes, sir, colored people are as white as anybody here, if they behave” (Parsons, 1976, 205).

Although the last statement is somewhat ominous, this man added, “Col[ore]d people like the Germans, there’s no deception with them” (Parsons, 1976, p. 205). Evidently a rapport between these two groups developed as, in his 1898 book *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom*, Wilbur Siebert mentions that those fleeing slavery were encouraged to contact “Germans”, who were known to be of assistance (Siebert, 1898, p. 92).

There is also some evidence that Blacks in Pennsylvania learned the “Pennsylvania Dutch” dialect. The newspaper *Pine and Palm* of 5 October 1861 included an article titled “Colored People of Pennsylvania, IV”, by Dr. J. B. Smith who noted that in Reading, Pennsylvania, the “inhabitants are mostly Dutch people, and you will hear little else than this jaw-breaking outlandish Pennsylvania Dutch spoken, even among the colored people.” While the “Pennsylvania Dutch” in Reading may have been primarily Lutheran or Reformed, Mennonites did live in neighbouring areas.

Some Mennonites and Tunkers did assist fugitive slaves in the Underground Railroad (Blockson, 1981; Lehman, 1990; Parsons, 1976; Ruth, 1984; Switala, 2008). Some of the most renowned abolitionists in the United States were also associated with Anabaptism. The family of the famous abolitionist Elijah J. Pennypacker, for example, had Mennonite roots: “his parents were both of German descent, and in early married life were connected with the Society of Mennonites” (Smedley, 1883, p. 210), while his grandfather, Matthias Pennypacker was a Mennonite bishop and his uncle Matthias Pennypacker “paid for the reprinting of the Dordrecht Confession of Faith at West Chester, Pennsylvania in 1814” (Wenger, 1959).

## Migration

Specific Anabaptist-Black relations in Canada are more difficult to document than those in the United States, but numerous pieces of evidence point to the possible existence of relationships and a positive attitude of Anabaptists to Black neighbours. The late 18<sup>th</sup> century migration to Upper Canada may have been caused by a shortage of land in Pennsylvania, coupled with concerns about political and religious freedom. But at least some migrants may have headed north because of their opposition to slavery in parts of the U.S. Joseph Schörg and Samuel D. Betzner were two of the first Anabaptists to arrive in the Waterloo area in 1800. Before moving north, Betzner of Lancaster County first traveled to Virginia to explore the possibility of living there. He was said to have objected to the idea of moving to that state, having “no love for the negro slavery which he found there” (Edworthy, 1993, p. 32). Betzner may have traveled with his brother-in-law Schörg, who also moved from Pennsylvania to Rockingham County, Virginia, “but stayed there only about a year because of his disapproval of the black slavery he found there” (Sherk, 1982, p. 298). Another account suggests that members of the Wildfong family migrated from North Carolina to Pennsylvania also due in part to their resistance to the slavery they encountered in the south (Eby, 1895, p. 641). Whether Mennonites from the United States moved to Upper Canada because of similar resistance cannot be verified. A current website, “Exploring Niagara”, suggests that slavery was “perhaps the most compelling reason” for Mennonite migration to the Niagara region (n.d., para. 6). While this seems to be an over-statement, opposition to slavery appears to have influenced the path of migration for several Mennonite and Tunker families.

What is known is that when the Niagara settlement began in 1788 with Jacob Sevitz (Zavitz), followed the next year by John and Christian Troyer, and then other families from Lancaster County in Pennsylvania, bearing surnames including Carver, Braley, Enos, Doan and Hershey (Fretz, 1953, p. 64) they settled in townships with Black residents. Certainly, research on Mennonite history in the Niagara region is challenging, as the stories of Mennonites are intertwined with those of other denominations. Revivalist movements within the Mennonite church, for example, led many Mennonites to “convert” and become members of other Anabaptist denominations such as the Tunkers, or of Methodist, Baptist, or Anglican churches. According to one account of St. John’s Anglican Church in Ridgemount, it received sixty-three candidates for confirmation on June 18, 1846, most of whom were “‘Pennsylvania Dutch’ who came to Canada from New York and Pennsylvania following the American Revolution” (Fort Erie Historical

Museum, 2004, p. 168). This church was located one kilometre to the west of the Colored Cemetery which served Little Africa. Gravestones in the cemetery bear the surnames Beam, Shisler, Haun and House.

Numerous other accounts of Anabaptist-Black proximity exist. Within Welland County, Mennonites tended to settle in Bertie, Humberstone, and Willoughby townships, not far from where Blacks had established the community of Little Africa, which stretched from the Niagara River at Miller's boat yard (later the Niagara Parks Marina) to the community of Ridgemount, along Sunset Trail and Curtis Road (Thomas, 2007, p. 11; Fort Erie Museum, 2004, p. 371). Little Africa's population increased from 80 residents in 1840 to around 200 in 1880 "when a dwindling wood supply and an increasing demand for coal to fuel the railroad trains deprived these people of their chief livelihood" (Hill, 1981, pp. 50-51).

