Breaking down Barriers: MCC Ontario and Ontario Native Communities, 1967-1999

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Questions concerning Aboriginal-Mennonite relations have been with me my entire life. The more I am exposed to the issues, the more urgent becomes the need to address them. I grew up near Springvale, Ontario, just two kilometres from the Indian line that borders the Six Nations Reservation between Hagersville and Brantford. Children from both sides of the Indian line attended the two-room schoolhouse in our village of Springvale, and we went to each other's birthday parties. The pastor of the Brethren in Christ Church that I attended as a child, Paul Nigh, and his father John Nigh before him, rented land on the reserve. They also officiated at the wedding ceremonies of many Indian couples and held countless funerals. My parents were part of our small church's Sunday morning mission, picking up native children and bringing them to Sunday School. My father was a mechanic and people from the Aboriginal community were also among his business associates. At some point when I was growing up, I discovered that my great-great grandmother had been a Chippewa Indian and this also gave us personal ties on the other side of the line.

Amidst these connections, as a child I was aware of the psychological barrier that the Indian line represented. Racism was also a part of my experience. Despite my great-great grandmother's heritage, I knew I was white and I knew that to be white meant that I lived on the right side of the line. In the midst of relationships with our aboriginal sisters and brothers, I was taught that our ways were superior. These mixed messages left me with considerable

confusion and a strong sense of the injustices that Euro-Canadians have perpetrated against our aboriginal neighbours. I have no doubt but that my academic interest in aboriginal history and native-white relations stems from my personal past.

The Six Nations reservation is what remains of Missaussaga land that the British government assigned to Joseph Brant and his Iroquois people in the late eighteenth century as compensation for their support during the American Revolution. Reginald Good has shown in his study of Mississauga-Mennonite relations in the Upper Grand River Valley in the late eighteenth century that "an accurate assessment of Aboriginal-newcomer relations ... must begin with the recognition that the land onto which Europeans moved was not vacant but already occupied by dynamic and creative peoples."[1] Today this remnant is one among nearly 200 reserves in Ontario, which stretch into two million acres of land. On these tracts live more than 100,000 people in 130 First Nations or bands. As in the past, these territories continue to be in jeopardy, threatened by land-hungry white entrepreneurs. At last count, there were more than 50 land claims in Ontario.[2]

Some thirty years ago, Mennonite Central Committee began to concern itself with the long history of injustices suffered by aboriginal people. When looking specifically at MCC Ontario, three themes emerge: breaking down barriers by building relationships through aid in gardening and farming enterprises, educating the Mennonite constituency and attempting to advocate on behalf of Aboriginal peoples. Doug Roth, a young man who also grew up in Hagersville close to the Six Nations reserve, put it well at the end of his two year assignment at the Ininew Friendship Centre and Coffee House in Cochrane: "I question whether a two-year VS assignment can ever tackle a set of problems ... extending back over more years than Canada's confederation." What was important, he stressed, was "breaking down barriers."[3]

Olive Dickason, a métis historian well-known for her history, *Canada's First Nations*, has pointed out that despite their earlier histories of complicity with government, in recent years the churches have been among the most supportive of indigenous concerns.[4] The purpose of my investigation, then, is to assess how much MCCO's activities support Dickason's hypothesis. Native concerns has been on the MCCO agenda for the past three decades. Questions which arise are as follows: What contribution has MCC Ontario made to Aboriginal-Mennonite relations? What part have Aboriginal people taken in this relationship? How has MCC Ontario worked at playing out a theology which emphasizes justice? Have Ontario Mennonites been able to cross the line, to meet aboriginal people where they are hurting?

Crossing the Line

Mennonite Central Committee Ontario's relationship with Aboriginal peoples illustrates that the Mennonite role has been one of respondent. Historians are finally recognizing that indigenous peoples, in truth, have always set their own agenda.[5] Certainly in the period since the Trudeau government's infamous White Paper of 1969, Indian protests, rooted in a long history of injustice, have set the stage. Government and the churches have followed. As David T. McNab notes in his study of native land claims in Ontario, "many of the issues have

been around for as long as 200 years and are now firmly embedded in ... rich oral tradition - [aboriginal] history - as real grievances that affect [aboriginal] control over their lives."[6]

Even before the White Paper, with the support of Indian Affairs, Aboriginal people had put up a pavilion at Expo in Montreal to celebrate Canada's Centennial year. Dickason has noted that through it "they publicly expressed, for the first time on a national scale, dissatisfaction with their lot." This public action followed the Hawthorne report which had come out the previous year. Hawthorne's study showed that the average annual income for Indians was $600 compared to $1400 for white Canadians. Further, Native youth suffered a 94% high school dropout rate.[7] As historian J.R. Miller explains, "[t]he social and economic conditions in which natives in Canada live - or, more accurately, exist - are a national disgrace. Indian children are more likely than the general population to be born outside a stable nuclear family, are far less likely to complete enough schooling to obtain a job and become self-sustaining, are much more highly represented in the figures of unemployed and incarcerated people than the rest of the population, and have shorter life expectancy than most others in the country."[8]

