

Mennonite Fundamentalism and the Hawkesville Brethren.

An examination of the origins of the
Wallenstein Bible Chapel and
its impact on the local
Mennonite Community.

©by *David A. Martin*

This is the complete version of the Waterloo Historical Society's
2003 Local History Award Winning paper.

A condensed version, with photographs,
appears in the WHS annual volume 91, pub. 2004.

All opinions expressed are those of the author.

In the rolling countryside of northern Waterloo Region, one kilometre south of the hamlet of Wallenstein, lies a church called the *Wallenstein Bible Chapel*. There is nothing particularly unusual about its architecture or construction; it is a moderately-sized plain-brick building which blends into the backdrop of the area's Old Order Mennonite farms. Indeed, one could easily drive right past on the highway and not even notice it.

This church is part of a group known as the *Plymouth Brethren Assemblies*, also called *Christian Brethren* (CB). Each CB church is an autonomous entity under the direction of an eldership. As there is no formal inter-church government, the Christian Brethren do not consider themselves a denomination. They do, however, share a common set of worship practices that sociologically set them apart from some other Christian groups.

If casual observers from one of the other hundreds of CB churches in Canada came to the Wallenstein Chapel for a Sunday morning service, they would not notice anything terribly unusual. The worship format, preaching style, and theology would likely seem quite similar to their home congregation. But a more observant visitor might notice some interesting peculiarities: why does the church bulletin list a large number of Swiss Mennonite names such as

Martin, Bauman, Frey, Weber, and Gingrich? Why do most of the participants in the service have Pennsylvania German accents? Why are the hymns always sung in four-part harmony? On the right Sunday, the visitor might witness a few women wearing Mennonite-style bonnets. Visitors exploring the church grounds might even notice a few hitching posts for horses and buggies at the back of the parking lot. If this is a CB church *comme les autres*, why are there so many elements which appear Mennonite?

In fact, this church has a history unique among the Christian Brethren. Its original members were Old Order Mennonites who left the sect to form an independent, biblically-fundamentalist Bible study, which quickly became a separate church affiliated with the CB. Today, Wallenstein Bible Chapel, with its some 450 weekly attendees, is fairly indistinguishable from other CB churches, (aside from certain minor traits of Mennonite culture already described). However, in its early days, it had a theology and worship practices that were quite Mennonite in nature.

The congregation began to emerge about 1931 in the village of Hawkesville, a few kilometres south of the chapel's current location. In that year a Sunday school was organised in a private home and was called the *Hawkesville Gospel Mission*; in 1939 this group built a separate building and named it the *Hawkesville Gospel Hall*. In 1960 the church was renamed the *Hawkesville Bible Chapel*. In 1968 a new facility was built at its present location near Wallenstein and renamed the *Wallenstein Bible Chapel*. As the variety of name changes over the years can be confusing, I will hereafter refer to this church's members mostly as the *Hawkesvillers* or the *Hawkesville Brethren*.

The history of the Hawkesvillers has become particularly significant due to the emergence of several daughter congregations in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. In 2003 these

churches have a combined weekly attendance of around 1,500 worshipers.¹ One of these, Woodside Bible Fellowship, is the largest Protestant church in the town of Elmira with a weekly attendance of around 550.

While the Hawkesvillers and the members of their daughter congregations may take pride in their numbers, their presence has also been a source of friction and schism in the Mennonite community of Waterloo County. Indeed, much bad blood has existed between the two groups. Over the years, the Hawkesvillers made concerted efforts to convert other Mennonites to their own fundamentalist thinking. These efforts were successful in many instances, as their numbers grew considerably. Their effectiveness in proselytising has been undoubtedly aided by their continued retention of Mennonite culture and structure.

Today members of the Hawkesville Brethren generally interpret their history as an exodus from the Old Order Mennonite church caused by the witness of various CB preachers from outside. The few Mennonite historians who have paid attention to this group are generally happy with this interpretation, as it conveniently puts the blame for their splits on outside forces instead of trends within their own churches.²

In my view, the Hawkesvillers' defection from the Mennonite church was a result of a variety of factors, the CB being only a small part. That they themselves became associated with the CB is incidental and perhaps even accidental. In reality, the move towards evangelical fundamentalism was a broad interdenominational phenomenon in Canada and the United States.

In this study I will examine the emergence of the Hawkesvillers as a case study of this fundamentalist shift in the Ontario Mennonite Church in the 1930s. This movement has origins in Mennonite circles in the United States, as well as the influence of Russian Mennonite immigration in the 1920s. I will demonstrate that the Hawkesville Brethren were influenced

largely, and perhaps primarily, by their own Mennonite people. It was only after they had been converted to fundamentalist interpretation that they aligned themselves with the CB and this, after much disagreement. I will then briefly outline the impact of the Hawkesvillers on some other Mennonite dynamics in the years following their departure from Mennonite Conference affiliation.

The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy

Prior to 1920s, North American Protestantism had a degree of uniformity that was unparalleled in later years. The fundamentalist-modernist controversy, which began early in the century and came to a head in the 1920s was to leave a permanent gulf in North American Protestant churches. The Mennonite community was affected very much by this shift in Protestantism, and itself began to split along similar lines.

Modernists were Protestants who felt that that Protestantism needed to re-adjust itself to be consistent with the emerging modern culture. Modernists viewed their philosophy not as abandonment of old doctrines, but rather adaptation – an effort to be consistent with a changing intellectual world. It did not, however, contradict any fundamental tenants of Christian faith. For example, while Modernists still respected the authority of the Bible, some read certain passages as poetry and symbolism more than literal instruction. Union Seminary in New York and the University of Chicago became hotbeds of modernist biblical scholarship. It emphasised the life of Christ in addition to doctrines of crucifixion and resurrection, and committed itself to scientific methods for studying biblical history. It also left its mark on churches by becoming much more occupied with social justice issues than had traditional Protestantism.³

Some modernists actually remained quite conservative in their beliefs. Thinkers, like Shailer Mathew of the University of Chicago, taught a modernist faith that stressed the importance of Christ as a saviour, the divine origins of the Bible and the belief in life after death. Modernists endeavoured to “reclaim the powers of Christianity in a changing intellectual world.”⁴

In reaction to modernism, came another stream of protestant thought known as fundamentalism. George Marsden, the premier historian of this movement, has described the fundamentalism of the 1920s as “militant evangelicalism.”⁵ Evangelicalism, a broader movement with origins in the late 1800s was characterised by revival meetings, the stressing of conversion experience and an adherence to traditional Reformation doctrines on the authority of scripture.

In 1910, a document titled *Fundamentalism: A Testimony to the Truth*, outlined the fundamentals of the Christian faith, as seen by its authors: the bible as the inerrant word of God; Jesus as saviour who died for men and women on the cross, who rose from the dead and would return to earth in a second coming. It also stressed the virgin birth, the sinlessness of Christ, and a Lutheran salvationism based solely on grace.⁶ In 1923, J. Gresham Machen, the most prominent academic spokesman for fundamentalism, authored *Christianity and Liberalism*, which contended that modernist faith amounted to a new religion as opposed to a rethinking of Christianity.⁷

While the theological debates of this controversy remained primarily in academia, the polarisation also made its way into popular culture. In Tennessee, the 1925 ‘Monkey Trial’ of John T. Scopes received mass press attention. Scopes, a high school teacher who admitted to teaching evolution, was charged under the state’s anti-evolution law. Evolution was an example of an issue where the modernist could adapt biblical literalism to create consistency with

scientific theory; the fundamentalist, conversely, could not escape from a literal reading of the six-day creation account in Genesis. While it is dangerous to draw too broad generalisations (some self-described fundamentalists were reluctant to argue against evolution), this dispute shows elements of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in secular society. The effect of this schism was to leave its mark on Protestantism forever. It is not surprising, then, that the Mennonite Church too was affected profoundly by this movement.

The Waterloo Mennonite Churches of the 1930s

The Mennonite community of the 1930s was a fairly diverse group of churches with radical differences in theology and practice. This study is concerned primarily with three groups: Old Order Mennonites, Old Mennonites, and Mennonite Brethren (not to be confused with the Christian Brethren). The first two of these groups are called Swiss Mennonites as they descend from the sixteenth-century Anabaptists of Switzerland; the latter group is Russian Mennonite, descendents of the Dutch Anabaptists who, through a series of migrations, ended up in the Ukraine.

