

2005 BENJAMIN EBY LECTURE

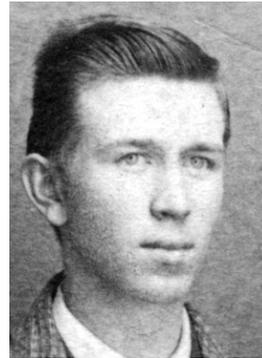
**A Mennonite Novelist's Journey (from) Home:
Ephraim Weber's Encounters with S.F. Coffman
and Lucy Maud Montgomery**



Ephraim Weber
(1870-1956)
Photo circa 1900



Lucy Maud Montgomery
(1874-1942)
Photo 1908



Samuel F. Coffman
(1872-1954)
Photo circa 1900

Hildi Froese Tiessen

Introduction: Weber, Montgomery and “Aunt Rachel’s Nieces”

What follows is, in large measure, a respectful investigation into the life of a man who grew up among the Mennonites of Waterloo County, Ontario well over a hundred years ago, but who found the Mennonites’ way of life not conducive to the realization of his deepest longing: to be a writer. Like so many writers – perhaps like most of us – Ephraim Weber occupied several worlds and was comfortable in none. “I want nothing so much as to write,”¹

Photos of Weber and Montgomery: Archival and Special Collections, McLaughlin Library, University of Guelph. Photo of Coffman: Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College.

he wrote Lucy Maud Montgomery in 1903. As we shall see, Weber would leave the Mennonites in order to realize his longing to be a writer, and – following the pattern of the epics – he would return, finally, to the place from which he had begun and see it differently. He would absorb and confront his heritage – gently enough – in a novel: the great work of his life. Weber, the great-grandson of Benjamin Eby, lived to be 86 years old, and throughout his life he was, as his wife Annie Melrose remarked after his death, “ever the student.” “We are climbing the Alps of life,” he wrote when he was 27, eerily anticipating a lifetime replete with vocational disappointment. “We mount and slip and fall and rise and fall and rise and mount and tremble.” But, he added, the “awful avalanche of adversity must not dismay us.”²

I will begin by placing what I have to say into the context of my own scholarly interests, which have been focused over the past several decades on the emergence of a significant body of creative literature written by Mennonites in Canada. I have been interested, in particular, in two things: the often uneasy relationship between the Mennonite writer and his or her community, as one affects the other; and the impact that Mennonite literature has had on the construction of Mennonite identity in our time. I am interested in how Mennonite writers respond to their communities, and their communities to them; and in the fact that writers of Mennonite heritage – whether they embrace or reject the communities that nurtured them – contribute, in any case, to the construction/our conception of “the Mennonite” both within the Mennonite community and without. Nowhere are all these dynamics more evident than with respect to the recent (conflicted) reception of Miriam Toews’ novel *A Complicated Kindness*,³ about a disenchanting teenager appalled at what it means to be Mennonite in her small Mennonite prairie town.

* * *

Stories make us real, Rudy Wiebe has remarked. This investigation hinges on the discovery in Canada’s national archives of a story – a narrative in fiction – about Mennonites who lived in or around Kitchener, Ontario, in the early years of the last century. In June 1937 – two years after Ephraim Weber had begun to write his novel about Mennonites – Lucy Maud Montgomery wrote to him one of her wide-ranging, lengthy letters (in this case, some

thirty hand-written pages). Montgomery and Weber had been writing to each other for over three decades. She ended her letter with a breathless question: “Have you read ‘*Gone With the Wind*’!!!” In the body of her letter were comments on the immortality of the soul (on which Weber had delivered a sermon in his Saskatchewan church) and on other things, including the recent abdication of King Edward VIII, who, Montgomery declared, had expressed “senile folly” when he threw away “the crown of the greatest empire the world has ever seen . . . for the sake of a middle aged double divorcee!!” Edward VIII, she told Weber in exasperation, ought to have “his royal bottom soundly spanked.”⁴ Among these scattered bits of gossip and opinion was her response to Weber’s latest letter to her of some seven months before: “You were, when you wrote me, writing a novelette called ‘Aunt Rachel’s Will,’ she observed. “Is it finished? As you outlined it, it sounded like an ‘awfully good’ idea and something quite *new* – a rare thing nowadays when almost everything has been written about and almost every situation exploited.”⁵ The novel to which she refers – later called “Aunt Rachel’s Nieces” – lies at the heart of this investigation.

The journey I’m about to map began some fifteen years ago, when Paul Tiessen and I stumbled upon a collection of letters in the National Archives in Ottawa – letters between the celebrity Canadian author of *Anne of Green Gables*, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and an Alberta homesteader named Ephraim Weber, who had spent the first twenty-six years of his life among the Mennonites of Kitchener (then known as Berlin). We became aware in Ottawa of other, related collections of letters in the National Archives – letters between Weber and two of his other correspondents (he had as many as thirty-two at a time): letters to Leslie Staebler, an old high school friend, who would intermittently keep Weber apprised of cultural developments in his home town (mostly of music and theater events); and letters to and from Wilfrid Eggleston, once a student of Weber’s and later a distinguished Canadian man of letters. We discovered to our great delight as scholars of Mennonite literature that these collections of letters from Weber to Staebler and between Weber and Eggleston – as well as from Montgomery to Weber – contained recurrent references to the novel Weber had begun to write in 1935: a “yarn,” as he called it, set in the environs of Kitchener, about three sisters whose acting out against their Mennonite congregation’s

rules regarding dress and deportment threatened to lead to a church split.