A careful examination of township records, the 1876 historical atlas, histories of Mennonites and Tunkers in Welland County, accounts of Little Africa, and various census records suggest other instances of Anabaptist-Black proximity. First, Mennonites and Tunkers were neighbours to Little Africa throughout its existence. Township records include many transactions of land bordering on Sunset Trail and Curtis Road which are associated with the surnames listed by Fretz (1953) as belonging to early Mennonite and Tunker settlers. Census records from 1851 indicate Morningstar families, listed as "New Menonists" in the census, indicating the influence of Daniel Hoch's revivalist movement, (Epp, 1974, p. 149), as living in close proximity to the Russell family, the only family identified as "Black" in census records whose members were buried in the "Colored Cemetery", formerly Denahower Cemetery, near Ridgemount (although other Blacks may have been buried in unmarked graves, Fort Erie Historical Museum, 2004, p. 341). Other Mennonite and Tunker surnames are found in the historical atlas in close proximity to Little Africa, including Hershey, Miller, and Shisler. In this atlas, the southwest corner of Edwin Hershey's land, Lot 9 Concession 4, features a schoolhouse that, according to one newspaper article, had Black students in attendance (Davies, n.d., para. 1). While Hershey had become Methodist by this point in time, his family was of Mennonite heritage. The document "Black Heritage in Bertie Township" notes that "the Quakers were heavily involved in the hiding and transporting of runaway slaves", and then provides a list of Quakers in Bertie township from the 1851 census (Ontario Genealogical Society, 1993, p. 8). Significantly, the Zavitz families listed (Jacob, Henry, and Jacob O.) were important in each of the Quaker, Mennonite and Tunker church groups in the area (Fretz, 1953).

Places of Mennonite and Tunker worship were also located in the general vicinity of Black settlements. According to Fretz (1953), the

first Mennonite church in Welland County was erected in 1827 at Sherkston. Fretz also mentions the Reformed Mennonites as having a church in Humberstone in the 1830s. By the 1870s, Stevensville featured a Reformed Mennonite church, as well as Tunker and United Brethren churches (Fort Erie Historical Museum, 2004, pp. 171, 176, 184). Little Africa was located approximately six kilometres to the east of Stevensville. The MacAfee cemetery, according to Fretz, was located “on the river road a few miles north of Fort Erie”, that is, across the road from a meeting house that was used by Mennonites. The cemetery itself includes the graves of Abraham and Edwin Hershey. One newspaper article noted that the men of Little Africa, specifically “250 males, of whom 175 were negroes”, cleared the land in search of hardwood for the construction of buildings, steam boats, furniture and railway ties. This source suggests that Little Africa included individuals who were not “negroes” but were presumably neighbours to the Black community. The article proceeds to describe the land which the Little Africa men cleared as in close proximity to the MacAfee cemetery: “At that time the section from Miller’s Bay and MacAfee cemetery was one dense forest of standing trees, some of large girth” (Little Africa was a thriving..., n.d., para. 1). Furthermore, individuals of Anabaptist heritage worshiped in nearby churches of other denominations, such as St. John’s Anglican Church.

Blacks may have lived and/or worked on land owned by Mennonites and Tunkers. Early Black settlers in Little Africa seldom owned property, and the land bordering on Sunset Trail and Curtis Road was owned by bearers of some Mennonite and Tunker surnames, according to the 1876 atlas. Blacks, perhaps especially the men, worked at clearing land for the railroad, cutting trees that would fuel the engines of the trains and be shipped abroad (Little Africa, n.d., para. 1). The railroad was central to the livelihood of Little Africa and cut across properties bearing Mennonite and Tunker surnames in the historical atlas. In his book *The Freedom Seekers*, Daniel Hill writes,

The expansion of the railroads in the 1850s to ‘70s gave work to some Black communities. At Fort Erie, for example, early Black residents often worked at cutting logs to be rafted across the Niagara River for shipment to American centres. In 1860 a railroad line was run from Fort Erie to Niagara-on-the-Lake, through the heart of “Little Africa” where woodchoppers prepared fuel for the engines. Blacks cut wood for the Canada Southern Railway, built from St. Thomas to Buffalo in 1873, and for the ferries which carried trains across the Niagara River at Fort Erie before the International Railway Bridge was built. (Hill, 1981, p. 177)

In doing this work, Blacks may have cleared land belonging to Mennonite and Tunker families. In his 1849 autobiography, Josiah Henson writes of the Blacks in Little Africa:

Several hundreds of colored persons were in the neighborhood; and, in the first joy of their deliverance, were going on in a way which, I could see, led to little or no progress in improvement. They were content to have the proceeds of their labor at their own command, and had not the ambition for, or [*sic*] the perception of what was within their easy reach, if they did but know it. They were generally working for hire upon the lands of others, and had not yet dreamed of becoming independent proprietors themselves. (Henson, 1849, pp. 138-139)