Mennonites were among those Canadians who, to quote Dickason, "reacted with stunned disbelief that people in Canada were being treated in such a manner."[9] Similar to those in other churches, Mennonites felt compelled to respond to the Hawthorne report and the native pavilion. In June 1967, for instance, long-time MCC supporter Cornie Rempel travelled from Kitchener to Winnipeg to attend a workshop highlighting Mennonite missions to Indian peoples. He was among those who heard anthropologist Jacob Loewen insist that "missions should 'prepare for obsolescence'." Rempel carried the idea that the new role for missions was simply to provide a frame of reference for aboriginal people "to work out their own social, religious, and economic systems," back to Ontario with him.[10] Shortly afterward, Mennonite delegates explored their role further at the second annual meeting of the Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada, where they heard speakers deride the minimal contact between Indians and whites.[11]

These initiatives brought responses in Winnipeg, and in Kitchener. While Dan Zehr, the Ontario born and bred director for MCC Canada's Peace and Social Concerns, directed a study on Indian, Métis and Eskimo communities, some in the MCC Ontario constituency felt compelled to also explore the issue closer to home.[12] In 1968, a committee of 6 visited 16 Ontario reserves and two in Alberta. After touring Sioux Lookout, Pikangikum, Deer Lake, North Spirit Lake, Round Lake, Sachigo, Kingfisher Lake, Wunnummin Lake, Assabannica, Bearskin Lake, Big Trout Lake, Poplar Hill and Sandy Lake in Ontario's north, and Cape Croker, Oneida Reserve, and the Six Nations in the south, the committee also visited Calling Lake and Sandy Lake in Alberta, where mission programs had been in place for some years. This experience acquainted them with the incredible diversity among Ontario and Alberta's native communities. They recommended that MCC Ontario hire a co-ordinator in cooperation with MCC Canada. They saw a real need for someone in the Mennonite community to devote their energies to keeping abreast of the issues in the various native communities.[13]

This Mennonite attempt to cross the boundaries by educating themselves about the needs and problems of Ontario's aboriginal people came at what Harold Cardinal, who was then president of the Indian Association of Alberta, has called a turning point among native people. In 1967 the National Indian Brotherhood was born. When the Department of Indian

Affairs responded predictably to the Hawthorne report with their infamous White Paper, the Indian organization promptly rejected it. Naming it "genocidal" in its attempt to cancel the Indian Act, Aboriginal leadership adopted the Indian Chiefs of Alberta's position paper, "Citizens Plus," also known as the "Red Paper."[14] This would be followed by a variety of protests, including a number of stand-offs, as aboriginal people developed a canny political awareness and began to resist economic development which threatened to disrupt their way of life.[15]

These changes on the Canadian scene occurred alongside the civil rights movement south of the border. Mennonites had begun to respond to these undercurrents with an altered view of their role in the world. In the words of sociologists Leo Driedger and Donald Kraybill, "the politics of Jesus filtered into action as a wave of 'Peace and Justice' thinking crested in Mennonite circles."[16] Becoming attuned to structural sins along with their American counterparts, MCC Canada began "talking about Canada's Third World" and adopted native concerns among other peace and social issues such as international affairs, capital punishment, penal reform, problems of urbanization, poverty and affluence.[17]

By 1974, the national organization had placed Menno Wiebe as first full-time director of native concerns. His mandate was to draw federal and provincial governments, and the public, to native issues. MCC Canada had thus begun to see itself as "an advocate" for aboriginal people, and would stand alongside them in their attempts to obtain justice in such areas as hydro development in northern Manitoba and pipeline construction in the Northwest territories.[18] MCC Canada's decision to take membership in Project North, an interchurch coalition in support of native rights, reframed Mennonite goals from focussing primarily on service to doing their work in the context of the "call for Christian justice."[19] Mennonites thus began to work with other Christian churches to come into relationship with native people and "their calls for a responsible custodianship of the environment which is entrusted to us."[20]

Ontario Mennonites would move more slowly. The MCCO Indian Study Committee attempted to keep up by immersing themselves in the Red Paper. They also prepared a bibliography of suggested readings for constituents. But they moved tentatively. When the Union of Ontario Indians asked them to endorse their organization, for instance, MCCO hesitated. This would be too political for the constituency to handle at this time, they protested.[21] They would begin in the domain in which they felt most comfortable by offering assistance in gardening and farm projects, and by providing disaster service.

Following this decision, MCCO responded with excitement when band leaders from the Cape Croker reservation near Wiarton requested help in their new agricultural program, and when the Cree communities at Attawapiskat and Moose Factory further north on James Bay, called on them for help in gardening projects.[22] From ancient times, aboriginal survival has been based on the ability to adapt.[23] Decades earlier, Basil Johnston of Cape Croker had noted that "before the Indian people can move forward and break down economic, social, and political impediments, the mass of the people must first overcome their want of confidence ... At the political level, they must seize and conduct their own community affairs."[24] An important aspect of this political awareness was economic development. Well-known for their agricultural skills, Mennonites might prove to be a solid ally.