Swiss Mennonite migration into the Waterloo area began in the years following the American Revolution. Some settled in the Niagara area, while others made their way to communities around Markham. Others came to the Waterloo area when it was still largely unsettled. While there were various types of Mennonites who moved to the area, (including the Amish who settled west of Berlin/Kitchener), the Mennonites of Waterloo and Woolwich townships existed under a single Mennonite Conference. The Woolwich group originated in Lancaster County and from the beginning differed from other groups in the future Waterloo County.⁸

In 1889, a major schism came to the Mennonite community, the result of some splits in the United States over the same issues. Almost all the Woolwich churches (north of Waterloo Township) split from the conference to form the Old Order. This fledgling group was very concerned about the emergence of Sunday schools, English language preaching, and evangelical revival meetings that were starting to appear in the church. They sought to preserve what they thought was the true nature of their religion and distance themselves from the influence of a foreign, English, culture.⁹

It is from this split that the distinction between Old Mennonite and Old Order Mennonite emerges: the Old Order, referring to the traditional practices of the new group that split from the church, and the Old referring to those who remained with the old church. In actual fact, the term Old Mennonite evolved a few years earlier to distinguish the Old Mennonites from a new revivalist group called New Mennonites. In any case, the distinction between Old and Old Order can be confusing, and is ideologically loaded. Both groups thought they were retaining the original doctrines and practices of the Anabaptists. But the terms nonetheless became conventional and are useful for classification. Today the Old Order are still seen around northern Waterloo Region in horse and buggies, while the Old Mennonites are broadly assimilated into mainstream culture.

The effects of this split were strong in Woolwich Township. Because most local Mennonites sided with the Old Order, all of the churches (and their buildings) became part of the new Old Order conference. By 1906, there were five Old Order meetinghouses in the county, with a total membership of over 370 adults.¹⁰

In 1889, a small faction of 30 Woolwich families did not join the Old Order split. These Old Mennonites were an isolated group for many years. They met for Sunday worship in a

private home; however, it quickly became too crowded. The group persistently lobbied the Old Order Conestogo group (near Three Bridges) for use of their building, and eventually worked out a deal by which they acquired the meetinghouse. The Old Order congregation built another building for themselves nearby. Eventually the Old Mennonite group relocated to St. Jacobs, becoming what is known today as the St. Jacobs Mennonite Church.

Throughout the next decades, the small contingent of local Old Mennonites began to grow. Some who had originally sided with Old Order were returning to the Old Mennonite church. By 1924 there were three Old Mennonite churches in the region, compared to five Old Order congregations.

It was also in the early 1920s when a third group of Mennonites arrived in Waterloo County. Following the anarchy of the Russian Revolution, some 20,000 Russian Mennonites passed through Kitchener and Waterloo. These Russians had in-fact originated in Holland centuries earlier, but through a series of migrations ended up in the Ukraine. The chaos of the revolution had been particularly burdensome for this group, and consequently many immigrated to Canada.

It is important to emphasise that these Russian Mennonites were of a completely different ethnic origin than the Swiss Old and Old Order Mennonites of Waterloo County. While the two Swiss groups largely shared the same culture, these Russian Mennonites had a markedly different history than did the Swiss.

In the 1870s an earlier group of Russian Mennonites had migrated to Manitoba and other Western provinces and established thriving communities. But in Ontario, there was almost no Russian Mennonite population prior to 1920. While the Russian Mennonites almost all eventually withdrew into their own communities (some joining the existing Russian Mennonite

community out west, and others forming their own congregations in Ontario) they were at first billeted to various Swiss Mennonite homes. The interaction between these newcomers and their hosts was “a crash course in intercultural relations.”¹¹ To begin, the immigrants spoke High German while the Swiss Mennonites spoke Pennsylvania German, a dialect seen by the newcomers as primitive. The Russian Mennonites were paradoxical: they were “better educated, culturally more progressive, yet penniless and utterly dependent” on their Swiss Mennonite hosts.¹²

In their brief time as guests in Swiss Mennonite homes and churches, the Russians left a mark on their hosts. The Russians’ style of worship was much more aggressive; they incorporated more Bible readings, audible prayers, and a generally greater sense of enthusiasm: in short, the Russians were much more evangelical. The differences in style led to accusations on both sides: the Russians perceived their hosts’ services as dull and primitive; the Swiss accused the Russians of *hochmut* (high mindedness) in their worship.¹³ Nevertheless, relations between the newcomers and hosts were generally cordial, and perhaps even mutually beneficial.

The new Russian immigrants can be classified generally into three groups: The *Bruedergemeinden* (Mennonite Brethren), *Allianzgemeinden* (Alliance Mennonite), and the Conference Mennonites. Of interest in our study is the first: the Mennonite Brethren (MB) began in the 1860s in Russia, and differed markedly from the other Russian Mennonites in their practices of baptism. All Mennonite groups practise believers’ baptism (a voluntary act for adults) as opposed to infant baptism as practised by mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. However, the MB stood alone among the Russians in practising full-immersion baptism also known as dunking. Most other Mennonite groups practise a pouring baptism where only the head of the confessor gets wet. To the outsider, the differences in these two practices

might seem trivial, but for the Russian Mennonite community it was a profoundly important issue, with each form of baptism conveying different theology and symbolism.

Also, the MB church stressed a “cataclysmic emotional experience”¹⁴ as a mark of Christian conversion. This is sometimes referred to as being “born again” or “saved.” As this language suggests, the Mennonite Brethren church was on the fundamentalist end of the religious spectrum.

Fundamentalism and the Ontario Old Mennonite Community

The earlier discussion of the American fundamentalist-modernist controversy is of strong importance to Ontario Mennonite circles; for Mennonite communities have historically not been too affected by the international border. This is to say that Swiss Mennonites of Ontario in the 1930s had a lot more ties with Swiss Mennonites in Pennsylvania or Ohio, than with Russian Mennonites in Manitoba. It is only in recent years that Mennonite conference structure has been based on national boundaries and not Swiss-Russian cultural distinctions.

For the Old Mennonite conference, events south of the border began to have an impact. In 1921, the General Conference of the Old Mennonites adopted a document called *Eighteen Fundamentals*, clearly an effort to side with the fundamentalists over the modernists. In 1924 Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana, the premier Mennonite educational institution, saw its modernist minority of faculty leave the institution.

Even traditional Mennonite issues began to be defined along fundamentalist-modernist polars. For example, the Mennonite doctrine of pacifism was shared by both sides: the modernists felt it was an innate social ethic for all people, while the fundamentalists thought pacifism could only exist for converted Christians.¹⁵

American fundamentalism made its way into the Ontario Old Mennonite church where biblical fundamentalism became the norm. Influential leaders, such as S.F. Coffman, founder of the Ontario Mennonite Bible School, and Oscar Burkholder, minister at Breslau Mennonite Church, began using their institutions to promote fundamentalism in the province. In 1924, First Mennonite Church in Kitchener chose the well-known American fundamentalist C.F. Derstine as its new minister.¹⁶ By the early 1930s most of the local Old Mennonite churches were heavily fundamentalist and pre-millennial.¹⁷ The St. Jacobs, Elmira, and Floradale churches in Woolwich continued to attract Old Order defectors regularly.

Early CB influence and the Old Order Mennonites

At the height of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in 1924, the Christian Brethren began to make inroads in the Old Order Mennonite community. The notion of a fundamentalist-modernist controversy is somewhat of a moot point in the Old Order community, for there is nothing in their movements that could properly be called modernist. Conversely, the Old Order communities were not particularly interested in the intellectualisation of Christianity. Old Orders only attended elementary school, and were generally sceptical of the merits of higher education and anything that was deemed “modern.” They were, however, not fundamentalist. They did hold conservative notions of the Bible, but were very uncomfortable with the revivalist tendencies of evangelicalism.