In his history of Mennonites in Canada, Frank Epp notes that Mennonites may have hired Blacks as “cheap labour”, suggesting such a case in the relationship between Abraham Erb and Isaac Jones in the Queen’s Bush Black settlement, which I will discuss in the next section (Epp, 1974, p. 79). One source suggests that Abraham Hershey may have hired Blacks in his tannery and lumber mill:

A large number of black slaves who escaped from the south by way of the underground, settled on the land bordering the old Indian trail. There [*sic*] settlement stretched [*sic*] from the mouth of the Creek to St. John’s Church on Ridgemount. They were employed in the lumber industry. Abraham Hershey who lived by the river just south of Miller Creek had a large tannery and also a lumber business. Cheap labour would be his for the asking. (Little Africa: 1840-1875, n.d., para. 1)

Other potential connections between Anabaptists and Blacks exist in this area. The property owned by William Forsyth at the corner of Bowen Road and Niagara Boulevard features the legendary Bertie Hall and Forsyth’s cave, places reputed to be connected to the Underground Railroad (Little Africa, n.d., para. 1). According to the 1876 atlas of Welland County and land records from the area, land immediately to the south of Forsyth’s was owned by the Wintemute family; this surname belongs to some Mennonites in the Niagara area (Fretz, 1953). The area of Pleasant Point, on the Niagara River, was the site of George Hershey’s tannery and was a crossing point for the Underground Railway (Niagara Parkway, Mackenzie, and Chippewa). Wilma Morrison has also suggested that Blacks may have been in attendance at a Tunker church in Welland (personal communication, September 25, 2013).



## Waterloo

The earliest record of interaction between Mennonites and a Black person in Waterloo County, and perhaps the most-often cited, is a reference in Ezra Eby's manuscript *From Pennsylvania to Waterloo: A Biographical History of Waterloo Township (1895-1896)*. In the fall of 1806, one of Waterloo's early prominent citizens, Abraham Erb, brought a "colored boy" with him from Franklin County in Pennsylvania (Eby, 1895, p. 32) to the site of present-day Waterloo (35). The boy in question was Isaac Jones, who tended cattle for Erb (37). According to Eby, Jones was looking for lost cattle that he was tending for Erb, but he himself became lost in the woods. Many people looked for the boy for over a week, but most "gave up in despair and returned home" (Eby, 1895, p. 37). Only two searchers continued, finally hearing the barks of the two dogs that Jones had with him that had not left his side for the entire time. When the boy was found, he was nearly dead from starvation and unable to walk. Unfortunately, his rescuers now were also lost, but managed to navigate their way to the Grand River, two miles south of Galt, and then arrived at their home with Jones. This story has been repeated, in summarized form, in numerous publications speaking to the history of Mennonite and Pennsylvania German settlement in the Waterloo area (Moyer, 1997, p. 17; Martin, 1964, p.6; Groh, 1971, pp. 79-80.).

Another early Mennonite pioneer with a relationship to a Black person in this area was Abraham Weber. Weber had set out in 1806 from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, for Canada. Weber had been one of the men to administrate Abraham Erb's will. In his 1937 history of Kitchener, William Uttley (1937) provides the following account:

Young Abraham Weber had purchased 361 acres of Lot No. 16....He first cleared the expanse on which the Goodrich Tire Works now stand, and built a log house. Three years later he married Elizabeth Cressman. The pioneer hired a Negro named Carroll. Once, while working in the bush, the darkey broke an arm or leg. Mr. Weber then gave the injured man a piece of land for a cabin and garden. (p. 13)

The 'negro' mentioned here was presumably Levi Carroll, described as a "one-legged ex-slave" (Rickert-Hall, 5 June 2012). The Carroll family then lived in the building which had previously housed Waterloo's first school, built in 1820 and now located in Waterloo park. This building, "a log cabin (16' x 22')", was originally located on the northeast corner of Bridge and Main Streets (near King and Agnes Streets), "on land located for that purpose by G. W. ('Wash') Hanna"; the building also

served the local Methodist congregation. Carroll was described as a having “raised corn on his lawn, tilling the soil with a long hoe, in the fashion he had learned on plantations [...] He died penniless in 1897, and spent the last few years of his life in the poorhouse [...] living in the county House of Industry on Frederick Street. The former slave was buried in a pauper’s grave somewhere in downtown Kitchener, with no money for a headstone.” In her blog “1820 Log Schoolhouse”, historian Joanna Rickert-Hall (June 19, 2012) suggests that Carroll was the ancestor of Addie Aylestock, the first Black woman minister in Canada, who was inspired at a Mennonite revival meeting near Lebanon in Wellington County, of Rella Aylestock/Braithwaite, the eldest surviving descendent of the Queen’s Bush black families, and of Rella’s daughter Diana, who is a renowned blues singer and advocate for Black history. In her history of the Schneider family, Miriam Helen Snyder notes that the children of Joseph Schneider knew Levi Carroll’s children.