In his letters, especially those to Eggleston and Staebler, Weber documented his progress while writing this novel, which had a plot strangely evocative of an historical controversy concerning Mennonite women's compulsory wearing of the bonnet in the early decades of the century – a controversy that in 1924 led to a split in Kitchener's First Mennonite Church (where some of Weber's relatives still attended). Disagreement about what women in the Mennonite church should wear – especially upon their heads – plays a central role in Weber's novel, as it did in the "Old" Mennonite world in which Weber had once lived. I cannot explore the subject of nonconformity in dress here, but I will invoke the words of Melvin Gingerich, who observed in his study of the history of Mennonite costume, that "between 1865 and 1950 in the district and general conferences of the 'Old' Mennonite Church, the name widely used for the branch of the church established in America in the late seventeenth century [the branch of the church under discussion here], no [fewer] than 230 resolutions were passed on nonconformity in dress, more than on any other subject."⁶

The controversial material of Weber's novel is surely interesting, but the very existence of the work is itself worthy of attention, as anyone who has followed the emergence of Mennonite literature in Canada over the past few decades would agree. Prominent in the front lines of the current onslaught of Mennonite literary talent – indeed, on the foreground of English literature in Canada – are Mennonite writers like Sandra Birdsell and Rudy Wiebe and David Bergen, who was awarded the Scotiabank Giller Prize for fiction in 2005,⁷ and, of course, Miriam Toews, who won the Governor General's Award for fiction in 2004. It has for some time been generally acknowledged that Mennonite literature in English in Canada began with Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* in 1962,⁸ so Paul and I were enthralled when we happened upon the references to Ephraim Weber's work of fiction from a quarter of a century before Wiebe. Here was a Mennonite writer who predated the parade of Mennonite writers who had published scores of volumes of fiction and poetry over the past few decades – and remarkably often to national acclaim.

The only trouble was that the novel about which Weber's letters had so much to say was nowhere to be found. Driven by curiosity and a sense of

intrigue, we looked everywhere for it. We pressed the people at the National Archives to search for it, thinking it might have gone missing in their miles of shelves; we wrote letters of inquiry to newspapers across the country, and received among the responses some that were modestly useful, some mildly bizarre. Finally we located and visited those of Weber's friends who were still alive – all to no avail. After years of searching we were surprised and elated when a copy of the novel surfaced. We quickly realized that we had unwittingly been within perhaps twenty feet of the manuscript some years before.

The charming novel that Weber modestly and affectionately referred to as a “yarn” about three Mennonite sisters “on the border between Mennonitism and the world” (May 29, 1937)⁹ was given several names by him before he settled on “Aunt Rachel’s Nieces.” He told his literary friends about his new work soon after he began to write it. To Leslie Staebler he wrote in June 1936 that he had “spent countless weeks on a yarn about three Mennonite maids,” and went on to describe how it just kept growing. “The story is stretching out to novel length,” he wrote Staebler a few months later, “and is probably on the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire. However, the scribbling thereof makes the days short and keeps me from reading myself stupid.”¹⁰ To Wilfrid Eggleston he explained that “It’s a creation of the L.M. Montgomery type, of course: character continuity and atmosphere, &c. . . . Of one thing I’m sure,” he remarked, inimitably, “it is good practice.” After briefly outlining the plot, he ventured: “To my knowledge nobody has done this sort of thing.”¹¹ Weber’s novel, a playful portrait of three sisters who struggle to be allowed to express their love for the arts in the context of powerful forces in their community, the members of which would rather they submitted quietly to church discipline (especially as it pertained to dress), begins like this:

Lucinda, Luanna, and Luella were the only ones of her forty nieces and nephews that Aunt Rachel had succeeded in naming permanently. She loved to name them in pairs and sets. A number of times she had tried to have a Mary and a Martha in at least one of the families of the “Freindschaft”; but the parents and relatives, knowing the Bible rather well, would unfailingly object that nobody could foretell which one would develop into

Mary, and which into Martha. A Mary named Martha, and a Martha named Mary, – “Ach, how stupid that would be,” cried Aunt Selina.

So the maiden aunt and the eldest member of a family of nine felt sweetly gratified when she had completed the building up of a set of Lu's in her youngest sister's family. The babies were not baptized with these names – Mennonites do not baptize infants; but the names were recorded in fancy letters in the family Bible, as well as in the books of the registrar of births. To all this the matronly aunt had attended with prompt devotion.¹²

As much as Weber's novel is central to my interests here, it is not the primary subject of this inquiry (I dealt with it in detail in my Edna Staebler Fellows Lecture at the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum in March 2006).¹³ The question I was attempting to answer, when I carried on my research for *this* essay, was: who was the author of this work of fiction – this man Weber, who grew up among the Mennonites of Waterloo County, later homesteaded with his family in the frontier Mennonite settlements in Alberta (then known as the Northwest, for Alberta didn't become a province until 1905), wrote letters to Lucy Maud Montgomery for nearly forty years, longed achingly to participate in the broader literary worlds of his day, and eventually came to write this work of fiction which, he confided to Staebler, he feared might offend the “old-school Mennonites”?¹⁴ What might knowledge of him contribute to our understanding of Mennonite literature in general – and especially to our consideration of one of its dominant themes: the relationship between the writer and his community? This paper is thus a kind of meta-exercise. That is, it reveals something about the subject of investigation, Ephraim Weber, and something about the trail of research that allowed me to discover who he was.

* * *

So obscure a man as Ephraim Weber may have escaped attention in an earlier era. But current scholarly conditions have made room for an investigation of the life and work of this minor Mennonite literary figure, and I have invoked many of these conditions in the course of my work. They include

such things as the thoughtful attention given over the past few decades to the very notion of minor literatures – such as the Jewish, West Indian, Chinese, South Asian, or Mennonite traditions within Canadian literature. Current scholarship in the humanities demonstrates a formidable interest in life-writing (diaries, journals, letters such as those that inform much of my work); it invokes a new respect for the history of print culture in general (the first volumes of the encyclopedia of print culture in Canada, which contain a brief chapter on the early print culture of the Mennonites, have just been published).¹⁵

The scholarly ethos that informs this work invites fresh inquiries into the very nature and function of archives (where it becomes ever clearer that we have both gathered and repressed much of our history); and it provokes intellectual curiosity among critical theorists about the sphere of “everyday life” – the “hidden and oft-suppressed”¹⁶ details and banal daily gestures by which people live¹⁷ – those things that are “‘left over’, and hence of little consequence in relation to such ‘superior’ pursuits” as politics, history, science, or theology. All these approaches to how scholars in the humanities are able to read the products of culture have encouraged our taking a close-up view of people and events we might once have overlooked. All these scholarly conditions have contributed to the intellectual ground upon which stands the investigation I am documenting here.