The Old Order hierarchical structure also reveals peculiarities. In the 1930s there were five Old Order churches in the Woolwich Township cluster. The churches would meet on alternating weeks, giving members the opportunity to visit each others' churches. A minister oversaw each congregation, and a bishop oversaw the entire cluster.

In Old Order congregations (as in Old Mennonite churches at this time) ministers and bishops were chosen by lot. To the outsider this seems like a random process similar to drawing straws, but for the insider, it was a means of determining God's choice for the position. Since this appointment was then invariably 'God's will', turning it down was considered wrong. None of these leaders had formal training, and their jobs as ministers were to be done in addition to their regular work on the farm. As one might imagine, this random appointment process led to a mix of good and bad ministers and bishops – and if people were dissatisfied with 'God's choice', it was fairly difficult to overturn!

The CB had a similar structure to the Old Order Mennonites in many ways. They had emerged in Plymouth, England after a defection from the Church of England in the early 19th century. Their leaders, too, typically did not have any formal training. Unlike the Old Order, they did not have any higher church government. Each individual congregation was autonomous with no formal denominational structure beyond the local congregation. While the Old Order had communion only twice a year, the CB observed the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis.¹⁸

Another theological distinction of the CB, and one increasingly shared by Old Mennonites, was dispensational pre-millennialism. This brand of theology divided the history of the world into various ages which included different economies of salvation. A sharp distinction was made between the Old and New Testaments, and heavy attention was given to eschatology: it stressed a time of coming tribulation following a rapture of all Christians. The tribulation

would expose the heresy of non-fundamentalist denominations and would then be followed by a thousand year reign of Jesus Christ on earth.¹⁹

The Old Order Mennonite faith was quite opposed to this sort of apocalyptic vision. It also argued against Brethren notions that a Christian could be assured of salvation. This is to say, once people had experienced evangelical conversion, they would be guaranteed a spot in heaven. This belief was seen as presumptuous and arrogant; it was thought to downplay the significance of living a good life in the present. In the words of one Old Order preacher, “This was putting hope to shame, for if they know, there is no place for hope.”²⁰

In 1923, Alex Stewart, a CB from Guelph held evangelistic meetings in Linwood and Elmira. These attracted a significant number of Old Order Mennonites. Among those influenced by Stewart was Simeon E. Martin. As he relates:

We lived on a farm a few miles east of the village [Linwood], and being myself very very dissatisfied with my spiritual life – if I dare call it such – attended a few of these meetings. Thus it was so vividly brought to my attention that I had never really accepted Christ as Saviour, but merely as a pattern. And so, as a result of the sermons and some visiting with loving friends of the group that had recently gone through the same ordeal as I, I became soundly converted.²¹

As well as the CB evangelist’s influence, Simeon was also affected at this time by the evangelicalism of the Russian Mennonite immigrants; his “Russian neighbour helped him during these trying times of spiritual struggle.”²²

Stewart’s Elmira meetings also led to the conversion of Emanuel Martin (whose nephew, John Martin, later became an influential leader among the Hawkesvillers). From the influence of these leaders, two small Christian Brethren assemblies started in Linwood and Elmira respectively. A cursory look at the names of those converted at these meetings shows that these two CB churches were not overly Mennonite in makeup.²³ Simeon Martin did not join the new

CB assembly at Linwood, but Emanuel and his wife were active participants in the new gathering in Elmira. By the 1930s, however, both these assemblies had petered out due to dwindling membership.

John Martin's Experience

The origins and future dynamics of the Hawkesvillers cannot be understood without analysing the experiences of the group's most influential leader: John Martin. Born in 1910 on an Old Order Mennonite farm near Wallenstein, Martin describes himself as a typical young boy who did not care too much about religious things. He relates the following about his experiences in the Old Order Mennonite church services:

The services were generally long and uninteresting. There was no Sunday School and the children sat through these services as well as the adults. If the children were not taught at home, they only heard what they got at church services every three weeks.²⁴

When interviewed, Martin also said that he never witnessed his father reading the Bible and could not remember receiving spiritual instruction from his parents.²⁵ All prayers were silent and, despite his Old Order outward appearances of piety, he did not feel any general sense of spiritual life.

Martin recalls Old Order Mennonite social gatherings on Sunday evenings where he engaged in such rebellious actions as square dancing and card-playing. He also was also known on occasion to drink hard cider with his peers, often leading them to “of course try to act a little foolish.”²⁶

At the age of 20, however, the death of Martin's older brother in a railway accident created a huge shock in the young man's life. It is evident that this event has left a permanent scar. As he relates in his autobiography, “When this news came to me, I ... asked myself the

question, ‘John, if that would have been you, where would you be?’” It would seem he had a fear of hell – perhaps for his deceased brother, and certainly for himself. For Martin to even ponder such an obviously fundamentalist concept, it would seem likely that he had already been somewhat influenced by fundamentalists. He had presumably been having conversations with his uncle Emanuel (who was converted at the Elmira meetings) prior to this accident.

Martin relates that this event caused him to ponder spiritual matters seriously. He began to read the New Testament, and decided to attend instructional baptismal classes in the Old Order Mennonite church. Interestingly, he also began to attend revival meetings at some of the Old Mennonite churches which were becoming more popular with the emergence of fundamentalism. When asked about these meetings, Martin stated that “some were good and others not so good.” He also claims that his subsequent development of fundamentalist ideas in this period came from reading the New Testament. It is difficult to believe, however, given the profound evangelicalism in the Old Mennonite church during this era, as well as the exodus of Old Order Mennonites to the Old Mennonite church, that these meetings left him completely unaffected.

John Martinson's Sunday School at Wallenstein

Another fundamentalist institution, this time from outside the Mennonite community, was influential for John Martin. In Wallenstein, he attended a Sunday school at an old log Methodist church led by John Martinson, a retired school teacher. Sunday schools served as supplementary religious educational institutions for local children. One person recalls "that we went there because we didn't really have anything else to do [on Sunday afternoons]."²⁷ Martinson was Methodist, and the people who attended his Sunday school were from various denominations. Many Old Orders were attracted to this school for its instructional value.

Another element of Martinson's programme was interdenominational evangelistic meetings that followed the classes. These were taboo for Old Order Mennonites. One individual, who later joined the Old Mennonites, recalls sneaking out of the house by throwing his good clothes out the window of his bedroom, leaving the house in his barn clothes and changing before attending the meetings.²⁸

John Martin attended one of these revival meetings in August of 1931 after hearing about them from a friend. He was particularly affected by a visiting Pentecostal evangelist; an event which, he relates, led to a later emotional conversion experience. He marks this as a profound turning point in his life.

Later that year Martin married, and he and his wife attended the Sunday school meetings regularly, in addition to services at the Old Order Mennonite church. He recalls bringing his New Testament into the Old Order services (a practice quite uncommon), and having the ministers question him about it. He shared his new-found fundamentalism with the clergy and other members of the church, who viewed his *frema geist* (new spirit) with a great deal of suspicion.

The Origins of the Hawkesville Gospel Mission

In October of 1931, another Sunday school began in Hawkesville at the home of Nathan Martin. Nathan's brother, Israel, was born Old Order, but had come under the influence of Old Mennonite fundamentalism. He joined the Old Mennonite church in Floradale in 1928, and opened the Sunday school after visiting Martinson's Wallenstein Sunday school and deciding a similar effort should start in Hawkesville. Nathan donated a large room in his house to the effort, and the Bible study became known as the *Hawkesville Gospel Mission*. Israel Martin furnished the room with hymnals and old church pews that were donated by the St. Jacobs Mennonite Church.²⁹

While the leaders of the Sunday school were Mennonite, it attracted mostly non-Mennonite children in its initial years of operation.³⁰ There were also classes for adults, and Israel also began to hold interdenominational Sunday evening services, which attracted more Old Order young adults. The speakers, to name but a few, included Old Mennonite fundamentalists such as Moses Brubacher and Oscar Burkholder; Henry Janzen, minister of the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church [later called Kitchener Mennonite Brethren]; as well as a CB lay preacher named Frank Guthrie. Eventually a group of regular attendees began to form and the Hawkesville Gospel Mission carried on for some years. Over time, two preachers began to emerge as the most respected speakers: Henry Janzen and Frank Guthrie. Both men were very different in backgrounds and preaching style.