The Erb/Jones and Weber/Carroll stories are important as examples of Black-Mennonite interaction, but also because Abraham Erb and Abraham Weber are noted early pioneers in the Waterloo area, marked by historic sites and artifacts. The home of Barnabas Devitt, Isaac Jones’ adopted brother, is also a historic site.

There is also at least one account of the adoption, or “raising” of a Black person by Mennonites (although the account of Isaac Jones might be a second). In his history of the First Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Reg Good refers to Jacob Z. Kolb, ordained as a Mennonite deacon “for Cressman’s (present day Breslau congregation) and Christian Eby’s localities on 22 November, 1875” (Good, 1988, p. 91). Kolb and his wife Maria lived and farmed two miles east of Berlin. One of the Kolbs’ children was Charlie Jones, adopted either formally or raised by the Kolbs. Jones joined the Waterloo District Conference through baptism at First Mennonite Church. Uttley refers to Jones as “a Negro [...] who had been raised by the Kolb family and could talk Pennsylvania Dutch like a streak” (Uttley, 1937, p. 338). Uttley also mentions Jones as working on an inter-racial threshing team.

In Waterloo, Mennonites both supported and attended a school run by an African-American man. At least two Mennonites received some instruction from Western Reserve College’s first African-American graduate, John Frederick Augustus Sykes Fayette. Referred to as “a mulatto” in Gottlieb Leibbrandt’s history of German Canadians in Waterloo County (1977, p. 204), Fayette attended the college from 1832-1836. He was a student of theology in 1836-37 and graduated with a Bachelor’s degree. Fayette was described by his own pastor as “a regular & worthy member of the church of my pastoral care; a young man (of colour) whose principles appear fixed and sound; a candidate for the Christian ministry, of good & hopeful promise; &

a scholar of respectable attainments and behaviour. He has the best wishes of Christians who know him, for his prosperity in all things” (Case Western Reserve University, February 17, 2011).

While at Western Reserve College, Fayette became known for his abolitionist sympathies. In 1833, Fayette and twenty-four other students signed a petition defending one of their professors for supporting abolitionism. He also supported an anti-slavery resolution in the college church. In his biography of John Brown, W.E.B. Du Bois recorded Fayette’s attendance and influence at an important turning point in Brown’s life:

It was in 1839, when a Negro preacher named Fayette was visiting Brown, and bringing his story of persecution and injustice, that this great promise was made. Solemnly John Brown arose; he was then a man of nearly forty years, tall, dark and clean-shaven; by him sat his young wife of twenty-two and his oldest boys of eighteen, sixteen and fifteen. Six other children slept in the room back of the dark preacher. John Brown told them of his purpose to make active war on slavery, and bound his family in solemn and secret compact to labor for emancipation. And then, instead of standing to pray, as was his wont, he fell upon his knees and implored God’s blessing on his enterprise. (Du Bois, 1997, p. 46)

The next year saw Fayette traveling to Ontario as a missionary of the Presbyterian church and establishing the Wellington Institute (the Waterloo Historical Society’s Second Annual Report, 1914, records Fayette as having “built a schoolhouse on his own account”), the first school in Berlin (now Kitchener) to teach grammar and how to use maps. Uttley states that the Wellington Institute was “housed in a building at the rear of the Royal Exchange hotel in East King Street” (Uttley, 1937, p. 39). In an 1840 issue of the *Canada Museum*, an early German newspaper of the area, the institute is advertised as having just opened that December, and as being “comfortable” and “well calculated for the object to which it is appropriated [...] to impart instruction to both sexes,” with the following encouragement from the paper’s editors:

we hope that all of them [Waterloo villagers] do readily accede to the following trite & true saying- and acceding thereto, will avail themselves of its advantages- viz. ‘Tis Education forms the common mind- Just as the twig is bent the tree’s inclined.

Fayette provided the *Canada Museum* with a short statement regarding the institute, dated December 4, 1840: "Instruction, at present, will be given in READING, WRITING, ARITHMETIC, GEOGRAPHY, ENGLISH GRAMMAR, &c." Fayette also noted plans to expand the curricular offerings: "as soon as circumstances will admit, Scientific and Classical instruction will be given." Fayette also assures parents of students that "the Pupils are under the eye of the Principal of the Institute, who has the supervision not only of their Education, but also of their Habits and Morals." Two of Fayette's students were Jacob Y. Shantz, at age eighteen, and Israel Bowman, at age eleven (Bowman later appears in a school reunion photo of the 1820s schoolhouse). Shantz would later be instrumental in Mennonite settlement in Western Canada (Steiner, 1988). It is also interesting to note the endorsement of the school in the *Canada Museum* (Dec. 4, 1840), as signed by, among others, Jacob S. Shoemaker, Esq., a Mennonite merchant, and Benjamin Eby, a prominent pastor/bishop in the Mennonite church who had migrated from Lancaster County to Ontario in 1807. Eby was a key share-holder and supporter of this newspaper, founded in 1835 (Roth, 1986). The endorsement, dated December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1840, reads as follows:

Mr. Fayette, the Principal of The Wellington Institute, is a regular Graduate of a distinguished Literary Institution, whom we consider fully competent, both from his respectable Testimonials of Character and Ability, as well as of our personal acquaintance with him, to discharge the important duties devolving upon an Instructor of youth.