John Nadjiwon, the economic development councillor of the Chippewas of the Nawash

Band, responded enthusiastically to MCCO staff person Dave Worth's invitation to tour several Mennonite farm operations. A new relationship began one September day in 1979, when Nadjiwon and several others from Cape Croker drove several hours south to St. Jacobs to inspect a cow/calf operation and a market garden. Following the tour, Nadjiwon thanked Worth: "But there is one thing Dave we sure had a very, very good time and it is one that we will remember for quite some time and it gave the members some very good ideas and you should have been in the car on the way back, the wheels were sure turning as to the plans that where (sic) flying through the air for next year."[25]

The following summer, MCCO responded to Nadjiwon's request for input by sending Howard and Elva Fretz, retired Brethren in Christ farmers, to Cape Croker. By fall, Len and Gwen Schlicting, teachers from Manitoba trained respectively in animal husbandry, and nutrition and home economics, were also working with Nadjiwon to help manage the Community Farm Project.[26] With this developing relationship, MCCO began to respond more politically to native requests "to be heard, that we might understand their conflicts and position." They also began to recognize that crossing the line would mean educating the Mennonite constituency. In this spirit, the board invited Nadjiwon to speak at the 1980 annual meeting. Nadjiwon informed delegates of his band's agricultural history, of how their economy had shifted from agriculture to fishing, and now back to agriculture. Thanking MCC for its support, he closed his talk with "a prayer of thanksgiving."[27]

Meanwhile, MCC volunteers emphasized the reciprocal nature of the relationships that had developed as they had crossed the line to work with aboriginal peoples on their issues as they saw them. From Cape Croker, the Fretzs Aemphasized the new learning gained ... including attitudes towards land and its use, and towards children.[28] Meanwhile, as was mentioned earlier, from his position at the Ininew Friendship Centre in Cochrane, Doug Roth insightfully declared that the big task confronting Canada's native and European communities was that of "breaking down barriers." Indeed, MCCO began to see its role as "a representative of, and a voice for, voiceless and oppressed people." Finally, in 1980, the MCCO board proclaimed "native ministries" as a new area of focus.[29]

Breaking down Barriers

MCCO's decision to emphasize "native ministries" followed an increasing public awareness of aboriginal issues. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's patriation of the Constitution in the early 1980s, for instance, brought a strong response from aboriginal leaders. Although the focus of the Constitution remained firmly on the provinces, Mennonites, along with the other churches, supported the native leaders who untiringly brought to public attention how their rights were being overlooked.[30] In 1982, in response to the new Canadian constitution ratified by the federal government, MCCO created a Native Ministries program board and for the first time entered into formal dialogue with aboriginal people. That fall, the Social Services Committee invited several Mennonite and native leaders to consult with them at Hidden Acres Retreat Centre.

Twenty chiefs, elders, community workers and farmers travelled from northern and southern reservations to New Hamburg to meet with MCCO personnel and board mem-

bers. Mennonite and Brethren in Christ ministers, missionaries, university professors and other interested lay persons were also invited to the consultation. Ojibwa Chief Frank Solomon from Cape Croker and Cree Chief Reg Louttit from Attawapiskat, for instance, stressed the need for agricultural assistance, business advice, education for youth, and wildlife farming/management. Meanwhile, others spoke of needs for employment advice and training, along with help in dealing with cultural disorientation, alienation and the isolation of urban society.

Reservations about "MCCO's involvement in native ministries as being too political," by some of the more conservative in the constituency, were challenged by "the native leaders strong affirmation that not to be involved was also a political statement."[31] Menno Wiebe represented MCC Canada at the event. Wiebe stressed that the national organization was strongly supportive of the native communities in their transformation. Ontario Mennonites came away convinced that they, too, were responsible to support aboriginal concerns. In that spirit, delegates at the MCCO annual meeting that fall declared the Ontario Mennonite community to be in "solidarity with Native people in the upcoming constitution discussions."[32]

The years following would be critical ones for aboriginal people in Canada. Three First Ministers' Conferences between 1982 and 1987, designed to negotiate how native self-government could be implemented, ended in failure. Yet, these were also significant events. For one thing, they taught the aboriginal community the importance of learning to dialogue in European "political speak."[33] Ontario Mennonites responded by underlining their support of the native community and by setting up an eight-member native concerns committee. The new committee's major tasks would be to provide administrative counsel for MCC Voluntary Service workers in native communities, and to provide a link with native bands east of Thunder Bay. The new committee declared its desire to "seek out ways of interpreting God's message of reconciliation in the context of the native community's needs and concerns in relation to the Canadian society."[34] It went further, to recognize Mennonite complicity as a "colonizing people" who had "help[ed] create the problems of injustice." Committee members called for "repentance" and vowed to attempt "to right any wrong where at all possible."[35]