Henry Janzen and Frank Guthrie

Heinrich (Henry) Janzen was born in 1901 in the Mennonite town of Muensterberg, Ukraine.³¹ His life story is a fascinating tale of an intellectual journey which took him from agnosticism to atheism, and ultimately to fundamentalist Christianity.

Janzen attended a Mennonite high school several kilometres from his hometown, where he recalls being “a wild boy [who] never failed to be there when mischief appeared.”³² He jokes how he and his peers never attended the local church “because of fear that the sermons would touch our conscience.”³³

In his later years of school he became more in tune with the emerging political climate. Increasingly influenced by revolutionary ideology, he applauded the abdication of the czar in 1917 along with many of the students. He became quite agnostic, distributing, with other students, a paper called *Anti-Mennonite* which criticised the beliefs and values of his own religion.³⁴

Janzen began post-secondary studies in commerce, but never finished due to the civil war and a call to state service. According to his wife, it was during his unhappy years in the Red Army that he developed clearly atheistic beliefs. Curiously, he ended up marrying a devout Mennonite Brethren (being of Conference Mennonite background himself). Interestingly too, he still refused to bear arms during his military service, a conviction which was difficult to carry out under Red Army command. Eventually Janzen deserted his army post, hid out with local Mennonite farmers and later appears to have bribed officials for a permanent release.³⁵

However, being married to a Mennonite Brethren woman had its effect on Janzen. Following some evangelistic meetings in 1925, he renounced atheism and embraced

fundamentalist Christianity. Later that year, with a throng of other Russian Mennonites, Janzen, his wife and baby child, immigrated to Canada.

Once in Canada, he began to take religion much more seriously. In the summer of 1926, he was baptised into the newly-founded Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church. Over the next few years, Janzen became an itinerant preacher at various Bible studies and churches sponsored by the Kitchener MB Church. By 1932, Janzen was ordained a minister of the church, and became the first moderator of the newly founded Ontario Conference of MB Churches – a fascinating appointment for a man who had been an atheist seven years earlier.

In the early 1930s, Janzen was leading Bible studies in a variety of locations, including New Hamburg, Tavistock and Hespeler. He also organised several large baptismal services in the Nith River near New Hamburg, and became a popular, self-taught Bible expositor. A fellow clergyman noted Janzen's ability "of expounding the [Bible] clearly and simple enough for everyone to understand."³⁶ Janzen's theological knowledge was admired by lay and clergy alike.

Janzen became involved with the Hawkesville Gospel Mission during this era of itinerant ministry. Another group of Hawkesville members, influential in the early history of the group, was the Hoffman brothers – Amos, Israel, David and Sydney. They had come under the influence of fundamentalist thinking through a different route: family friends, the Dycks, who were Russian immigrant members of the Kitchener MB Church. As per Old Order custom, a farm had been purchased for Amos at the age of 18, to be acquired in full at the age of 21. In the meantime, the Dycks were hired to look after the farm, and Amos was given free board and functioned as a hired man.³⁷ Conversations with these evangelically-minded Russian Mennonites, as well as contact with Simeon E. Martin (discussed earlier) and other converts from local revival meetings, led the Hoffmans one by one to join the Hawkesvillers. It isn't clear

when Janzen first made contact with the Hawkesville Sunday school, but it seems the Hoffmans' acquaintance with him would have been a likely link. Also, Israel Martin was active in seeking a variety of speakers from different denominations in the early years of his Hawkesville Sunday school. Janzen was also, at least, an occasional speaker at John Martinson's revival services in Wallenstein, another logical connection.³⁸ In any case, by 1934, Janzen was one of the two prominent speakers at the Hawkesville meetings.

The other popular speaker was Frank Guthrie, a lay preacher (and baker by trade) from the Eramosa Gospel Hall, a CB assembly in Guelph.³⁹ Guthrie had been involved in proselytising efforts among the Old Order as early as 1923, when he accompanied Alex Stewart during the Elmira and Linwood meetings. Guthrie was also a speaker at Martinson's Wallenstein services.⁴⁰ Guthrie was raised Presbyterian, but became acquainted with CB fundamentalism in Toronto around the time of World War One.⁴¹

It would appear that Guthrie and Janzen first came into contact with each other during this period. According to John Martin, relationships between these early mentors of the Hawkesvillers were quite cordial and respectful, despite significant differences in their theologies and preaching styles.

In addition to work among the Old Orders of Waterloo, Guthrie was also spending time with fundamentalist converts in rural Grey County – a much farther commute for the Guelph resident. Guthrie, a very active and likable man, “had a knack for going to little known places”.⁴² Contemporaries recall a personable man who was willing to spend a lot of time in conversation with these young Old Order Mennonites. He often brought day-old loaves of bread and cakes from his bakery to the Sunday school meetings, a gesture much appreciated during the Depression era.

As a preacher, Guthrie had a flare for hammering out a clear, passionate presentation of the fundamentalist gospel: he was an articulate speaker with an endearing Scottish accent. Members recall how he kept their attention by periodically pounding on the pulpit as he spoke. This direct and to-the-point speaking style was very appealing to the Swiss Mennonites, whose culture is often seen as blunt and sharp.⁴³ In fact Guthrie was so to-the-point that one individual who grew up in the Hawkesville Brethren criticised him for “preaching the same sermon every time.”⁴⁴ He was good at articulating the basic tenets of the fundamentalist notion of conversion (a skill highly regarded by the group) but was perhaps a less astute biblical expositor than Janzen.

Janzen, however, despite better education, was not a native speaker of English. According to his wife, the Hawkesvillers were “so hungry for the Word that they gladly overlooked his broken English.”⁴⁵ It was perhaps, ironically, his broken English that first helped Janzen win respect among the Hawkesvillers. While he was encouraged to preach in English during public meetings, he used German in private bible studies with certain people at this time. Despite his High German being less familiar to the Mennonites, his ability to speak to them in a linguistic pattern they were more familiar with won him favor.⁴⁶

It is telling of Janzen’s intellectual aptitude to observe some of his accomplishments in subsequent years. After being a pastor at Kitchener MB Church and moderating the Ontario MB Conference, he founded a Russian language Bible school in Toronto, and eventually became a professor at Canadian MB College in Winnipeg where he served as academic dean and, eventually, president. He also received an honorary Doctorate of Divinity degree, and authored several books and articles, mostly in German, on various biblical themes, as well as Russian

Mennonite history. In the 1930s, however, this tri-lingual academic and clergyman was still a fairly new immigrant trying hard to master the English language.

The Organisation Debates

By 1934, the regular attendees at Israel Martin's Hawkesville Sunday school were so taken by fundamentalist influence that they were sure they needed to form a congregation separate from the Old Order. But a decision of organisation needed to be made: they could each go their separate way to any of the local Old Mennonite churches (as had been happening among the Old Order for some time) and keep the Hawkesville Gospel Mission the way it was. Alternatively, they could reorganise the mission to form a new church with either CB or MB affiliation.

The point of departure happened on this point following a mass immersion baptismal service on September 9, 1934. For some time, certain members of this group had been interested in being baptized by immersion. While they had all been baptised in the Old Order church, some felt an acceptance of an ostensibly new brand of Christianity also required a new baptism. John Martin was among this group, and it was decided that a baptismal service would be organised in the Conestogo River near Wallenstein on this date. It was well-advertised on road signs, and due to its oddness in this Mennonite area, a crowd of some one thousand curious onlookers watched the proceedings.