* * *

Ephraim Weber was by no means, when we first encountered him in the National Archives, completely unknown. His friend Wilfrid Eggleston had written extensively about him in his autobiography entitled *While I Still Remember*¹⁸ and elsewhere. Montgomery scholars like Muriel Millen¹⁹ or biographers like Mollie Gillen²⁰ acknowledged Weber’s existence too – and often drew heavily in their own work from the archival Montgomery/Weber correspondence – all the while sweeping Weber aside as a rather unsophisticated person who, by his own admission, didn’t read a word of English until he was twelve years old. (These same Montgomery scholars neglect to mention that in spite of his modest beginnings on a southwestern Ontario farm, Weber would later just miss completing a PhD in German literature at the University of Chicago after winning two gold medals

in graduate studies at Queen's.) Paul Tiessen and I wrote several pieces documenting the epistolary relationship between Weber and Montgomery,²¹ but the questions I found most compelling throughout our research remained unanswered: who was Weber in the context of Waterloo County's "Mennonite Country"? In what sense was he a Mennonite? What was the nature of his religious education, that he and Montgomery and later he and others of his correspondents should comment so broadly on religious matters? What compelled him to construct, decades after leaving the Mennonites of both Berlin/Kitchener and Alberta, a novel concerning three young women's struggle to express themselves artistically in a Mennonite congregation in his hometown? And what place might his novel have in the literature of the Mennonites of Canada?

* * *

In 1937 Weber predicted that if ever he were to "gain any moonish fame," it would be because he had become a "satellite" orbiting "around the greater heavenly bodies of Eggleston and Montgomery."²² He was to live another nineteen years after he made this remark; and four years after his sudden death by heart failure in 1956, it would seem that his prediction began to come true. It was then – in 1960 – that Toronto's Ryerson Press first published Eggleston's *The Green Gables Letters*, an edition of Montgomery's early letters to Weber,²³ letters that crossed the continent from Prince Edward Island to the Alberta plains and back between 1905 and 1909. In 1905 Montgomery and Weber had both been aspiring writers, each with a modest claim to success; by 1909 she was the international celebrity author of *Anne of Green Gables*,²⁴ and he was, well, still an aspiring writer (when he wasn't occupied as a wrangler or census-taker in the homestead territories of Alberta). Montgomery remained and remains a star in the international literary heavens, and Weber, as he predicted, would appear to have gained a slight bit of literary recognition because of his association with her.

But this essay is not solely concerned with Weber's relationship with Montgomery either – a relationship that, to be sure, drew our attention to Weber in the first place. For it was Weber we were interested in from the start, this native of Kitchener, this late-nineteenth-century Mennonite with an irrepressible longing to be a writer. So we began a search in earnest,

not for Ephraim Weber, warmly favored correspondent of Lucy Maud Montgomery, but for Ephraim Weber, Mennonite writer. And the place to begin appeared to be a U.S.-based Mennonite periodical called the *Young People's Paper*, where Weber was known to have published in the earliest days of his writing career.

Weber and the *Young People's Paper*

The *Young People's Paper* was published by the Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana between 1894 and 1906, and was one of several initiatives of the prominent nineteenth-century Mennonite bishop and evangelist John Fretz Funk. Funk had, in 1864, founded the internationally distributed newspaper *Herald of Truth* (the first newspaper of the Mennonites of North America). Funk was committed to revitalizing the Mennonite church, and, indeed, had a long career as an extremely influential “reformulator of the Mennonite identity,” as Rod Sawatsky has put it. In fact, as Sawatsky has remarked, the changes in the Mennonite sensibility “spawned largely through the efforts of John [Fretz] Funk” are now read as the great “Mennonite awakening.”²⁵

A quick look at the history of the *Young People's Paper* reveals that Ephraim Weber was one of a stable of men listed as contributing editors over the paper's twelve-year run. As such, he served alongside prominent American Mennonites, indeed alongside some of the most influential figures in the history of the Mennonite Church in North America over the past century, ambitious men who “did much to mold the thought and activities of the church during an important period of awakening and expansion into organized church-wide activities.”²⁶ These men gave shape to what we now identify as “the Sunday school, mutual aid, publishing, missions, education, historical interpretation, peace work and relief work” of the Mennonite church.²⁷ As a regular contributor to and contributing editor of the *Young People's Paper*, Weber was in effect swept up among the most influential configuration of leaders in the Mennonite church of his day.

The *Young People's Paper* began in 1894 as an eight-page publication released bi-weekly. Reflecting on the paper at the end of its eleventh year, Bishop Funk described it as one “that will not teach the Young Christian to be worldly – and follow all the vanity and follies of the world, but to be

humble and pure. . .".²⁸ For this paper Weber, in the closing years of the century, wrote over 175 pieces, including poems, collections of aphorisms, and prose reflections of varying lengths – some just a paragraph long, others longer. His first contribution appeared in February 1896. He was then 26 years old and about to move from Berlin to the territory around Didsbury in the Northwest. It was there (in what is now southern Alberta) that Weber's family, under the leadership of his maternal grandfather Jacob Y. Shantz, had begun to homestead barely two years before. For this first column Weber took on an admonishing tone. He addressed his readers directly: "You have been working industriously all day and come home tired," he wrote. "After tea you feel somewhat refreshed. Picking up a paper to read, you notice in some prominent place a poem. Now, this time stop and read it."²⁹ Invoking some of the language he would later use in his letters to Montgomery, to whom he would declare that poetry was "the human soul's magic come out to sun itself in the grace of language,"³⁰ he said in this article that poetry "tends to make us better. It lifts us up out of the mire. It makes life beautiful. It nourishes the better nature of a man. . . ." People smothered by the cares of life need "aesthetic culture," he remarked, and the "poverty of the Philistine" is pitiable. "Then form the habit of perusing one poem in your paper," he urged his readers, observing that it will give them "intellectual development and soul culture. . .".³¹

Weber would write 13 pieces in all for publication in the *Young People's Paper* in 1896, 44 in 1897, 39 in 1898, 38 in 1899, 32 in 1900, and 9 in 1901. Beginning in March 1902, he would write the first of at least 11 letters that year to Montgomery; eight months later, in December, he would move to Philadelphia to pursue his literary fortune – as a guest of Miriam Zieber, a woman who advertised in the *Young People's Paper* her expertise in shaping literary careers (and, incidentally, the person who first suggested to Weber that he write to Montgomery, whose poetry he had so admired).