As MCCO named Native Concerns a priority, identity questions arose.[36] Was MCCO following MCC Canada, or was it its own committee? What were its priorities? How could it reach out to Ontario native communities? These questions weave through committee reports as MCCO native concerns attempted to discern its mission. Over time, the focus would shift from agricultural aid to educating the constituency, and finally to taking on advocacy roles.[37]

The decision in early 1985 to hire Evan Heise, a member of the Brethren in Christ, as half-time staff person (shared with Community Justice Ministries) marks a major shift in MCCO's approach to native concerns.[38] Heise was able to make new contacts, including several on the nearby Six Nations reserve an hour southeast of Kitchener; he also connected further with native leaders in the north.[39] He monitored problems developing in the programs that MCCO had been sponsoring in Attiwaspikat, Moose Factory and Cape Croker. What did it mean, for instance, when some in these communities perceived MCC as helping only Treaty Indians, and others worried that the Mennonites were only attempting to get a foothold in order to plant a church?[40] How should MCCO respond to situations like the political

instability developing in Cape Croker, and the corresponding threat to the farming project established some years earlier? What was *their* role, committee members asked themselves? What was Heise's?[41]

Possibly the most significant development was Native Concerns Ontario's increasing awareness of their "limited knowledge and understanding of Canada's native people."[42] As volunteers at Cape Croker, Rene and Frances Van Mil, reported back to the annual meeting, day to day progress seemed minimal. Their real work was in breaking down barriers and in building relationships: "Our greatest joys here have been experienced in friendships and enjoyment of social occasions with all the richness of native ways and humour. We are always learning more about the native culture, and the children have learned quite a lot of the language and heritage in school."[43]

During the five years that Heise served as staff person, despite ongoing frustrations with what seemed to be tiny advances in resolving the difficulties faced by native people, and ofttimes poor communication with MCC Canada, solid relationships were built.[44] For instance, material aid directed to Wahnepuhnud, a used clothing store in Toronto run by native women remanded to training centres, expanded relationships in the urban domain.[45]

Other opportunities arose through Mennonite Disaster Service. In the summer of 1986, for instance, when fifty people volunteered to rebuild the Cree community of Weenisk, following massive destruction during spring breakup on Hudson Bay, ongoing friendships developed. Committee members accompanied Heise on follow-up visits to the new community of 215 families that had relocated to Peawanuck, a traditional site twenty miles up river at the mouth of the Winisk.[46] In 1987, at Heise's initiative, MDS also helped build a community hall in Wahgoshig, near the Kirkland Lake Brethren in Christ Church.[47] With their involvement in these communities, Heise and native concerns were also able to make the connections necessary to market indigenous crafts through Self-Help.[48] Marketing such pieces as the Tamarack geese woven by artisans in northern communities proved to be a way to demonstrate "appreciation of cultural values and personal skills of the producers."[49]

Under Heise's leadership, MCCO's Native Concerns committee also took risks. Members began taking a stand, moving from the more traditional hands on approach with material aid to listening, standing with, and becoming more intentionally involved in advocacy. In spring 1986, Heise met with Grand Chief Dennis Cromarti of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation to discuss concerns about the government's lack of responsibility emerging from the Fahlgren Report, the result of the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment. He also shared their joy in the Cromline report's "generous ... interpretation" of the rights of aboriginal people.[50] An elective seminar at MCCO's 1986 annual meeting, focussing on "Native Self-Government and Land Claims," gave Cromarti and Regional Chief Gord Peters of the Chiefs of Ontario an opportunity to share with the broader Mennonite constituency their history of "promises and broken treaties."

Ongoing support for the Teme-Augama Anishnabai (Bear Island Band) of Temagami in their precedent-setting case was a major focus of the committee's work. Insisting that they had occupied the land in north-eastern Ontario's Lake Temagami region from time immemorial, the Anishnabai had blockaded the attempted extension of a logging road into their motherland, in the summer of 1988. This action followed 15 years of lobbying the Ontario government, and was based on aboriginal title as spelled out in the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

The government sued the Anishnabai for their own lands, but it was a surprise to no one when the Supreme Court of Canada came down in Ontario's favour. MCC Ontario took the Anishnabai side when they stuck to their guns and refused the Ontario government's feeble attempts at a settlement.[51]

As Native Concerns committee chair Campbell Nisbet reported at the 1989 annual meeting, the Anishnabai were at the point where "'[t]here just doesn't seem to be anything else left to do.'" He was quoting Chief Gary Potts, whom he had heard speak passionately of "his ... people's 110-year struggle for their recognition of their claim to the land they have occupied for over 6000 years."[52] Encouraging the MCCO Board to lobby the provincial and federal governments to "negotiate in good faith with the Teme Augama Anishnabai ... with regard to their land claim ... and further to recognize that the Teme Augama Anishnabai have a right to a meaningful role in managing and preserving the natural resources of their traditional homeland," they brought in a band spokesperson to inform the constituency of the issues around the land claim.[53] A letter to Ontario's premier David Peterson in mid-January 1989 further emphasized MCCO's solidarity with native groups across Canada, who felt forced to adopt confrontational tactics.[54]