Prior to this baptism, a visiting CB speaker (an acquaintance of Frank Guthrie) named George McKenzie had challenged the group: if they wanted to be true fundamentalists, they needed to "remember the Lord in the breaking of bread every [Sunday morning]."⁴⁷ This was a reference to the CB custom of observing communion every week, a practice quite foreign to the Old Order who typically had communion only twice a year. Before Sunday, September 9, 1934,

certain members had begun to take communion privately on occasion, but it was decided, after a casual suggestion by Guthrie, that the baptismal service would be preceded by a communion service at the Hawkesville Gospel Mission.⁴⁸

The events of September 9, 1934 led to a departure of many members due to the deliberate and public defiance of these actions: a second baptism would be seen as a strongly stated opinion that the baptism of the Old Order was meaningless; a communion service on Sunday morning suggested Old Order communion was not good enough. Generally the former practice had people attend their regular church services in the morning and then attend the Hawkesville meetings in the afternoon. Before Guthrie's casual suggestion to have communion,, many had not even entertained the notion of forming a new church.⁴⁹

It was at this point, according to John Martin, that about half the regulars at the Hawkesville meetings departed. Apparently most of these people were already members of Old Mennonite churches who had joined the group due to conversations with Israel Martin. None of the Old Orders in the group returned to the Old Order, nor left the movement at that time.⁵⁰

It would seem that after this departure, any faction wanting to join the Old Mennonites had already done so. The remaining Hawkesville members, in sticking with the public baptismal and communion services, had demonstrated a clear intention to disassociate from either the Old or Old Order Mennonites and form a new church. Most writings on the topic seem to indicate that by choosing to observe communion in the CB manner, the Hawkesvillers had clearly demonstrated their intention of becoming a CB assembly.⁵¹ *A careful look at some of the documents, however, reveals that even after the pivotal events of September 9, 1934, the question of church affiliation was hardly settled: there was actually strong momentum to form a*

Mennonite Brethren congregation at this time, perhaps even stronger than movement towards the Christian Brethren.

Most Hawkesviller contemporaries have tended to gloss over the rough edges involved in the process of becoming a CB church; however, it was a difficult and often trying process with sharp disagreement. Following the schism after the large baptismal service, about eight families and a few single individuals remained with the Hawkesvillers. John Martin relates that the CB and MB parties in the group had unofficial spokesmen: he himself favoured going with the CB, while the Hoffman brothers favoured going with the MB. John's uncle, Emanuel Martin, had been active in the dissolved Elmira CB assembly. Extensive conversations with his uncle, as well as weekly meetings with Frank Guthrie left John Martin firmly in the CB camp. On the other side, the Hoffman brothers, influenced heavily by Russian Mennonites including the Dycks and, later, Henry Janzen, were in favor of joining the MB.

Articles from a business meeting on September 13, 1934 also reveal that Israel Martin, the founder of the Hawkesville group, favoured MB affiliation, and motioned that they be incorporated into the MB conference.⁵² *According to John Martin, this motion was initially carried by a majority vote. If this plan had gone through, the Hawkesvillers would have likely joined the local MB cluster of churches; there were other MB congregations in New Hamburg and Hespeler as well as the largest congregation in Kitchener (where Henry Janzen was minister). They would have also been incorporated into the newly-founded Ontario Conference of MB churches (where Henry Janzen was moderator.) Had they joined the MB, they would have sat in a peculiar situation: part of a Russian Mennonite conference, but with purely Swiss Mennonite members and elders.*

Janzen, as minister of Kitchener MB and moderator of the conference, was very active in Sunday school programmes and baptismal services for these various local MB churches and would have presumably remained influential among the Hawkesvillers.⁵³

It was precisely for this reason that John Martin opposed joining the MB. He became convinced, through the mentoring of Frank Guthrie and Emanuel Martin, that the Hawkesvillers should form “a simple New Testament assembly.”⁵⁴ In other words, they saw a church in the pattern of the CB where there was no conference structure and each assembly was an unaccountable, autonomous entity that observed communion every Sunday. Martin was so persuaded that the CB structure was the only true New Testament pattern that he staunchly refused to go along with the majority vote to join the Ontario MB Conference. When the rest of the members asked him what he would do, he said he did not know, other than that he would not affiliate with the MB under any circumstance.⁵⁵

Unfortunately the only existing record of these debates is in the memory of John Martin. Quite predictably, surviving family members of others involved in the organizational discussions do not generally recall much being shared about these meetings. As Martin relates the story, his refusal to go along with the majority vote left the group undecided on whether to join the MB and leave John Martin, or to simply defer the decision. They ended up doing the latter.

Article 7 of a business meeting dated September 13, 1934 (a mere four days after the mass baptism in the Conestogo River) states:

Discussions on church organization. Explanation of the topic by Israel Martin. Proposed by Israel Martin that we be incorporated with the Russian Mennonite Brethren (Brueder Gemeinde) by reason of several very obvious advantages. Objections to church organization raised by brothers John Martin, Noah Martin and Jacob Martin. Agreed upon to discuss this problem at some future date.⁵⁶

It is not clear if this is the same meeting at which John revealed his defection, as the individuals involved in the process discussed this point on several occasions.

A perusal of some of the other resolutions reveals that the now-separate church had a combination of CB and MB doctrines. While stating that communion should be observed weekly in the CB fashion (Article 1), they had also affirmed that foot washing be observed (Article 2), and that a pastor be appointed (Article 5).⁵⁷ The Christian Brethren did not appoint individual pastors as per Article 5: their structure involved a group of elders who were collectively responsible for leadership.

Article 4 states “that Christians should abstain from combatant service in the case of military service.”⁵⁸ *This position is much closer to the MB than the CB or even Old Mennonite positions.* The Russian Mennonites of the 1920s immigration were generally willing to participate in military service provided it was non-combatant, while the Old and Old Order Mennonites objected more strongly to military service of any kind.⁵⁹ The Hawkesviller statement prohibited combat, but does not appear to ban non-combatant military service. The CB for their part did not take any uniform position on the bearing of arms.

Article 3 deals with traditional Mennonite dress among the women:

Recommended by Israel Martin to have the Mennonite women wear the distinctive head covering but not make it obligatory for women of other customs from other denominations. Unanimously approved by all present.⁶⁰

That this statement not only upholds traditional Mennonite attire, but also draws a distinction between Mennonites and non-Mennonites and demonstrates that there were members who were not comfortable abandoning a Mennonite label for John Martin’s ‘New Testament Church’.

Most indicative of the unique MB influence on this group is found in Article 6:

Discussion on baptism. Proposed that the three different and prevalent forms of baptism namely immersion, pouring and sprinkling be all recognized as valid or scriptural under different circumstances. Unanimously agreed upon, by the assembly, that baptism by immersion is the mode to be observed and most clearly indicates what the rite of baptism is to signify.⁶¹

This statement on baptism was nowhere near that of Guthrie or the Hawkesvillers' other CB influencers. Guthrie preached household baptism, a process whereby infants were baptised along with their parents upon fundamentalist conversion of the parents. This would assume that most homes would practice infant baptism. Furthermore, the Old and Old Order Mennonites practised a pouring baptism, which was only *permitted* in the Hawkesville article but not encouraged. The Hawkesviller position on baptism was, in fact, almost identical to that adopted by the Ontario MB conference two years earlier in 1932 which stated:

Article 17:

The church recognizes baptism by immersion as scriptural and will only administer this form. However, members who have been baptized on the faith of the Son of God, will be accepted in to the church.⁶²

Both the Hawkesvillers and the MB conference stressed immersion baptism as the only acceptable future practice for their churches, but were willing to admit members who had been previously baptised as adults in other manners. Interestingly too, this position of the Ontario MB conference differed from the larger Canadian MB conference which did not admit non-immersed members under any circumstance. The Ontario MB Conference had made an exception on this point, as a large number of their members had come from the *Allianzgemeinde* tradition in Russia which practised a pouring baptism.⁶³

During this period, Henry Janzen and the Ontario MB Conference had been organising a number of baptismal services. John Martin and some of the Hoffman brothers attended a few of these services and undoubtedly were influenced by them.

John Martin relates how the mass baptismal service of 1934 reflected their various doctrinal positions. Frank Guthrie preached a sermon before the crowd outlining the nature of evangelical conversion, while McKenzie (Guthrie's other CB preacher friend) despite being himself an advocate of household baptism, preached on adult baptism. Janzen too preached specifically on immersion baptism, and it was he who performed the actual baptism of the 15 candidates that day. Martin insists that, despite their obvious differences on the issues of baptism, the three speakers were very gracious and did not criticize each other.⁶⁴

It appears that even as late as December 10, 1935, which was 15 months after the Hawkesvillers first celebrated Sunday morning communion together, there were still lingering questions about church structure and affiliation (although a variety of CB preachers were already visiting the new church).⁶⁵ *It seems that the decision to affiliate with the CB was slow and gradual, and did not occur at any one moment.* Perhaps it became most evident sometime in 1935, about the same time Henry Janzen stopped being invited back as a regular preacher.