Unfortunately, "lack of students and increasing debts soon forced the school to close. At a cost of two dollars per person plus fuel, a student at the institute could get proper instruction in English grammar and use real maps to study geography. But this was expensive in those days and few could afford the fee." (Steiner, 1988, pp. 25-26) In contrast, Uttley records that while "Fayette's rates for tuition were moderate, the institute did not attract enough young folk to make ends meet. He ran into debt and after a year or two left for parts unknown" (Uttley, 1937, p. 39). Fayette became a minister and served for many years in various churches in Canada, including those in the Niagara Presbytery. He also served as a superintendent of schools in Ontario. He died in London, Ontario, Canada in 1876, leaving behind his wife and two married daughters.

Mennonites living in Berlin or Waterloo may have also had contact with some of the other Blacks living in those communities. For example, a "fugitive" named P.E. Susand was a barber and ran a coffee-shop in Berlin. Another Black person, a Mr. R. Sutherland, was a lawyer.

According to Brown-Kubisch (2004), Susand had lived in Wellesley as early as 1843, but had moved to Berlin, where he and his wife lived with their ten children. Sometime during the mid-1850s, the Susand property suffered some damage by vandalism; Susand brought charges against the perpetrators between the years 1853-1857. The Justice of the Peace who found the culprits guilty was a Mr. Henry Stauffer Huber, formerly of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. His family had migrated to Canada in 1822; Huber became a merchant along with Jacob S. Shoemaker. Brown-Kubisch writes: "in 1851, Huber formed a partnership with Charles Henry Ahrens and together they operated a general store and foundry in Berlin. A community leader, Huber was a Crown Land Agent, a Justice of the Peace, a founder of Berlin's grammar school and he served as a school trustee for twenty-five years. He also served as a Reeve of Berlin in 1857 and from 1859 to 1864" (Brown-Kubisch, 2004, 254-255). Huber also assisted in the establishment of the Queen's Bush Black settlement.

### **Queen's Bush**

Mennonite-Black relations are also apparent in Wellesley Township, one of 30 townships in which Mennonites could be found by 1841 (Epp, 1974, p. 72). In the Wellington district, which included the townships of Woolwich, Wilmot and Waterloo, nearly 1,000 Mennonites and over 100 Tunkers were numbered in the 1841 census. This area also included one of the largest Black communities in nineteenth-century Canada West, a community which at its peak totaled approximately 2,000 people. The community stretched along the northeastern edge of Wellesley Township and southwestern Peel Township, and today is known as the 'Queen's Bush settlement' (Brown-Kubisch, 2004). The initiatives of mission societies, which considered this community an area of outreach, are still reflected in cemeteries that today are located on land owned by Mennonites. Mennonites also appear to have assisted in the community's establishment. Archaeologist Karolyn Smardz Frost has suggested that neighbours to this settlement, including Mennonites, may have lent seed to the Black farmers (Ontario Heritage Trust, 2008). One of these neighbours may have been Henry Stauffer Huber, a local merchant whom Brown-Kubisch (2004) identifies as 'Mennonite' but who may have been United Brethren or Swedenbogian (p. 42). Two of the earliest Black settlers, John and Eliza Little, referred to the help that they had received from 'Dutchmen', who may have been Mennonite:

I raised that year one hundred and ten bushels of spring wheat, and three hundred bushels of potatoes on land which we had cleared ourselves, and cultivated without plough or drag. All was done with the hoe and hand-rake. This I can prove by my nearest neighbors. I got the seed on credit of some Dutchmen in the towns, by promising to work for them in harvest. They put their own price on the seed, and on my labor. (Drew, 2004, p. 153)

Today the land which the Littles farmed is owned by Mennonites.

Interviews with descendents of Black and Mennonite families from the Queen's Bush area suggest that John Little's role as labourer on Mennonite farms was not unique. Some records exist which indicate labour exchange between Blacks and their neighbours. Families such as the Littles assisted other farmers, giving days of work on the neighbour's farm in exchange for one day's labour by their neighbours on the Black farm. The 1851 census includes one family, that of Martin Winger of Wellesley Township, and a Black labourer, Henry Butler, who was a 'non-family resident' and apparently boarded with the Wingers. Brown-Kubisch (2004) also lists Butler in the Queen's Bush community (p. 195). Some Blacks and Mennonites lived in close proximity to each other within Peel Township. Members of the Jacop Brant family are listed as Mennonites in the 1851 census, living with their boarder Fanny Shenk in the midst of the Black Queen's Bush community of Peel Township.