Weber would leave Zieber and Philadelphia some ten months later, deeply disappointed in his inability to accomplish what he had set out to do. In May 1904, after a sojourn with another literary friend in New Hampshire, and then a short visit with old friends in Berlin, he would return to Didsbury, from where he would re-establish himself on the prairie and write to Montgomery: "I had the grip for a week, and now except for blistered hands,

blistered feet, twitching muscles, aching bones, lame back, gnawing hunger, weariness, homesickness for civilization – I feel first rate. I’m just back from a chase after the cattle. I’ve been plowing, painting rooms, and milking.”³² He would spend another five sometimes nondescript, sometimes wild and woolly years as a homesteader, before embarking on what for him would become a soul-destroying career as a teacher in small prairie towns.

Teaching would remain a curse for Weber. It was how he made his living, but it was also, he believed, an activity that consumed all his energies and destroyed his soul. “[W]e have to educate the bum, the dandy, the athlete, the moron, and the pair in puppy love,” he complained to Eggleston, revealing his failure to see much good in the next generation. The only thing more intolerable than his lackluster and unambitious students were the members of the small town school boards, whose children he taught and – more often than not – refused to advance. These parents drove him to declare: “God made the country, man made the city, and the devil made the small town.”³³ But I’m getting a wee bit ahead of myself. Let’s return to the younger Weber, the *Young People’s Paper*, and the years before Montgomery.

The sensibility that would lie at the heart of Weber’s later fiction was readily discernable in much of his work for the *Young People’s Paper*. Here, in April 1897, he celebrated the imagination and what he called “the inner man”: “Oh the inner man wants sustenance!” he wrote. “Let him out, let him out!” “Open your clay door. The imagination is the key.” Invoking a lifelong antipathy towards doctrines and creeds, he criticized preachers for failing to recognize the power of imaginative thought: “when they discourse on the crucifixion,” he wrote, “on the mysteries of grace. . . , on the soul’s communion with its Author, on the Judgement day, on the joys of heaven, [they] would make more impression on their hearers if they wrought more sanctified imagination into it and less theology.”³⁴

Not a casual contrarian, Weber nevertheless passionately expressed his belief that there was much wrong with the world and so we should celebrate those who dare both to think independently and to demand change. “If men were as dwarfed and deformed physically as they are intellectually, morally, emotionally, aesthetically and spiritually, what hideous things many of them would be,” he declared. It is thanks to “the fault-finding

Emerson that we have a nobler morality; thanks to the fault-finding Ruskin that we can use our eyes when we walk the verdant paths of nature and visit the art gallery; thanks to the fault-finding Luther for the popular orthodoxy of justification by faith; blessed be the fault-finding Jesus of Nazareth for a new Christianity. All reformers are fault-finders.”³⁵

Weber's disposition as a regular contributor to the *Young People's Paper* was mostly pious and scripture-bound; his voice was literary, passionate, cajoling. In 1897, the year the paper carried more of his contributions than any other, his subject matter ranged from devotion and hard work to worldly ambition and the love of Mammon. Among other things, he addressed such subjects as temperance and testimonies, service, and forgiveness. In the three years following, he deliberated on prayer, temptation, God's promises, hospitality, personal growth, independent thought, moral courage, friendship, patriotism, bettering the world, recreation, education, the supernatural, the happy home, the Christian's use of time, penitence, humility, duty, honoring the Lord's day, the art of letter writing, and Christian zeal.

Weber in the Archives

The articles Weber contributed to the *Young People's Paper* during the years he began to find himself as a writer reveal he was complexly aware of, and largely in step with, the religious sensibility of the Mennonites of his day. After examining what he published there, I wondered what else I might learn about him. To Leslie Staebler he had written from Alberta, in 1902, “I have two or three very nice literary correspondents, to whom I write many a lonely hour and thus enjoy myself exquisitely.”³⁶ Is it possible, I wondered, that Weber had carried on a correspondence with one or more of his fellow contributing editors of the *Young People's Paper*? Or might any of these other editors have referred to him in their letters to each other?

Realizing that many of his collaborators were prominent enough that the archives of the Mennonite church in both Canada and the U.S. would likely have laid claim to their literary estates, I sent a student in search of Weber in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College. Where to begin to look? I decided to start with the lists of names that appeared alongside Weber's on the masthead of the *Young People's Paper*: the other men on the editorial team – Steiner, Hostetler, and Coffman,³⁷ for example.

We did find an item of interest: a brief typed letter from Hostetler, written on the stationery of the Mennonite Evangelizing and Benevolent Board in Elkhart, Indiana (these men loved their lavish letterheads). It was addressed to S.F. Coffman and dated April 4, 1901.³⁸ It read, in part: “We are glad to hear of the encouraging work in the Northwest. If you see Ephraim Weber give him my very best regards.” Wow! This line in a letter to Coffman, who would later become so prominent a Mennonite churchman in Ontario. It wasn’t much but it was certainly something. Then it became even more interesting. The letter was addressed to Weber in Okotoks, Alberta. The single and handsome twenty-eight-year-old Coffman had been ordained by Bishop Funk in his early twenties, and would shortly become one of the most highly regarded and beloved bishops among the Mennonites in Ontario. And here he was in Alberta, while Weber was there (Coffman had been seconded by the Waterloo bishops to travel to Alberta – the Northwest – in 1901, to help Mennonite settlers organize themselves into congregations).

I poked around a bit more, and was intrigued to discover that the Mennonite Archives of Ontario holds a substantial S.F. Coffman collection that includes not only his daily journal of 1901³⁹ but also his 1901 letters from Alberta to his Indiana fiancée, Ella Mann. So I proceeded to sift through the files. (Among the fascinating things I found there was a large number of letters to the dashing young Coffman from so many of the young women he encountered in his ministry – “I’ll send you my picture if you send me yours. . .”).⁴⁰

Coffman in the Northwest

Coffman began to pack for his trip west on February 9, 1901. He left Toronto by Canadian Pacific Railway on February 19 and arrived in Calgary on the 23rd. By March 6 he had traveled to Carstairs,⁴¹ and on Saturday, March 9, he wrote: “Brother Steckle wanted to go over to Andrew Weber’s to get oats for feed. He drove over with the wagon, and I went along with him. We staid there for dinner. They have the best fixed up place I have seen yet. They have been here about seven years. Their two sons, Ephraim & Manasseh, have places near home.”⁴²

I had to fight not to get drawn into the western adventures of the young Coffman as he narrated them in his diary. I was particularly interested

in his reflections on how he spent his leisure time, sketching in pen and ink, or writing poetry and hymns. It appeared to me that the two poets Coffman and Weber had the potential to be what Montgomery would call “kindred spirits.” In fact Coffman’s reflections suggest that Weber made quite an impression on him. “I have met Ephraim Weber,” he wrote to Ella on April 16. “He is a young man yet. But he has a very wide awake appearance and seems to be a very fine young man.”⁴³ (Weber was actually two years Coffman’s senior.) The familiarity between the two men implied in these remarks is sustained in later letters to Ella, where Coffman refers to other members of the Weber family as “Ephraim’s father” or “Ephraim’s brother.”