Despite dissent from the more cautious among them, MCCO's native concerns committee viewed the large numbers who came to their seminar as solid support for the direction they were taking.[55] Resolving that "Scripture calls us to stand with the dispossessed in their struggle for identity and dignity," and that "the aboriginal peoples of Canada are a dispossessed people in our midst," the committee vowed to stand behind native calls for self-determination.[56] Advising the Ontario board to stand with aboriginal people in their negotiations to be included in the constitution, they also followed MCC Canada's lead in joining the Project North Coalition of Churches. Representatives from Ontario also participated in talks with their provincial government leaders. On the local scene, initiatives included those with Weejeedimin, Kitchener's Native Resources Centre, and Native Sons, a person to person visitation program at Guelph correctional centre.

The shift from doing, to standing with, is reflected in MCCO Native Concerns chairperson Anna Wiens's report to the 1988 annual meeting. Quoting Australian Aboriginal Lilla Watson, Wiens highlighted the committee's movement from breaking down barriers to becoming aboriginal neighbours:

> If you are come to help me
> you are wasting your time.
> But
> if you have come
> because your liberation is bound up with mine.
> then let us work together.[57]

Aboriginal Neighours

Rick Cober Bauman's words, as he accepted an appointment in 1992 as full-time MCCO native concerns staff person, further illustrate this shift in relationship and a growing

awareness of the issues: "In the middle of the eighteenth century, 'an Indian,' led my ancestor, Jacob Bauman, further in the Pennsylvania interior, helped him build a cabin, and invited him to bring his wife and child." His next words were more startling: "A few years later Jacob's brothers followed, and the flood of settlers continued to roll westward."[58] Now facing their complicity in the contemporary native dilemma, through the 1990s, MCCO became increasingly intentional in its advocacy, as the tensions in aboriginal communities escalated.

In the attempt to better understand the land claims issues to which their aboriginal neighbours were urging them to respond, in fall 1990, MCCO commissioned returned VSer Beth Brubacher to research "the status of Treaty Land Entitlement in Ontario."[59] That fall also, six of MCCO's nine-member committee travelled to Cape Croker to participate in the Ontario Assembly sponsored by the band and the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (Project North).[60] But most significantly, when Heise resigned from his half-time position as Native Concerns staff person that fall to pursue graduate studies, the committee lobbied for a full-time worker.[61] Lisa Schirch-Elias, a recent graduate in Political Studies and Peace Studies accepted a two-year VS assignment. Then in 1992, when Rick Cober Bauman and his wife Louise returned from a three-year assignment in Sheshatshit, Nitassinan where they had served among the Innu in Labrador/Newfoundland, he took up the position. Schirch-Elias and Bauman would continue the direction Heise had set in moving away from development to focussing on relationship building and advocacy.[62]

A highlight of MCCO's connection with the Saugeen Ojibway at Cape Croker was the celebration in 1993 of a "precedent-setting" victory. Saugeen fishermen and Kitchener-Waterloo Mennonites and United Church folks enjoyed a potluck supper of whitefish and salads, stories and friendship at the Preston Mennonite Church in Cambridge, only days before the Ministry of Natural Resources passed a precedent-setting new ruling: "Native fishing, whether subsistence or commercial, would be given first priority after the need to conserve a healthy fish stock had been met."[63] Meanwhile, MCCO's native concerns program also expanded to include a northern office in Timmins. Job Koene and Lyndsay Mollins, from Willowdale Presbyterian Church in Toronto, joined the staff and continued the focus on relationship-building in their respective positions with the Ojibway-Cree Cultural Centre in Timmins and Youth Programme Coordinator with Kunuwanaimano Child and Family Services.[64] This victory, and the strengthening of relationships in a variety of aboriginal communities, were soon to be overshadowed, however, by what is arguably the most tragic event to date in the modern history of aboriginal-white relations.

In October 1995 during a stand-in at Ipperwash, on the shore of Lake Huron, thirty-eight year old Dudley George was shot and killed by a member of the Ontario Provincial Police. Out of their several year long relationship with the Chippewa and Potawatomi people of the Stony Point Reserve, MCCO attempted to support the grieving family and communities involved with the dispute. MCC Canada had been standing with the Lubicon in Alberta's interior, the Mohawk at Oka, Quebec, and defenders of the Shushwap nation at Gustafson Lake in British Columbia, all cases where aboriginal people had put their bodies on the line to resist further encroachment on their land. In like manner, MCC Ontario supported their aboriginal neighbours at Ipperwash, whom the federal government had expelled from Stoney Point fifty years earlier during World War II, to construct a military training centre on their

land.[65] As Bauman reported to the MCCO annual meeting the following year, the repercussions of Dudley George's tragic death were widespread: "It has been painful," he stressed, "to watch the cracks and fissures that split the various parts of this community along lines of race, reserve, [and] family."[66]