Both the Blacks and Mennonites encountered difficulties in terms of land ownership during the 1800s. During the first decade of that century, Mennonites had purchased land from Richard Beasley, unaware of an existing mortgage on the land. Assistance from American Mennonites helped to resolve this matter. Several decades later, the Blacks of the Queen's Bush community were informed that the land which they had cleared and were living on was in actuality 'clergy reserve', and were given the option of purchasing the land or moving elsewhere (Brown-Kubisch, 2004). Only a few Black farmers, including the Littles, were able to purchase their land. Records indicate two cases of Black farms being sold to Mennonites (Mountjoy, 1999, pp. 51, 125). At times the Black family would then live on a section of this land, perhaps working for the Mennonite family (Martin, n.d.).

Other forms of interaction included community childcare provided by Black families to neighbourhood children, including Mennonites (interview with John Hisson and Mose Metzger, September 8, 2008); a Black woman teaching crochet to a Mennonite girl (Mountjoy, 1999); young Black men who drove their carriages passed Mennonite homes, with their "best girl" in arm (Bauman, ca.1953). Rella Braithwaite provided the following recollection:

I only know that my parents, Aylestocks, ancestors of the Queens Bush area, frequently spoke of the good neighbors the Mennonites were. My mother often mentioned that the Mennonites helped her parents who were farmers in Elmira and Kitchener area, and they in turn enjoyed her mother's cooking, especially her pies, she told us. My father also learned to speak German from them. (personal communication, January 23, 2008)

### Interaction in Other Regions

Anabaptist-Black interaction occurred in other areas of Ontario as well. Jacob Burkholder was one of the first European settlers in the Hamilton area, "a Swiss-born Mennonite who settled at the Head of the Lake after the American Revolution" (Shadd, 2010, p. 147). While Burkholder became Methodist later in life, his roots were Mennonite. In her *Hamilton Spectator* newspaper column "Out of the Storied Past", Mabel Burkholder identified Black settlers "Daddy Nelson" and Henry Johnson as gravediggers for the Burkholder cemetery (Shadd, 2010, p. 148). However, historian Adrienne Shadd writes of Mabel Burkholder: "unfortunately, her articles were full of romantic myth, half-truths, complete untruths, and patronizing stereotypes" (p. 147).

Nathaniel Boyer Paul, the son and nephew of two prominent ministers in the Wilberforce settlement near London, may have had some Anabaptist connection reflected in the name 'Boyer'. He assisted in bringing another Black, John Adley, to Canada. Adley married Hannah Stauffer, of Pennsylvania Dutch background. Nathaniel Boyer Paul went on to become the first Reeve of Kinloss in 1855 (Gilbert and Townsend, 2009).

The Silver Shoe community of the New Lowell was populated by Tunkers, Blacks, and some Mennonites. One of the founding couples of this settlement was Margaret Jane Lang, from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and John Morgan, Jr., one of the Black pioneers of the Sunnidale area. Margaret was the daughter of James Lang and Margaret Jane Clance, and of Pennsylvania Dutch background (Silver Shoe Historical Society, 1997).

Marriages between Mennonites and Blacks may have occurred in other areas as well. In her historical novel *Rachel's Legacy*, Pat Mestern describes a marriage between a Mennonite man and a woman described as "half negro". In an interview (September 10, 2009), Mestern told me that her novel is based in part on interviews with a local historian Isaac Horst, now deceased.

## Social Roles and Identities

While it is difficult to interpret the meaning of Anabaptist-Black interactions for those engaged in them, nonetheless these interactions do suggest certain qualities of Mennonite-Black relations. Although they were generally unwilling to join formal abolitionist initiatives and societies (Stauffer, 1992), evidence indicates that Mennonites did interact positively with their Black neighbours in Canada West. The reluctance to participate in abolitionist societies reflects some elements of Mennonite values and identity, including a refusal to participate in militaristic activities and a reluctance to become “unequally yoked” with non-Mennonites. Furthermore, I have found no records to suggest that Mennonites acted collectively (i.e., as a congregation) to interact with Blacks during the nineteenth century. The instances of interaction that did occur were between Mennonite individuals, and at times their families, with Blacks.

Labour exchange between Mennonites and Blacks reflected some reciprocity, although Blacks apparently needed to provide two days of work on a neighbour’s farm in exchange for one day of work by their neighbours on their Black-owned farm (Drew, 2004, p. 154).

Mennonites also benefitted from the services of Blacks, from the “cheap labour” referred to by Epp to the instruction and care provided to Mennonite students by Fayette at the Wellington Institute. Mennonites may have also been privy to Josiah Henson’s sermons in the area of Niagara’s Little Africa (Henson, 1849).

However, it is important to keep the authorship of most of these manuscripts and excerpts in mind. Most writing on Mennonite-Black interaction has been done by Mennonites; very few accounts exist from the perspective of Blacks themselves, with the exception of John and Eliza Little’s autobiography, as recorded by Benjamin Drew, and interview statements made by the descendents of Black families of the Queen’s Bush. Much of the other evidence is government-based land and tax records and newspaper files suggesting Anabaptist-Black geographic proximity. These records may not spell out the sociological nature of these relationships but they suggest strongly that such relationships did in fact exist.