Weber and Coffman apparently spoke often. Among the conversations Coffman carried on with various members of the community, he recorded the substance of very few. His journal entry for Friday, July 12 was an exception: “This afternoon I rode back to Ephraim Weber’s, had a visit there, went to Bro Henry Weber’s and staid there tonight. Ephraim called too in the evening. Had a very pleasant visit talking of God’s use of natural laws in the great changes, miraculous visitations of God upon the earth.” As if continuing the dialogue in his own mind, Coffman added: “God cannot go beyond His laws.”⁴⁴

Coffman’s journals reveal something of the texture of that time and place. Serving as an itinerant bishop, Coffman moved constantly from home to home, always engaged with the people around him, invariably busy, trying to be helpful. When he wasn’t giving the Mennonite homesteaders shaves and haircuts, he was fixing the pipes of their organs or repairing their sewing machines. He attempted to shoot owls and prairie hens (he never seemed to get very good at that), collected buffalo bones (he took several specimens back east with him, including a vertebra, out of which he had made an inkwell), and gathered wild flowers – the greatest of his passions – and then identified, pressed, and mounted them for a collection that numbered upwards of 160 species by the time he left the territory on November 11, 1901.

References to encounters with Weber are scattered throughout Coffman’s diary and letters of 1901. On April 9 Coffman wrote, “Ephraim Weber is not at home. [H]e is out taking the census for this district.”⁴⁵ On May 4 the inevitable: “Ephraim Weber’s father is a second cousin to us. Brother

Andrew Weber's (Ephraim's father) Grandfather and my Grandmother Coffman were brother and sister."⁴⁶ On May 11: "Rode up to the field where the men were working. Then called on Ephraim Weber's for a little while. He has a very pleasant home."⁴⁷ On July 13, Coffman "went over to Brother Andrew Weber's" (Ephraim's father). "Had a talk regarding the building of a meeting-house. He thinks it ought to be built 30 x 50. This may be a bit too large."⁴⁸ July 21: "I taught the Bible class. Ephraim Weber was present today."⁴⁹ August 19: "rode over to Bro Henry Weber's. Met Ephraim there again and had a pleasant visit. . ." .⁵⁰ September 10: "Adjusted the hair spring in Bro Weber's alarm clock so that it may be regulated again. Ephraim Weber came with some cattle he had been hunting. He staid all night. Had a long talk."⁵¹

On Sunday, September 15 Coffman wrote about helping the new congregation at Carstairs to choose its minister and deacon by the lot. On September 24, Ephraim's brother Manasseh was present when Coffman "[w]rote out a certificate of ordination."⁵² By late fall, Coffman, the itinerant bishop, was making his last rounds of the Alberta settlement and saying his good-byes. He missed saying farewell to Ephraim's father Andrew, who was "away threshing at the Honsburgers," but managed to catch Ephraim on November 8: "Called at Ephraim Weber's too," he recorded, and then hinting at their similar sensibilities and common interests, added, "Got my magazines there."⁵³

Three days later, on November 11, Coffman was gone. He had spent nine months in Alberta while Weber was there – months during which Weber would see his last nine articles appear in the *Young People's Paper*. Within five days of leaving the Northwest, Coffman was re-united with friends – and specifically with Ella Mann – in Indiana, where he dropped in at the Mennonite Publishing Company and, as he recorded in his diary, "saw Bro Funk." The next day he taught Sunday School and preached. "Bro J.F. Funk was present," he recorded.⁵⁴ Later that week he and Ella were married.

Weber's Restlessness

In the months during which Coffman and Weber overlapped in Alberta, Weber was growing restless as a writer and beginning to register an increasing spiritual hunger that, he would later remark to Leslie Staebler, he

was never able to satisfy – “this universal cry from the center of the heart for an unchangeable, substantial Something, not to be found in all the wide world of material things.”⁵⁵ In his own published reflections in the *Young People's Paper* he emphasized Christ as the Bread of Life, but sometimes his remarks seem little more than hollow platitudes alongside his passionate yearning after “fare for the *soul!*”⁵⁶

It is unlikely that Weber and Coffman remained in communication after Coffman left Alberta in 1901 (I've found no evidence of it). Decades later, in the summer of 1935, Weber decided on the spur of the moment to attend a Mennonite general conference in Kitchener, as a means, he reflected later, “of studying Mennonitism anew, in its latter-day aspects.”⁵⁷ At the conference he was approached by someone who invited him to consider writing a cultural history of the Mennonites. It may have been Coffman who extended the invitation, for he was very active at that conference, as his diary reveals, and as Chair of the Historical Committee he was uniquely poised to make such a gesture. It was this invitation that prompted Weber to embark on the cultural reflections that would become his novel “Aunt Rachel's Nieces” instead.

Weber and the Mennonites

My search for Weber's “Mennonitism” was richly rewarded in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, the S.F. Coffman collection in particular. A visit to the Mennonite Church Archives USA in Goshen, Indiana, where the John F. Funk collection occupies the largest swath of shelves, offered other resources, especially some that cast light on the wider Mennonite world into which Weber – as contributing editor of Funk's publishing enterprise the *Young People's Paper* – had inadvertently inserted himself. Here my search for information on Weber the Mennonite began much as my search in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario had begun. And once more it was C.K. Hostetler (who edited the *Young People's Paper* for most of the time Weber served as contributing editor) who led to the most interesting of my discoveries. Among the Hostetler papers was a neatly written four-page letter that began “Dear friend” and was signed “Sincerely and fraternally, Ephraim Weber.” Dated December 29, 1898, from Didsbury, Alberta, it was clearly a response to Hostetler's request for a sort of spiritual autobiography.