Two years earlier MCCO had reminded the federal government's Department of Indian Affairs to follow through on its standing committee's 1992 recommendation that the land be returned to its former inhabitants. Now in the wake of tragedy, Mennonites supplied food and joined Observer Teams at the conflict site. The committee also planned "meet-your-neighbour" events and encouraged local churches to stand with their native sisters and brothers, in the attempt to bring healing in the aftermath of George's death.[67] In an open letter to the grieving family and community, Bauman wrote:

> For several years we have listened, watched, and tried to add our voice to yours, as you worked for the return of the Stoney Point lands taken by our Department of Defence in 1942. As we heard your stories, we glimpsed the pain and chaos felt by families uprooted from their homes 50 years ago. We also came to appreciate the commitment many felt to seeing the land restored to those who call it home. That a young man should lose his life in this commitment is a tragedy whose roots go much deeper than the present standoff at Ipperwash.
>
> Like you, our people have mixed and conflicting feelings this morning. We feel confused about land claims, and occupations and blockades. We wonder why choices were made that led to such a violent act. Yet we also recognize the profound frustration felt by too many in your communities, and acknowledge that this frustration cannot be dealt with by police action.
>
> We are making a hopeful and a prayerful plea to all parties to reject the power of the gun, and to commit themselves to the power of honest and patient dialogue....We too long for an end to confrontation. We are committed to seeing the Department of Defence return the Stoney Point land to your people. But more than that, we long for a new relationship between us, the newcomers, and you who welcomed us here.[68]

The Mennonite community's response suggests that they recognized with former chief justice Brian Dickson, who organized the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples whose report came out the year following George's death, that "the aboriginal rights issue is the most pressing human rights issue facing Canada today."[69] Mennonite support was symbolized by relationships nourished by summer gardener John Umble, the women from Zurich Mennonite church who joined George's sister Caroline in putting together a quilt, and those who potlucked with mourners on the beach of the Huron River as they listened "to the drum during a one-year memorial for Dudley George."[70]

The Ontario Mennonite community increasingly saw themselves as "Aboriginal Neighbours," as is symbolized by the new name that MCCO native concerns committee took in 1997. "Aboriginal Neighbours," with its "Northern Neighbours" counterpart expanded to include several members from the communities where Mennonites had been developing relationships for over fifteen years. For instance, Greg Nadjiwon from Cape Croker, Marcie Simon from Stoney Point, Lorna McNaughton from Ohsweken and Carol Cooper from

Waterloo, agreed to lend their expertise to MCCO that same year.[71]

Although we are too close in chronological time to critically assess Mennonite-Aboriginal relations in Ontario from the perspective of history, as historian Kenneth Coates has pointed out, "these are ... important times for historians of First Nations in Canada." With "the growing political emphasis on First Nations' demands, claims, and public statements - a process that began in earnest in the 1970s and that escalated steadily thereafter,"[72] the stages of growth in the relationships between Mennonites and aboriginal people in Ontario are worth noting. Initially, MCCO moved cautiously, in response to aboriginal calls for attention to injustices, and their demands that past wrongs be righted. Crossing the lines drawn by government officials, which separated native people from their land when they were assigned reservations, was a first step as Ontario Mennonites endeavoured to discover what justice meant. Attempts at building relationships and mending broken trust have included listening, and accepting aboriginal leaders' admonitions that to truly break down barriers, Mennonites must become political, that Mennonites must show their commitment to justice by standing with them. It has meant recognizing, to use Olive Dickason's words, that "far from being a flash in the pan," these conflicts have "roots that go deep into our national past."[73]

Later generations of historians will look back, and attempt to interpret what Mennonite efforts at breaking down the barriers of broken trust, ignorance and hostility have contributed to aboriginal-white relations in the last third of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, Ontario Mennonites, as the 1999 Aboriginal Neighbours mission statement suggests, continue to "look for moments, windows, opportunities to help build relationships between First peoples, and our people, ... work [ing] together in everything from resolution of outstanding land issues, to growing food together."[74]

Notes

[1] Reginald Good, "Mississauga-Mennonite Relations in the Upper Grand River Valley," *Ontario History* 87 (June 1995), 156.

[2] David T. McNab, "Aboriginal Land Claims in Ontario," in *Aboriginal Land Claims in Canada: A Regional Perspective*, edited by Kenneth Coates (Don Mills: Copp Clark Pitman, 1992), 75.

[3] Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (hereafter, MCCO), Annual Reports, 1981, Mennonite Historical Archives of Ontario (hereafter MHAO).

[4] Olive Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 380.

[5] Peggy Brock, "Building Bridges: Politics and Religion in a First Nations Community," *Canadian Historical Review* 81 (2000), 68; Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1996), xv.

[6] McNab, "Aboriginal Land Claims in Ontario," 74.