While it is not possible at this point in time to generalize these findings to the greater population of Mennonites in nineteenth century Canada, the instances of interaction which I have presented in this article do provide a foundation for further inquiry into a social history of Anabaptist-Black relationships, and of the ways in which these histories bear each other’s influence.



## References

- African American Mennonite Association. (n.d.). Churches. [Web page]. Retrieved February 3, 2013 from <http://africanam.mennonite.net/about/churches.php>.
- Anonymous. (1876). *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Lincoln and Welland*. Toronto: H.R. Page.
- Bauman, Audrey. (ca. 1953). *The Pioneer Negroes of [Peel Twp.] Wellington County*. Student Essay. Pioneers: Essays, WCHS file 17, ca.1953. Wellington County Museum and Archives.
- Bechler, Le Roy. (2001). *The Black Mennonite Church in North America*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.
- Berger, Peter and Luckmann, Thomas. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Blockson, Charles L. (1981). *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*. Jacksonville, NC: Flame International.
- Blockson, Charles L. (2001). *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Above Ground and Under Ground: An Illustrated Guide*. Harrisonburg, PA: RB Books.
- Brown, Hubert L. (1976). *Black and Mennonite*. Herald Press: Scottdale, PA.
- Brown-Kubisch, Linda. (2004). *The Queen's Bush Settlement: Black Pioneers 1839-1865*. Toronto: Natural Heritage Books.
- Case Western University. (February 17, 2011). *John Sykes Fayette*. [Website] Retrieved March 8, 2013 from <http://blog.case.edu/archives/2011/02/index>.
- Coffman, Barbara F. (1981). The Pennsylvania-German Settlement in the Niagara Peninsula. In John Burtiak and Patricia G. Kirks (Eds.), *Immigration and Settlement in the Niagara Peninsula* (pp. 39-46). St.Catharines: Brock University.
- Davies, Charles. (November 21, 1989). Town a Logical Entry Point for Freed Slaves. *Fort Erie Extra*.
- De Leon-Hartshorn, Iris. (2001). *Racism in U.S. Churches: Past Practices and Current Solutions [Presentation]*. Retrieved February 3, 2013 from <http://www.nccusa.org/publicwitness/racismpanel.html>.
- Drew, Benjamin (Ed.). (2004). *Refugees from Slavery: Autobiographies of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The Negro Church*. In W. E. B. Du Bois (Ed.), *Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903*. Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1997). *John Brown: a Biography*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Eby, Ezra E. (1895). *From Pennsylvania to Waterloo: A Biographical History of Waterloo Township*. Retrieved March 8, 2013 from <http://ebybook.region.waterloo.on.ca/>.
- Edworthy, Laura Betzner. (1993). *The Betzner Family in Canada: Genealogical and Historical Records, 1799-1970*. West Flamborough: self-published.
- Epp, Frank. (1974). *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People*. Toronto: MacMillan of Canada.
- ExploringNiagara. (n.d.) The Mennonites and Quakers. [Web-site]. Retrieved February 3, 2013 from [http://www.exploringniagara.com/all\\_about\\_niagara/the\\_history\\_of\\_niagara/the\\_mennonites\\_quakers.html](http://www.exploringniagara.com/all_about_niagara/the_history_of_niagara/the_mennonites_quakers.html).
- Fort Erie Historical Museum. (2004). *Many Voices II: A Collective History of Greater Fort Erie*. Fort Erie: Fort Erie Historical Museum.
- Fretz, C. J. (1953, January). The Early History of Mennonites in Welland County, Ontario. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 55-75.
- Gilbert, Deborah and Townsend, Mary Kay. (2009, August). Black Roots in the Family Tree: A Look into the Colourful Heritage of our Pennsylvania Dutch Cousins. *Families*, 7-10.