Much of Weber's candid self-description, which he wrote then with the understanding that it was not for publication, bears quoting:

I grew up in a beautiful farm home on Lancaster St. near Berlin, Ont. I loved farming ere I was in my teens even. . . . I attended school at Bridgeport, a near village, where I had many trials and tears – as all timid boys have at school; I learned slowly the first five years. After that I got over my extreme bashfulness and made faster progress. But after I was twelve I had to work on the farm in the summer, only attending the five winter months. One winter I worked in the Berlin Button Works, which employment was uncongenial to me. Most Winters I went to school again and kept on until July. When I passed entrance to High School I had now discovered a new kingdom, whose winding highways lured me on and on. . . .

Weber relates his substantial trials with high school – issues of confidence, issues related to health. He continues:

Then I went to Model School, passed and taught a public school, and in six months my dilapidated nerves gave out. I quit teaching and left for the Sanitarium, Battle Creek, Mich. where I sojourned four expensive months, with no improvement. A few months after leaving Battle Creek, I immigrated to our balmy Alberta, hoping simple life and easy open air work would in a few years have at least a [salutary] effect on me. So it has proved, only slower than even my little faith had made me expect. I am here thirty-three months.

. . .

I work about 200 days a year on our several farms. The remaining hundred I retire to my “literary den”, which is simply my brother's unoccupied, sod-roofed log shack. But a “snug little kingdom” it is.

Weber proceeds to describe how, as a bachelor, he has served as “cook, dairymaid [‘the merchants pronounced (his) butter “splendid”’], washwoman, mistress and servant.” Remarking that his people have a church and a Sunday

School, and that they struggle with apathy, he observes:

As a rule new countries are not interested in intellectual and spiritual striving, and our colony is no exception. I have been teaching for ten years in S.S. – ever since my conversion, which took place among the pine stumps on the lovely Lancaster farm as I was plowing with an ox-team.

“I was twenty-eight in November,” he reports. “I should soon be old enough to know what my life-work is to be, should I not?” he asks provocatively, and then goes on:

You will already have conjectured what I do in my “den”. Here the hours pass quickly and sweetly in utter uninterruptedness. I read, reread, write, rewrite and criticize other men’s writings, with a view of disciplining my mind into clear thinking. My purpose is to chisel my thick head into an essayist’s. It is only several months since I gave up the notion of re-entering the ranks of the pedagogues and came to a definite conclusion to prepare myself for writing.⁵⁸

Five years later, when his engagement with the *Young People's Paper* had come to an end, and just three months after S.F. Coffman had returned to Ontario, Weber would write a first letter to Leslie Staebler, his old friend from Berlin High School. The world he knew on the Alberta plains, he remarked in February 1902, had grown “painfully leathery and metallic.”⁵⁹ Still, he had decided “to continue” in his “den” until November. “My solitude has not oppressed me quite so much lately,” he wrote. “This morning, for instance, the sun without and the ‘sun within’ and the unworldly quiet make an ideal Indian summer in this retreat of mine. I can read and think and exult in here as I cannot do elsewhere.”⁶⁰

A month later he would write his first letter to Lucy Maud Montgomery, dated March 12, 1902, and confess that he had not been productive as a writer but had “dabbled off and on at composition for ever so long a time.”⁶¹ Buoyed by her engaged response to his first letter, he wrote her again the day her first letter arrived. She had inquired about his literary work. “Ah me,” he replied, “‘tis ‘the pitifulest infinitesimal fraction of a product.’” But he had produced it in God’s name. He used “to send short poems and articles

to Young People's Paper, Elkhart, Ind. for a dollar each," he told her, but one day an Alberta wind caught up his "unprotected periodicals, goldenly laden with gems from [his] pen," and carried them "into the wilderness." He had never "been zealous enough for [his] lost brain children to organize a search party." He conjectured playfully that "Probably some of the poems are holding sweet communion with the wild roses, at whose prickly feet I hope they have by this time settled to rest from their flighty ways."⁶²

The disappearance of Weber's saved-up issues of the *Young People's Paper* – so poignantly described in this poetic flourish – takes on particular significance when one considers it in light of his move, during 1902, away from so much of what had defined his identity. In his letters to Montgomery, his voice takes on a tenor markedly different from the pious, admonishing tone of his writing for Elkhart only months before. He wrote at least eleven letters to her before the end of 1902. In their flurry of letters, he and Montgomery tested their interests and sensibilities with each other, and found they had much in common, including their metaphysical absorption of nature. He had recently given himself up to the night, he said. "I was the night and the chinook and the grass and the horizon and the wild roses and Wordsworth and the frogs," he wrote. "I don't know how to talk about it. I was infinitely refreshed."⁶³

By December 1902 Weber had moved to Philadelphia "to widen [his] life," to expand, as he called it, his "narrow existence."⁶⁴ In Montgomery he had found, earlier that year, someone with whom he could test what it might mean to be a writer. And what it might mean to be a Mennonite – and what it might mean NOT to be a Mennonite. It was in his fourth letter to her, written on May 10, 1902, that he had confessed he was "brought up a Mennonite." He asked her, "Have you ever heard of Mennonites?"⁶⁵

In his letter to Montgomery of June 6, Weber conflated religion and poetry, declaring that the more he thought "over God and life and nature and salvation and everything, the deeper and more missionful" did this art of poetry they shared seem to be. He continued, "It is a serious and profound undertaking to reach into the flying chaos of thought and emotion and bring out into black-and-white a hint of the Infinite, for whom mortals are thirsting so. Isn't this, dear friend, what we're trying to do? To me, God is a poet, and there is no poetry in which He is not."⁶⁶

Weber's early letters to Montgomery both effected and documented his movement away from the Mennonite community. He confided to her that he sensed another world opening up for him. He thought many of the "old ways and creeds" were obsolescent, and declared that he was not living the kind of life he would want to, that he was "in a transition stage from the old to the new."⁶⁷ In September he was more specific about what this transition might entail, and – implicitly invoking his devotional writing for the *Young People's Paper* in the years just past – he declared that "[I] shan't do any more Sunday school, preachy, wishy-washy, willy-nilly writing."⁶⁸ Religious problems were of special interest to him, he told Montgomery in October, because he was "in a transition from the old thought and creed to some new and undefined life."⁶⁹ "To save my soul," he told her in January 1903, he couldn't "settle down into any ready made faith."⁷⁰ He had taught a Bible class for fourteen years and knew the Bible extremely well, but he had begun to re-think what he now called the "wonder-book." He declared that the Bible is fine as "literary pabulum" and "all gold" as "a book of altruism and ethics." It is "greatest of all literature" and "an inspired record of revelation and a means of spiritual salvation," he acknowledged. Yet he wondered "how much of it [was] final and absolute truth."⁷¹