It is impossible to know exactly what caused the Hawkesvillers to associate with the CB in the end. Some have suggested that with an increase in CB speakers visiting the young church, the individuals originally disposed to joining the MB became more familiar with CB structure. One thing, however, is certain: the influence of John Martin was absolutely essential. It seems to be he who saw to it that Guthrie remained a regular speaker, particularly in the earliest years when Henry Janzen had much more influence on the group than did Guthrie.⁶⁶ *It was only after Guthrie established a close relationship with John Martin that he became highly influential*

among the Hawkesvillers. In any case, by 1936, the Hawkesvillers were for the most part a church patterned after the CB; however, they remained highly influenced by Mennonitism.

Even after the group had affiliated with the CB, Henry Janzen was invited back to speak several times. He performed marriages for several couples because none of the leaders among the Hawkesviller was yet licensed to do this. It seems that Janzen and the new CB church parted on good terms. Janzen was quite busy in his role as Ontario MB conference moderator and pastor, and was ministering to a variety of groups in various locations. Janzen always had an ecumenical spirit and was willing to cooperate with various denominations and traditions. Decades after these events, after having been both in Manitoba and Europe for some years, Janzen was invited back to speak for a Sunday evening service at the Wallenstein Bible Chapel sometime between 1968 and his death in 1975. According to an observer, he was quite moved emotionally to again see the individuals whom he had influenced in those early years of their spiritual development.

Remnants of Mennonitism in the Hawkesvillers

An investigation into the degree of ‘Mennonite retention’ is a difficult endeavour, as there no universally acceptable definition of what makes a Mennonite a Mennonite. Mennonites are generally thought of as both an ethno-cultural group and a religious group. The sociological definition problem then emerges: to what extent is a community still Mennonite if they do not consider their religion Mennonite? A similar problem could be posed for people today who grew up in the Mennonite church, but never became members and have only sporadic attendance in adult years. Can this person still be called Mennonite?

There is no doubt that in the Hawkesvillers' early years most members maintained Mennonite culture. In its early years of existence, the church began to grow almost entirely from Mennonite converts. In the majority of homes of the Hawkesvillers, Pennsylvania-German was the spoken language for decades after the split.

John Martin's family was an interesting exception, as they were most intentional in abandoning any Mennonite customs. A picture dated 1935 of the Hawkesvillers shows everyone clad in back Old Order style clothing, with the exception of John Martin who is wearing a light-coloured suit that stands out noticeably.⁶⁷ *Furthermore, in the early 1940s, the John Martin family stopped speaking Pennsylvania-German deliberately, seemingly in an effort to complete a total separatism from Mennonitism although John Martin would likely deny this.*

Another interesting case study is the Hawkesvillers' reactions to pacifism and non-resistance. Most contemporaries cannot recall a single sermon ever being preached on issues of war and peace, but the minutes of the 1934 organisational meeting clearly forbade combatant military service. When war came in 1939, not a single member of the church joined the army; all of the young men in the assembly of military age (there were three or four) did alternative service in conscientious objector camps.⁶⁸

Several children of the Hoffman brothers remember a cadets' programme at Elmira High School in the 1950s and 60s. Former army officers led male students in military drills; the students donned uniforms and carried fake guns. The Hoffmans joined the Old Mennonites in not participating in this programme although others in the church, including some children of John Martin, did participate.

It seems that the second generation for the most part lost this element of pacifism in later decades; however, virtually all of the original leaders maintained pacifist convictions all their

lives. Even John Martin, for all his efforts to not be Mennonite, still seemed to oppose going to war in a recent interview but he certainly would not admit this conviction had anything to do with his Mennonite upbringing.

The Articles of 1934 stressed the right of foot-washing which had been a common Mennonite practice of symbolically washing each others' feet in the pattern of Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper. Members recall this happening a couple of times in the early years, but it died out very quickly. Furthermore, while the women in the church originally kept their Mennonite-style bonnets as a regular clothing piece, they eventually were worn only during worship services. Eventually, too, head coverings worn by women during services became the more fashionable hats and veils, and Mennonite-style coverings slowly lost popularity.

Some find a retention of Mennonite culture in the community spirit and work ethic of the Hawkesvillers. In true traditional Mennonite fashion, when increased membership necessitated a new chapel in 1939, no paid contractor was used. One member engineered and organised the project, and most others helped build the facility in only two months.⁶⁹

Others have noted the Hawkesville practice of gathering in homes following Sunday services as another major Mennonite cultural trait that has endured. In Mennonite homes, it was simply expected that a hostess be prepared for uninvited Sunday dinner guests and have enough food prepared when service was held at her home congregation. Sunday afternoons were an important leisure time for visiting. Similarly, in Hawkesviller homes, Sunday dinner was an important time when people usually visited with each other.⁷⁰

The Hawkesvillers indeed retained much of their Mennonite-ness long after the 1935 division. Perhaps most telling of this was the comment of a Toronto church leader who remarked to a visiting Hawkesviller that that his church was CB, but “a really Mennonite” brand of CB.

Effects of the Hawkesvillers on the Rest of the Mennonite Community:

Predictably, in the initial years following the departure, there was some degree of antagonism between the Hawkesvillers and the Old Order Mennonites. However, this ill feeling began to wane considerably in later years. Some Hawkesvillers recall attending Old Order weddings in the early years and being asked to sit at the back; within a few years this ostracism no longer took place.⁷¹ It seems that, overall, any interruption in family relationships was fairly short-lived. Many family members still enjoyed regular visits with those on the other side of the split, and even helped each other out in times of financial need.⁷²

For the more aggressive Hawkesviller, family relationships were more difficult. John Martin recalls periodic visits to his brother who was a minister in a local Mennonite Church. He called it a “strained relationship”; they visited out of a sense of obligation more than a desire. Not surprisingly, John was viewed with a great deal of disdain by some of the Old Order, because he so passionately opposed them. He recalls hearing that his brother counselled certain individuals not to visit the Hawkesvillers.

One particular influence on the Mennonite community occurred in the *frema geist* movement of 1939. Jesse Bauman, a minister in the Old Order church had come under the influence of fundamentalism. Influenced strongly by Simeon Martin, he was, by the late 1920s, preaching fundamentalism from the Old Order Mennonite pulpit while still defending some Old Order practices. Bauman never joined the Hawkesvillers, but was a strong sympathiser with their cause. In 1933, this controversial minister was appointed bishop by lot, further fuelling the controversy. By 1939, Bauman had led a group of some 300 followers out of the Old Order church into an alliance with some churches in Markham, forming what is now called the Markham-Waterloo conference where he was to serve as a bishop.

Jesse Bauman, however, only lasted six months in this new conference, as he also ran into controversy there. For Bauman, the main problem with the Old Order was a lack of fundamentalist dogma, while for others who left the issue was one of modernisation: these people wanted to drive cars, use electricity and have telephones more than anything. Soon Bauman's fundamentalism became equally unwelcome in the new conference and he left along with 50 followers.

The decision of where to affiliate was difficult. Bauman by this point had come under the considerable influence of the Hawkesvillers who were frequent visitors at his home. His doctrinal inclinations were also becoming very similar. It is widely viewed that he would have joined the Hawkesvillers, had it not been for his wife who was strongly opposed to the idea.⁷³ Eventually, Bauman and his followers joined the Old Mennonites in Elmira, but many still favoured merger with the Hawkesvillers. Clearly, the Hawkesvillers were very influential in this merger.