[7] Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 362.

[8] J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 249.

[9] Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 361.

[10] *The Canadian Mennonite* 15, 26 (27 June 1967), 1.

[11] *The Canadian Mennonite* 15, 49 (12 December 1967), 1.

[12] Frank Epp, *Partners in Service: the story of Mennonite Central Committee Canada* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Central Committee Canada, 1982), 26; MCCO Annual Reports, 1967, MHAO..

[13] MCCO, Annual Reports, 1968, MHAO.

[14] David Alan Long, "Trials of the Spirit: The Native Social Movement in Canada," in *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues*, edited by Long and Olive P. Dickason (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1996), 379-80; Dickason, *First Nations*, 363-64.

[15] Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, 249-50.

[16] Leo Driedger and Donald Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottdale, Pa. and Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1994), 150.

[17] MCCO Native Concerns Minutes (20 February 1990), housed at the Mennonite Central Committee Ontario headquarters at 50 Kent Ave, Kitchener (hereafter MCCO headquarters); See also the insert entitled "Indian Bulletin" in *The Canadian Mennonite* 17, 16 (22 April 1969) which included articles such as "The Church and the Original Canadians;" and "What can we do?" See also John A. Lapp, "The Peace Mission of the Mennonite Central Committee," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 44 (1970), 284 and Frank H. Epp, *Partners in Service.*

[18] MCCO, Annual Reports, 1975, 1976, MHAO.

[19] Epp, *Partners in Service*, 40.

[20] MCCO, Annual Reports, 1978, MHAO.

[21] MCCO, Annual Reports, 1970, 1971, MHAO.

[22] Ray Schlegel, interviewed by Linda Huebert Hecht and Laurene Harder, 31 October 1997, New Hamburg, Ontario; MCCO, Annual Reports, 1979, MHAO; for further information on the history of the Ojibwa at Cape Croker, please see Peter Schmalz's *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (University of Toronto Press, 1991). MCCO, Annual Reports, 1982, 1983, MHAO; MCCO Service Section minutes (19 May 1982), MCCO headquarters.

[23] Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel with Cornelius Jaenen, *History of the Canadian Peoples*, vol. I (Don Mills: Copp Clark, 1998), 11.

[24] Waubageshig (Harvey McCue), ed., *The Only Good Indian: Essays by Canadian Indians* (Toronto, 1970), 126, quoted in Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 244; Schmalz also notes on p. 258 that Basil Johnston, a member of the Nawash band, tells stories of his people in *Indian School Days* (Toronto, 1988) and *Ojibwa Heritage* (Toronto, 1967).

[25] Dave Worth to John Nadjiwon (10 September 1979); Nadjiwon to Worth (4 October 1979) Aboriginal Neighbours files, 1979, MCCO headquarters.

[26] Worth to Cape Croker Committee (20 September 1979); Menno Wiebe to Dave Worth (7 February 1980); Cape Croker Minutes (16 April 1980), Aboriginal Neighbours files, MCCO headquarters; MCCO, Annual Reports, 1980, MHAO.

[27] MCCO, Annual Reports, 1980, MHAO.

[28] MCCO, Annual Reports, 1981, MHAO.

[29] Ron Lofthouse to Nadjiwon (24 September 1980), Aboriginal Neighbours files, MCCO headquarters; MCCO, Annual Reports, 1980, MHAO.

[30] Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel, *History of the Canadian People*, vol. II (Don Mills: Copp Clark, 1998), 471-72; See *The Canadian Mennonite* for discussion of aboriginal rights and the constitution, for example, Neil Unrau, "Aboriginal Rights: Government policies contradict constitutional rhetoric," (8 June 1981), 10; Menno Wiebe, "The Church in the native setting: A biblical/theological reflection," 12, 16 (9 August 1982).

[31] Dickason, *Canadas First Nations*, 422, n. 27; MCCO Annual Reports, 1981, MHAO; Report:

MCCO Consultation on Native Ministries, Service Section Minutes (February 1983), MCCO headquarters.

[32] Ron Lofthouse and Mennonite Reporter staff, "Stand with us plead native leaders," *Mennonite Reporter* 12, 25 (13 December 1982), 1.

[33] Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 386; I am also grateful to students in my Native Aspects of Canada's History seminar at Augustana University College for their insights on these meetings during discussions of the National Film Board's version in "Dancing around the Table," directed by Maurice Bulbulian and produced by Raymond Gauthier, 1987.

[34] MCCO Service Section minutes (February 1983), MCCO headquarters.

[35] "Guidelines for Working with Native Communities," MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (26 June 1984), MCCO headquarters.

[36] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (3 November 1983), MCCO headquarters.

[37] See, for instance, MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (31 May 1983, 3 November 1983, 12 January 1984) regarding conflicts between MCCC and MCCO, MCCO headquarters.

[38] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (3 June 1985, 5 November 1985), MCCO headquarters; MCCO Annual Reports, 1986, MHAO.