During the earliest months of his association with Montgomery, Weber questioned the formal assumptions that had created the framework of his Mennonite faith. By December 1903, realizing that the culture into which he was born offered him no entry – indeed blocked his path – relative to the literary world he longed to inhabit, he stepped away from the Mennonites: "What an advantage [you've had] to be *born* into reading!" he exclaimed to Montgomery. "I had to grind and chisel myself into it. Our [people] are not at all for intellect and culture. My parents have never heard of Shakespeare."⁷² On another occasion he wrote: "I didn't read anything until I was an adult. Such was my heredity and environment, and to this day I suffer from it."⁷³

Yet it was to his Mennonite world that Weber returned some thirty years later – now with the distance of someone who had been gone from home a long time, and with a gentle sense of irony mixed with unmediated affection for most of those he had left behind. It was then – after so long an absence – that he recognized the potential for fiction of the Mennonite

world he had once known and, wondering where this recognition would lead, he began to write the story-ette that would not stay short and that became “Aunt Rachel’s Nieces.”

About this novel – the great work of his life – he would much later remark to Eggleston: “The Mennonite reader may find it interesting but Mennonites are poor readers!! However, ‘tis writ, What . . . value it may have I’m not in a position to know.”⁷⁴ In 1945 he would recall the novel he had sent to several publishers around the time he had completed it, but not since 1938: “Reread some of it lately and was surprised how interesting I found it. But the Dickens of it,” he added, “is that it takes an educated Mennonite or ex-Mennonite to feel the interest, and there aren’t many such.”⁷⁵

Ephraim Weber’s conflicted relationship with the world of his ancestors is familiar enough among Mennonite authors. As seems to be the case with writers – both among Mennonites and in other literary communities – he carried his ancestors with him long after he thought he had left them behind. In 1946 Weber wrote about his life’s ambitions to Eggleston: “I will strive, I will practice, till I’ve worn out my corporal functions totally; then I’ll yearn, yearn, yearn, till the dark is too chilly and the silence too mighty; then I’ll distill into an essence or evaporate into a fragrance – but not, never, yield to extinction.”⁷⁶

I won’t speculate here on the degree to which my investigations into Weber’s life – or the planned publication of his novel, “Aunt Rachel’s Nieces” – might rescue Weber from extinction.⁷⁷ But I will observe, finally, that the investigative search that allowed me to see something of who this man was and how he occupied various landscapes of Canadian culture and the ethos of the Mennonites of his day has comprised – for me – an extraordinarily exciting journey.

I would like to thank Paul Tiessen of Wilfrid Laurier University, whose collaboration richly informs all my work related to Ephraim Weber; and Ana Milanovic for her meticulous research on archival texts related to this project. Archivists Anne Goddard of Library and Archives Canada, Dennis Stoesz of Mennonite Church USA/Goshen Archives, and Sam Steiner of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College

offered invaluable assistance. This work was made possible by funding from the Province of Ontario/University of Waterloo "Ontario Work Study Program" (OWSP), and the Faculty Research Grants Fund of Conrad Grebel University College. I greatly appreciate having been given the opportunity to present this work in a public forum, in Conrad Grebel University College's Benjamin Eby Lecture series.

Notes

¹ Ephraim Weber, in Wilfrid Eggleston, "A-precis [ca. 1959]." Unpublished precis of Ephraim Weber's unpublished letters to L.M. Montgomery, 1902-04. MG 30 D282 (now R4882-5-2-E). Wilfrid Eggleston Papers, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, 22. [*Abbreviated as A-precis*]

² Ephraim Weber, "Excelsior!" *Young People's Paper* (June 5, 1897): 91. [*Abbreviated as YPP*]

³ Miriam Toews, *A Complicated Kindness* (Toronto: Knopf, 2004).

⁴ Lucy Maud Montgomery, *After Green Gables: L.M. Montgomery's Letters to Ephraim Weber, 1916-1941*. Ed. Hildi Froese Tiessen and Paul Gerard Tiessen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 237. [*Abbreviated as AGG*]

⁵ *AGG*, 235.

⁶ Melvin Gingerich, *A History of Mennonite Costume*. Mimeographed manuscript [1964?], 6.

⁷ David Bergen, *The Time in Between* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2005).

⁸ Rudy Wiebe, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962).

⁹ Ephraim Weber, Letter to Wilfrid Eggleston, May 29, 1937. MG 30 D282 (now R4882-5-2-E), volume 33-34. Wilfrid Eggleston Fonds. Weber-Eggleston Letters, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. [*Abbreviated as EW-WE Letters*]

¹⁰ Ephraim Weber, *Ephraim Weber's Letters Home, 1902-1955: Letters from Ephraim Weber to Leslie Staebler of Waterloo County*. Ed. Hildi Froese Tiessen and Paul Gerard Tiessen (Waterloo, ON: MLR Editions Canada, 1996), 70. [*Abbreviated as EWLH*]

¹¹ EW-WE Letters, October 18, 1936.

¹² Ephraim Weber, "Aunt Rachel's Nieces," Unpublished novel. MG 30 D282 (now R4882-5-2-E), volume 42. Wilfrid Eggleston Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, 1. For permission to publish the words of Ephraim Weber, I am grateful to Abraham Kidd and Margaret Melrose Kidd.

¹³ As 2005 Edna Staebler Research Fellow at the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum in Kitchener, Ontario, I presented a lecture entitled "The Story of a Novel: How We Found Ephraim Weber's Three Mennonite Maids." The lecture, conceived as an introduction to Weber's novel, will soon be available in the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum series.

¹⁴ *EWLH*, 71.

¹⁵ I refer here to *History of the Book in Canada. Volume 1: Beginnings to 1840*. Ed. Patricia Lockhart Fleming, Gilles Gallichan, and Yvan Lamonde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) and *History of the Book in Canada. Volume 2: 1840-1918*. Ed. Yvan Lamonde, Patricia Lockhart Fleming, and Fiona A. Black (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Michael E. Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

¹⁷ See Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life. Vol. 2: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*. Trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2002).