In the following years, the Hawkesvillers continued to impact community dynamics. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, J. Winfield Fretz describes "a short but intense evangelistic effort among the Old Order Mennonite and Waterloo-Markham groups" by the Hawkesvillers. From 1950-1970, 64 Old Orders joined the Hawkesvillers, in addition to about the same number of Old Mennonites.⁷⁴

These Hawkesviller membership gains were facilitated considerably by the work of Allan Weber. As *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968* relates:

In 1963 a mutual exercise of Allan and the brethren at Hawkesville Bible Chapel caused him [...] to do visitations in the Hawkesville area. Part-time work as a salesman and colporteur gives him many opportunities to visit homes, witness to people and point them to Christ through faith.⁷⁵

Ken Bechtel's history of Elmira Mennonite Church puts a much different spin on Weber's actions.

The Hawkesville Brethren hall was overcrowded and the spacious new Wallenstein facility was being opened. Several [Elmira Mennonite Church] members who were reputed "on the fence" have reported visits from a Brethren door to door salesman who fed rumours and invited them to the Chapel.⁷⁶

Weber's aggressive proselytising seems to have been met with some resistance among the Old Mennonites, particularly at the Elmira (Old) Mennonite Church. Much of the impetus for this reaction was a very sudden change in style of leadership with the arrival of Vernon Leis as Elmira's pastor in 1966. Leis represented a new generation of Old Mennonite leaders who were beginning to move away from the fundamentalism that had taken hold in the 1920s.

Leis started to move in a more liberal direction which led to rumours flying around the congregation: some thought Leis did not believe in the virgin birth; some went so far as to say he did not believe in Jesus' divinity. According to Bechtel, the sources of these rumours were proselytes among the Hawkesvillers.⁷⁷

Bechtel relates one story where Allan Weber inadvertently showed up at the home of Vernon Leis trying to sell something. Leis was not home, but his wife answered the door, and upon seeing who was there, yelled at him to never come back.⁷⁸

Whether or not these rumors did in fact originate with the Hawkesvillers is hard to determine, but that was the perception. It was widely held, according to Bechtel, that if one wanted to be a shady businessman he should join the Hawkesvillers. It was thought that while the Hawkesvillers emphasised moral living as it applied to not drinking or smoking, business and social ethics were not of major importance.⁷⁹

It is difficult to determine how accurate this really was, but it does illustrate some of the antagonism that ensued from Hawkesvillers' evangelistic efforts.

In the end, however, when the Hawkesvillers opened their new facility in 1968 at Wallenstein, some 33 individuals, including children, left Elmira Old Mennonite Church for the new chapel.⁸⁰ Included in this were key leaders. It seems that a large number of those who left were people who had joined in the 1940s during the Jesse Bauman merger – people who cherished fundamentalism strongly and became alarmed when its popularity began to wane.⁸¹ They felt a more comfortable affiliation among the Hawkesvillers, where they heard John Martin, declare repeatedly “We are fundamentalists!” in his sermon at the Wallenstein facility dedication service.

There was definitely some pain felt as a result of these two schisms (which appear to be really one extended movement). However, in the end, the fundamentalists felt at home among the Hawkesvillers, while the Elmira Old Mennonite Church was able to continue its development away from fundamentalism. Years later when John Martin and Vernon Leis were both living in the Tavistock area, a climate of mutual distrust persisted.⁸²

While the Elmira church was also being infiltrated by Pentecostals and other groups in the late 1960s, none was more effective at proselytising than the Hawkesvillers. The evangelists also attracted a large number of Old Order Mennonites into their fellowship at this time. For those who did join the Hawkesvillers, some sort of family connection usually facilitated the switch. The fact that the Hawkesvillers remained a “very Mennonite” CB assembly seems to have obviously affected their growth.

Conclusion

I admit that in this study I have done a dangerous thing: I have labelled a group Mennonite that does not truly consider itself to be so and is not recognised as such by those who do call themselves Mennonite. I will defend this risk, however, by reiterating my previous assertion that Mennonitism is both a culture and a religion, with often an often blurry distinction between the two.

In the years following 1968, the Hawkesvillers have planted daughter congregations in Elmira, Alma, Listowel, Tavistock and Heidelberg. These congregations have taken independent courses, and in true CB fashion, the daughters have no formal links to the mother group or to each other. The degree to which they have remained Mennonite varies.

However, the same could also be said of modern Old Mennonite churches; they too have in recent years witnessed the influx of members from a variety of countries and cultures which have rendered them much more indistinguishable from other Protestant churches. I suppose that in the end, what makes a Mennonite a Mennonite, will remain enigmatic.

Interestingly enough, in *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968*, the Hawkesvillers begin their history with an account of the teachings of Menno Simons and the early Anabaptists, narrating the Mennonite migrations to Pennsylvania and ultimately to Waterloo County. Conversely, this history makes no mention of the early Plymouth Brethren leaders or of the origins of the CB movement in England. This may be simply an oversight, or a coincidence, but perhaps it demonstrates – even in a small way – that the Hawkesvillers do acknowledge their Mennonite spiritual lineage apart from any CB church affiliation.

Appendix: Historiography

Relatively little has been written on the Hawkesville Brethren from Mennonite sources. The small number of writings that do exist, in my opinion, either downplay the significance of this group, or misrepresent it.

The Hawkesvillers own history, *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968* is a confessional account of the development of their church. It includes a wealth of primary source information, including meeting minutes and some diary entries of the early leaders of the Hawkesvillers. It provides an accurate chronology of the early beginning of the Hawkesvillers and their subsequent development. While its analytical merit leaves much to be desired, it is a valuable source of facts.

Frank Epp alludes to the Hawkesville Brethren when tracing the beginning of the Markham-Waterloo conference in the second volume of *Mennonites in Canada* published in 1982. In explaining the preaching of Jesse Bauman, Epp explains how, “Old Order young people were being attracted to [...] the evangelical gatherings of the Plymouth Brethren, sponsored from Guelph at Wallenstein and Hawkesville.”⁸³ This statement is inaccurate, as we now know the CB was only one of the groups involved in these meetings. In fact, the Wallenstein meetings were ‘sponsored’ by a Methodist, and the Hawkesville Sunday school was organised by a member of the Floradale Mennonite Church – not the CB at all. The Wallenstein and Hawkesville Sunday schools were interdenominational in their beginnings with a wide variety of speakers, the CB of course being just one of these groups.

A few years later, in the 1984 history of the Elmira Mennonite Church, Ken Bechtel devotes significant attention to the origins of the Hawkesvillers. In reference to evangelical currents running through Elmira and other Mennonite congregations in the late 1930s, he describes them as more of “a fifth column Brethren missionary effort than as a primarily

Mennonite renewal movement.”⁸⁴ Bechtel is somewhat correct but this colorful characterization of Mennonite renewal totally embellishes the Plymouth Brethren role in the formation of the *frema geist* movement, while undermining the still strong Mennoniteness of the early Hawkesvillers.

More recently, in 1989, a Wilfrid Laurier University undergraduate, Gordon Rumford, carried out a thorough study of the origins of the Hawkesville Gospel Hall. While this paper is well researched and thorough in analysis, it does not appear in any university archives or library. Rumford, himself a CB churchgoer, produced a source of tremendous historical value, and for this reason, I have used it considerably in my study. His paper documents the transition process of the church from an Old Order Sunday school to a CB assembly. Since Rumford is only interested in the sociology of the movement from a CB perspective, he does not go into detail about the continued Mennoniteness of the group, nor how the decision to become a CB assembly was made in the first place.

The year 2003 will hopefully see the much anticipated publication of Don Martin’s history of the Old Order Mennonites. Martin, a member of the Markham-Waterloo Conference, will be sure to provide an insider’s view into some of the Old Order’s history. I am told he will also discuss the impact of the Hawkesvillers on that community, and I eagerly await its release. [Editor’s note: the book the author refers to in the previous paragraph did come out in late 2003, too late to be used in the above paper, but it is included in the bibliography below.]

Bibliography:

Primary:

Bechtel, Ken. “The impact of the Hawkesvillers on the Elmira Mennonite Church” interview by David A. Martin, Breslau, February 7, 2003.

Frede, Alma. "The teachings of Frank Guthrie and Henry Janzen among the early Hawkesvillers" interview by David A. Martin, Wallenstein (telephone), April 7, 2003.

Martin, John. "The Hawkesville Schism of 1934" interview by David A. Martin, Tavistock, January 14, 2003.