[39] Evan Heise, "Native Concerns Committee staff report to MCCO Board," Native Concerns Committee Ontario Minutes (November 1985); Report to Native Concerns Committee meeting (10 February 1986), MCCO headquarters.

[40] A Model for the James Bay Area, MCCO Service Section Minutes (1978, 1979) (2 March 1983); Ron Lofthouse, Northern Trip Report, MCCO Service Section Minutes (27 November-3 December 1983), MCCO headquarters.

[41] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (3 November 1983), MCCO headquarters.

[42] MCCO Annual Reports, 1984, MHAO.

[43] MCCO Annual Reports, 1985, MHAO.

[44] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (6 June 1988), MCCO headquarters.

[45] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (26 June 1986, 9 February 1987, 20 July 1988), MCCO headquarters; MCCO Annual Reports, 1986, MHAO.

[46] Evan Heise, Report to NCC and MDS contact people, MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (6 August 1986); Anne Wiens, Peawanuk Revisited, MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (6 September 1989), MCCO headquarters.

[47] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (9 February 1987), MCCO headquarters.

[48] Staff Report, Native Concerns Committee Minutes (3 January 1985; 20 May 1986), MCCO headquarters; MCCO Annual Reports, 1986, MHAO.

[49] MCCO Annual Reports, 1987, MHAO; MCCO Native Concerns Committee (20 July 1988), MCCO headquarters.

[50] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (20 May 1986, 26 June 1986, 9 February 1987, 20 July 1988, MCCO headquarters; MCCO Annual Reports, 1986, MHAO.

[51] MCCO Annual Reports, 1989, MHAO; McNab, "Aboriginal Land Claims in Ontario," 80-85.

[52] MCCO Annual Reports, 1989, MHAO.

[53] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (19 November 1988, 4 January 1989, 18 January 1989), MCCO headquarters; MCCO Annual Reports, 1989, MHAO.

[54] MCCO Annual Reports, 1989, MHAO.

[55] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (2 December 1986), MCCO headquarters.

[56] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (5 November 1986), MCCO headquarters; Ferne Burkhardt, "Native Self-Determination," *Mennonite Reporter* 16, 23 (24 November 1986), 4.

[57] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (6 June 1988), MCCO headquarters.

[58] MCCO Annual Reports, 1992, 1994, MHAO.

[59] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (fall 1990); Bruno Baerg on Treaty Land Entitlement (28 November 1990), Aboriginal Neighbours files, 1990, MCCO headquarters.

[60] *Mennonite Reporter* 20, 19 (1 October 1990), 5; MCCO Annual Reports, 1990, MHAO.

[61] MCCO Native Concerns Committee Minutes (January 1990, 12 May 1990); Rick Cober Bauman to Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System, 28 October 1993; Aboriginal Neighbours files, 1993, MCCO headquarters; MCCO Annual Reports, 1990, MHAO.

[62] Bruno Baerg to Treaty Land Entitlement, 28 November 1990, Aboriginal Neighbours files, 1990; Schirch-Elias to pastors of churches of Native Concerns Committee Ontario, April 1991; Schirch-Elias, Reflections on my Visit to Wahgoshig, 22-24 July 1991; Visit to Peawanuck, 29-30 July 1991, Aboriginal Neighbours files, 1990-91, MCCO headquarters; MCCO Annual Reports, 1991, MHAO.

[63] MCCO Native Concerns Committee, Correspondence with Ontario re: Saugeen Ojibway Fishing; Adding our Voice, Aboriginal Neighbours files (1993), MCCO headquarters.

[64] MCCO Annual Reports, 1993; 1995, 1996, 1999, MHAO.

[65] Rick Cober Bauman, "Violence at Ipperwash: One Year Later," *Mennonite Reporter* 26, 20 (14 October 1996), 1, 5; *Mennonite Reporter* 26, 24 (9 December 1996), 2; Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 399-400.

[66] MCCO Annual Reports, 1996, MHAO.

[67] MCCO Board Chair to Minister of Indian Affairs, 30 September 1993; Bauman to MCCO Executive, 6 May 1993, Aboriginal Neighbours files, 1993, MCCO headquarters; MCCO Annual Reports, 1995, MHAO.

[68] Bauman, "Dear Friends at Stoney Point and Kettle Point," *Mennonite Reporter* 25, 18 (August 18, 1995), 7.

[69] *Mennonite Reporter* 26, 24 (9 December 1996), 2.

[70] MCCO Annual Reports, 1996, MHAO.

[71] *All Our Neighbours* (November 1997), MCCO headquarters.

[72] Kenneth Coates, "Writing First Nations into Canadian History: A Review of Recent Scholarly Works," *Canadian Historical Review* 81 (2000), 99.

[73] Olive Dickason, "Toward a Larger View of Canada's History: The Native Factor," in *Visions of the Heart*, edited by Long and Dickason, 7.

[74] The goals of Aboriginal Neighbours are outlined in the MCCO Annual Report, 1999, MHAO.