¹⁸ Wilfrid Eggleston, *While I Still Remember: A Personal Record* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968).

¹⁹ Muriel Millen, "Who Was Ephraim Weber?," *Queen's Quarterly* (Summer 1961): 333-36.

²⁰ Mollie Gillen, *The Wheel of Things: A Biography of L.M. Montgomery, Author of 'Anne of Green Gables'* (London: Harrap, 1975).

²¹ See Hildi Froese Tiessen and Paul Tiessen, "Lucy Maud Montgomery's Ephraim Weber (1870-1956): 'a slight degree of literary recognition.'" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (1993): 43-54; and "Epistolary Performance: Writing Mr. Weber," in *The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery*, ed. Irene Gammel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 222-38. See also our Introductions to *EWLH* and *AGG*.

²² EW-WE Letters, November 15, 1937.

²³ Lucy Maud Montgomery, *The Green Gables Letters: From L.M. Montgomery to Ephraim Weber, 1905-1909*. Ed. Wilfrid Eggleston (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 2001). [*Abbreviated as GGL*]

²⁴ Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (Boston: L.C. Page, 1908).

²⁵ Rodney Sawatsky, *History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition through History* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005), 33-34.

²⁶ "Daniel Henry Bender," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959), 273.

²⁷ Leonard Gross, "The Doctrinal Era of the Mennonite Church," *MQR* (January 1986): 83.

²⁸ John F. Funk, "Close of Volume XI [of *YPP*]," in John F. Funk Collection (Hist. Mss. 1-1-10 John F. Funk 101/13 "H[erald] O[f] T[ruth] articles" – about Periodicals Young People's Paper)," Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Indiana (MCA-G).

²⁹ Ephraim Weber, "Read the Poem," *YPP* (February 1, 1896): 18.

³⁰ *GGL*, 8.

³¹ Ephraim Weber, "Read the Poem," 18.

³² *GGL*, 20.

³³ EW-WE Letters, August 10, 1925.

³⁴ Ephraim Weber, "The Imagination in Devotion," *YPP* (April 10, 1897): 58.

³⁵ Ephraim Weber, "The Craving for Growth," *YPP* (April 24, 1897): 67.

³⁶ *GGL*, 14.

³⁷ Menno S. Steiner, C.K. Hostetler, and Samuel F. Coffman.

³⁸ Letter from C.K. Hostetler to S.F. Coffman, April 4, 1901. Hist. Mss. 1.1.1.2.9, S. F. Coffman Fonds, CK Hostetler letters. Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario.

³⁹ I refer to Coffman's diary interchangeably as "diary" and "journal."

⁴⁰ The Samuel F. Coffman collection at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario includes a series of friendly letters written to Coffman from women during his bachelor years: Elsie K. Bender, Alice Bearss, Ida Bergey, M. Elizabeth Brown, Mary Brubacher, Alda Culp, Mary Denlinger, Sarah Funk, Celesta Hartzler, Lucetta High, Barbara Kratz, Berta Lehman, Lizzie Minnich, Debbie Moyer, Louida Nahrgang, Saloma Rittenhouse, Valerie Rittenhouse, Anna Schact, Barbara Sherk, Rebecca & Sarah Sherk, Linda Shantz, Saphrona Sievenpiper, Mollie Snyder, Sarah Wismer, Bertha Zook, Lena Zook.

⁴¹ Samuel F. Coffman, "Diary 1901." March 6. Hist. Mss. 1.1.2.1.4.26., in the Samuel F. Coffman Family Fonds, Mennonite Archives of Ontario. [*Abbreviated as 1901 Diary.*]

⁴² 1901 Diary, March 9.

⁴³ Samuel F. Coffman. Letter to Ella Mann, April 16, 1901, in the Samuel F. Coffman Family Fonds, "Letters to Ella Mann," Hist. Mss. 1.1.1.1.3.2. Mennonite Archives of Ontario. [*Abbreviated as Letters*]

⁴⁴ 1901 Diary, July 12.

⁴⁵ 1901 Diary, April 9.

⁴⁶ Letters, May 4, 1901.

⁴⁷ 1901 Diary, May 11.

⁴⁸ 1901 Diary, July 13.

⁴⁹ 1901 Diary, July 21.

⁵⁰ 1901 Diary, August 19.

⁵¹ 1901 Diary, September 10.

⁵² 1901 Diary, September 24.

⁵³ 1901 Diary, November 8.

⁵⁴ 1901 Diary, November 17.

⁵⁵ Ephraim Weber, "The Bread of Life," *YPP* (February 11, 1901): 11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *EWLH*, 63.

⁵⁸ Ephraim Weber, Letter to C.K. Hostetler, December 29, 1898, John F. Funk Collection (Hist. Mss. 1-1-2 John F. Funk Correspondence and Papers). Box 116 (Green) Biographical sketches - Ephraim Weber. Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Indiana (MCA-G).

⁵⁹ *EWLH*, 5.

⁶⁰ *EWLH*, 6.

⁶¹ A-precis, 1.

⁶² A-precis, 2-3.

⁶³ *GGL*, 16.

⁶⁴ A-precis, 32.

⁶⁵ A-precis, 5.

⁶⁶ A-precis, 7-8.

⁶⁷ A-precis, 11.

⁶⁸ A-precis, 12.

⁶⁹ A-precis, 13.

⁷⁰ A-precis, 16.

⁷¹ A-precis, 21.

⁷² A-precis, 28.

⁷³ Ephraim Weber, quoted in *GGL*, 9.

⁷⁴ EW-WE Letters, November 4, 1937.

⁷⁵ EW-WE Letters, February 28, 1945.

⁷⁶ EW-WE Letters, September 5, 1946.

⁷⁷ Paul Tiessen and I are preparing the novel for publication.

Hildi Froese Tiessen is a professor of English and Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario.

BENJAMIN EBY LECTURESHIP

Benjamin Eby (1785-1853) typified, and possibly inaugurated, Mennonite culture in Upper Canada. He and his wife Mary arrived in Waterloo County from Pennsylvania in 1807. By 1812 he was ordained bishop, and in 1815 he was overseeing construction of the area's first schoolhouse. He provided outstanding leadership in the church and in education throughout his life. The Benjamin Eby Lectureship, established at Conrad Grebel University College in the 1980s, offers faculty members an opportunity to share research and reflections with the broader College and University community.