- Good, Edgar Reginald. (1988). *Frontier Community to Urban Congregation: First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario*. Kitchener, Ont: First Mennonite Church.
- Groh, Ivan. (1971). *Pennsylvania German Pioneers of Waterloo (1799 to 1889)*. Waterloo: Pennsylvania Folklore Society of Ontario.
- Henson, Josiah. (1849). *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself*. Boston: Arthur D. Phelps.
- Hill, Daniel. (1981). *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*. Toronto: Stoddart.
- Kraybill, Donald B. (1988). Modernity and Identity: The Transformation of Mennonite Ethnicity. In Calvin Wall Redekop and Samuel J. Steiner (Eds.), *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, (pp. 153-172). Lanham: University Press of America.
- Lehman, Daniel R. (1990). *Mennonites of the Washington County, Maryland and Franklin County, Pennsylvania Conference*. Lititz, PA: Publication Board of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church and Related Areas.
- Leibbrandt, Gottlieb. (1980). *Little Paradise: The Saga of the German Canadians of Waterloo County, Ontario 1800-1975*. Waterloo: Allprint Company.
- Little Africa. (n.d.) [Private paper]. St. Catharines Public Library Archives, Reference Files-Little Africa.
- Little Africa: 1840s-1875, By way of the Forsyth Cave. (n.d.) [Private paper]. Fort Erie Historical Museum, Reference files-Little Africa.
- Little Africa was a thriving place back in 1870. (n.d.) [Private paper]. St. Catharines Public Library Archives. Reference Files-Little Africa.
- MacMaster, Richard K. (1985). *Land, Piety, Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790*. Vol. 1 in *The Mennonite Experience in America*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Martin, Delton. (n.d.). A History of Mennonites in Wallenstein Area. Self-published.
- Martin, Menno. (1964). *History of the Descendents of Christian B. Martin (1834-1912)*. Zurich, Ont: (s.n).
- Mayer, Henry. (2000). *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Mountjoy, Max (Ed.). (1999). *Portraits of Peel: Attiwandaronk to Mapleton*. Mapleton: Peel History Committee.
- Moyer, S.S. (1997). *Mennonite Immigration to Waterloo County: The Moyer Journal*. Kitchener: Waterloo-Wellington Branch, Ontario Genealogy Society.
- Nolt, Steven M. (2011). News Analysis: 150 Years After U.S. Civil War. *The Mennonite*, 14(10), 46.
- Nolt, Steven M. and James O. Lehman. (2007). *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ontario Genealogical Society. (1993, May). Black Heritage in Bertie Township. Thorold: Ontario Genealogical Society, Niagara Peninsula Branch.
- Ontario Heritage Trust. (2008). *The Queen's Bush Settlement, 1820-1867*. Toronto: Ontario Heritage Trust.
- Ostwalt, Conrad. (1994). African-Americans in North Carolina: A Symbiotic Relationship. *Direction*, 23(2), 38-42.
- Ostwalt, Conrad and Pollitt, Phoebe. (1993). The Salem School and Orphanage. *White Missionaries, Black School*. *Appalachian Journal* 20(3), 264-275.
- Parsons, William T. (1976). *The Pennsylvania Dutch: A Persistent Minority*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Pennypacker, Samuel Whitaker. (1872). *Annals of Phoenixville and its Vicinity: From the settlement to the year 1871, giving the origin and growth of the borough with information concerning the adjacent townships of Chester and Montgomery counties and the valley of the Schuylkill*. Phoenixville, PA: Bavis & Pennypacker.
- Rickert-Hall, Joanna. (2012) 1820 Log Schoolhouse. [Blog] Retrieved March 8, 2013 from <http://logschoolhouse.blogspot.ca/search/label/Aylestock>

- Roth, Lorraine. (1986, April). The Years of Benjamin Eby, Pioneer Mennonite Leader in Ontario, Canada. *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 9, 18-41.
- Ruth, J. L. (1984). *Maintaining the right fellowship: A Narrative Account of Life in the Oldest Mennonite Community in North America*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Schlabach, T.F. (1988). *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press.
- Shadd, Adrienne. (2010). *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway: African Canadians in Hamilton*. Toronto: Natural Heritage Books.
- Sherk, Thomas A. (1982). *The Sherk Family*. Baltimore: Gateway Press.
- Siebert, Wilbur Henry. (1898). *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom*. New York: The MacMillan Co..
- Silver Shoe Historical Society. (1997, September 20). *The Silver Shoe, 1830-1973*. [Documentary]. Collingwood: Silver Shoe Historical Society.
- Smedley, Robert Clemens. (1883). *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania*. Lancaster, PA: Office of the Journal.
- Smith, Dr. J.B. (1861, October 5). Colored People of Pennsylvania, IV. *Pine and Palm*. Boston, Mass.: James Redpath.
- Snyder, Miriam Helen. (1941). *Hannes Schneider and His Wife Catherine Haus Schneider: Their Descendants and Their Times 1534-1939*. Kitchener: MH Snyder.
- Stauffer, Allen P. (1992). *The Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario, 1833-1877*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Steiner, Samuel J. (1988). *Vicarious Pioneer: the Life of Jacob Y. Shantz*. Winnipeg: Hyperion Press.
- Stoltzfus, Grant. (1969). *Mennonites of the Ohio and Eastern Conference*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press.
- Switala, William J. (2008). *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books.
- Thomas, Owen A. (2007). *Niagara's Freedom Trail*. Niagara, ON: Niagara Economic Development Association.
- Uttley, William Velores. (1937). *A History of Kitchener, Ontario*. Waterloo: The Chronicle Press.
- van der Zijpp, Nanne and Sam Steiner. (2012, November 22). "Bom, Cornelis (d. 1689)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Retrieved March 8, 2013 from <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/B6662.html>.
- Wenger, John C. (1959). "Pennypacker, Samuel W. (1843-1916)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Retrieved November 29, 2012 from <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/P4666.html>.