Elmira Mennonite Church Bulletins. Waterloo: Mennonite Archives of Ontario, III-11 Series 3.

Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968. [n.ed.] Wallenstein: [n.p], 1968

Secondary:

Bechtel, Ken. *Three Score Years: Elmira Mennonite Church, 1924-1984*. (Elmira: Elmira Mennonite Church, 1984).

Bender, Urie. *Four Earthen Vessels*. (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1982).

Brubacher, Glenn. *The Frema Geist: a study of the 1939 schism in the Woolwich Conference that ended in a Merger with the Ontario Mennonite Conference [undergraduate research paper, Eastern Mennonite University]*. (1956). Student Term Papers, Waterloo: Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

Coad, Frederick Roy. *A History of the Brethren Movement: its Origins, its Worldwide Development and its Significance for the Present Day*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968).

Epp, Frank H., *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: a people's struggle for survival*. (Toronto : Macmillan of Canada, c1982).

Epp, Marlene. "*Cooperation to Amalgamation to Merger: The Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada*". (*Mennonite Life*. vol 48(1), pp. 27-31, 1993).

Epp, Marlene, *Ontario Mennonites*. (Waterloo: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 2002).

Fretz, J. Winfield, *The Waterloo Mennonites : a community in paradox*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press for Conrad Grebel College, 1989).

Hiebert, Esther. *History of the Markham-Waterloo Conference [undergraduate research paper, Canadian Mennonite Bible College]*. (1980). Student Term Papers, Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

Janzen, Henry. *By God's Grace Rev. H.H. Janzen, D.D. was who he was*. Rudy Janzen, ed., John and Tienne Janzen, trans. (Scarborough: n.p., 1975).

- Malloy, Reta. *My Mennonite Roots*. (unpublished undergraduate essay, University of Waterloo, 1997).
- Marsden, George. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).
- Martin, David M. *My Story*. (Elmira: n.p., 1994).
- Martin, D. (Herald Press, Kitchener) and Epp, F. (Waterloo and Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 2003).
- Martin, John. *Saved to Serve: The Treasure in Earthen Vessels*. (Grand Rapids, Gospel Folio Press, 1994).
- Noll, Mark. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).
- Regehr, T.D. *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: A People Transformed*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
- Rumford, Gordon, *n.t.* (unpublished undergraduate thesis, Wilfred Laurier University, 1989).
- Thiessen, I.H. and Dueck H.H. *He Leadeth: History of the Ontario M.B. Churches 1924-1957*. (Ontario: Ontario MB Conference, 1957?).
- Toews, John A. *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers*. (Fresno: MB Board of Christian Literature, 1975).
- Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968. n.ed., (Wallenstein: n.p., 1968).

Endnotes

- ¹ This number is an estimate based on a number of informal emails and conversations with various members of these churches.
- ² See Appendix 1.
- ³ Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) p. 374.
- ⁴ *ibid*, p. 375.
- ⁵ George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 3.
- ⁶ Noll, p. 383.
- ⁷ See Marsden., pp. 182-187.
- ⁸ Gordon Rumford, [n.t.], (unpublished undergraduate paper, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1989) p. 8.
- ⁹ Marlene Epp, *Ontario Mennonites*, (Waterloo: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 2002) p. 4.
- ¹⁰ Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People*, (Toronto: McMillan, 1974) p. 269. (Hereafter, cited as: Epp, MIC 1).
- ¹¹ J. Winfield Fretz, *The Waterloo Mennonites: A Community in Paradox*, (Waterloo: WLU Press, 1989), p. 32.
- ¹² Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People Transformed*, (Toronto: McMillan, 1982), p. 245 . (hereafter cited as: Epp, MIC 2).
- ¹³ *ibid*, p. 246.
- ¹⁴ Epp, MIC 2, p. 250.
- ¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 61.
- ¹⁶ See Urie Bender, *Four Earthen Vessels*, (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1982), pp. 49-43.
- ¹⁷ Ken Bechtel, personal interview.

- ¹⁸ John Martin, *Saved to Serve: The Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, (Grand Rapids, Gospel Folio Press, 1994), p.24.
- ¹⁹ See F. Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement*, (Exeter: Paternoster P., 1976) pp. 129-130.
- ²⁰ Rumford, p. 21.
- ²¹ Glenn Brubacher. *The Frema Geist: A Study of the 1939 Schism in the Woolwich Conference that ended in a merger with the Ontario Mennonite Conference*. (Waterloo: Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Hist. Mss. 13 - Student Term Papers, 195?), pp. 5-6.
- ²² *ibid*, p. 6.
- ²³ See John Martin, pp. 17-18.
- ²⁴ *ibid*, p. 14.
- ²⁵ When interviewed, Martin also said this falsehood was his father's fault. He said that he had a book on his father's life, but it was not available to him at the time of the interview.
- ²⁶ *ibid*, p. 15.
- ²⁷ Alma Frede, interview.
- ²⁸ Brubacher, p. 7.
- ²⁹ John Martin, interview.
- ³⁰ Alma Frede, interview.
- ³¹ biographical information from Henry Janzen. *Byz Coude's John and The Mennonite Church in Ontario* (Southborough, N.J. Study 975).
- ³² Janzen, p.16.
- ³³ *ibid*, p. 17.
- ³⁴ *ibid*, p. 30.
- ³⁵ *ibid*, p. 27.
- ³⁶ *ibid*, p. 34.
- ³⁷ Reta Malloy. *My Mennonite Roots*. (undergraduate paper, University of Waterloo, 1997) pp. 6-7.
- ³⁸ Rumford, p. 17.
- ³⁹ *ibid*, p. 22.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid*, 17.
- ⁴¹ Alma Frede, interview.
- ⁴² Alma Frede, interview.
- ⁴³ Alma Frede, interview.
- ⁴⁴ I have deliberately chosen to not name this individual.
- ⁴⁵ Janzen, p. 32.
- ⁴⁶ Alma Frede, interview.
- ⁴⁷ Brubacher, p. 7.
- ⁴⁸ Rumford, p. 31.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 31.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 25.
- ⁵¹ See Rumsford p. 23; Martin p. 24.
- ⁵² *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968* [n.ed.] (Wallenstein: [n.p.], 1968), p. 11.
- ⁵³ See Thiessen, I.H. and Dueck H.H. *He Leadeth: History of the Ontario M.B. Church* (Ontario: MB/C57 (Ontario, 1957?).
- ⁵⁴ John Martin, p. 24.
- ⁵⁵ John Martin, Interview.
- ⁵⁶ *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968*. p. 11.
- ⁵⁷ *ibid*, pp. 10-11.
- ⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. 11.
- ⁵⁹ See T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: A People Transformed*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 46-47.
- ⁶⁰ *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968*. p. 11.
- ⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 11.
- ⁶² Thiessen et. al, p. 11.
- ⁶³ John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno: MB Board of Christian Literature, 1975) p. 172.
- ⁶⁴ John Martin, interview.
- ⁶⁵ *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968*. p. 11.
- ⁶⁶ Alma Frede, interview.
- ⁶⁷ See *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968*. p. 12; Martin, p. 32.
- ⁶⁸ David M. Martin *My Story* (Elmira: n.p., 1994). pp. 26-27; Alma Frede, interview.
- ⁶⁹ Alma Frede, interview.

⁷⁰ Alma Frede, interview.

⁷¹ Rumford, p. 40.

⁷² *ibid*, p. 41.

⁷³ Bechtel, p. 35; John Martin, interview; Ken Bechtel, interview.

⁷⁴ Fretz, p. 127.

⁷⁵ *Wallenstein Bible Chapel 1968*. p. 26.

⁷⁶ Bechtel, p. 39.

⁷⁷ Ken Bechtel, interview.

⁷⁸ Ken Bechtel, interview.

⁷⁹ Ken Bechtel, interview.

⁸⁰ Bechtel, p. 36.

⁸¹ Ken Bechtel, interview.

⁸² John Martin, interview.

⁸³ Epp, MIC 2, 434.

⁸⁴ Ken Bechtel, *Three Score Years : Elmira Mennonite Church, 1924-1984*, (Elmira, ON: Elmira Mennonite Church, 1984), p. 13.