Provenance

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First Schoolhouse in Waterloo

3. Pioneers in a New Land

*The Mennonites were among the pioneers of Central Ontario
and have always been noted for their excellent farms,
exemplary conduct, and orderly cooperation with the general
community, in spite of their unique marks of separation
from the secular world*—DOUGLAS J. WILSON[1]

THE PIONEER Mennonite immigrants entering the Pro-
vince of Upper Canada had the advantages, and the
disadvantages, of building their new homes in a land which itself
was fresh and unstructured. Like their contemporary co-religion-
ists migrating to Russia and their fathers arriving in Pennsylvania
a century earlier, they were entering an environment which was
primeval in many of its essential features. This new geography was
only partly sympathetic to the development of sectarian commun-
ities, notwithstanding the Lieutenant-Governor's direct invitation
to Mennonites, Quakers, and Tunkers to settle in Upper Canada.

The first Mennonite colonists in each of the three major settle-
ments and those in the numerous minor ones which developed
faced a difficult period of back-breaking work in the new province.
But all qualified for their task by a heritage of ancestral pioneer-
ing and by their own conquest of the 400-mile trail from Pennsyl-
vania to Upper Canada. Some came on foot, some on horseback,
and some with the famous Conestoga wagons drawn by four- and
six-horse teams. The heroism of the migrants was later immortal-

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ized by Mabel Dunham in her novel *The Trail of the Conestoga.*

These covered Conestoga wagons were the best available for the transport of freight, family belongings, and the families themselves. They had been named after the Conestoga River Valley, in which they first appeared around 1736. Created by the Mennonites, the Conestogas reflected the talent and skills for innovation so necessary in a new frontier. The boat-shaped body of the Conestogas prevented loads from easily shifting on the slopes. Their wide wheels reduced or slowed the sinking in soft road beds, and their wide axles prevented easy upsets. A high and wide frame allowed large loads, and a white canvas cover protected the precious cargo from chilling winds, soaking rains and burning sun.

Most often these sturdy wagons decreased, though sometimes they increased, the perils of the heroic journey that wound through forests, over mountains, across rivers, through swamps and marshlands. The typical journey must briefly be recalled not only because of its intensity but also because of its longevity. These treks remained an inevitable part of the pioneer encounter, as prospectors returned to Pennsylvania to get their families, as bachelor settlers rode back to find wives, as young couples set out, though only rarely, to visit their aging parents, and as prospectors, homesick relatives and church bishops travelled northward to attend to their respective interests.

The earliest journeys were, of course, the most difficult, but during the entire period of the migration they were never easy. For most of the immigrants, the 400 or more miles covered included the crossing of the Susquehanna, the mighty Niagara, and other great rivers, as well as the Allegheny Mountains. Some trails could be trod only after they were widened with scythe and axe. Some mountains could be ascended only if the wagons were unloaded and some narrow passes crossed only after the wagons were disassembled. Rivers were bridged with rafts or with floating corduroy hastily put together, or by converting tightly sealed wagons into boats. Many times the passengers, including women and children, walked for long stretches because the loads were too heavy and the roads too muddy. Burkholder has written:

> They required as much as seven weeks to make the whole
> journey. The part that came to The Twenty in 1800 consisted
> of 11 four-horse teams, and there were 60 persons in the
> company. One evening as they camped for the night a tree
> fell and killed three horses. Sometimes the wagons upset into
> the mud.[2]

One of the greatest obstacles of all, at least for the Waterloo people, was the Beverly Swamp; this one crossing could take more than a week. Recalling the adventures of one family, Mabel Dunham described this most difficult part of the Conestoga trail:

> On three different occasions the men had to take their
> Conestogas apart and carry the pieces and their baggage upon
> their backs for long distances to more solid ground. They
> were in constant danger of losing their way. The vegetation
> was so luxurious that it hid the path in many places, and on
> every hand there were yawning death-traps half-concealed
> by shrubbery, where insects and reptiles grew and multiplied.
> Even the trees entered into the dark conspiracy, intertwining
> their heavy branches to exclude the light.[3]

At the end of the trail, however, nature and the natives for the most part smiled upon the newcomers, offering them a life of abundance in return for their hard work. The settlers assumed that the conquest of nature would be their greatest challenge while building their new communities, but they soon found that human nature and government policies could also pose obstacles to the achievement of their utopia.

The Upper Canadian province had been set up as an administration separate from Lower Canada as recently as 1791, after the first wave of loyalist immigration had already run its course. The provincial apparatus, being largely responsible to the imperial government of London, was, therefore, quite distant from the people and only partially representative of them. To be sure, an average of three persons from each of the eight districts of Upper Canada were elected to the legislative assemblies of the successive provincial parliaments. The assembly's decisions, however, were easily ignored and often overruled by the legislative and executive councils, both of which were appointed by the lieutenant-governor, who himself had veto power. Even more powerful were the governor, the Crown's direct representative in Quebec, and, of course, His Majesty in London.

Each level of this government hierarchy had as its fundamental goal the preservation and advancement of British North America. But with only French Canadians already resident and immigrants arriving from the continent and overseas as the human elements, the authorities quite understandably guarded carefully the direction of the new society. Too much control could once more lead to a colonial secession, but too little direction would also be

meaningless in terms of the British intention. The policies of Upper Canada in its first half-century vacillated between the two alternatives and rebellion in 1837 changed the direction only temporarily.

In that autocratic context, it was clear that Upper Canada's early political and religious hospitality, compared to that of frontier Pennsylvania, was spelled out in limited, if not mostly negative, terms. Whereas Pennsylvania's holy experiment had been set up primarily with sectarians in mind, the loyalist experiment was assumed to benefit primarily British interests; more specifically, British aristocracy and the Church of England. Both of these could flourish only in an expanding society, and that is where the agricultural settlers fitted in.

In a society where land and other natural resources were abundant and cheap, an increasing population was the most important indication of wealth and strength. New York already had one million people, one third of them added in one decade, and Upper Canada was believed to have a similar potential. To facilitate such an increase, a second land grant program was instituted after the first phase of free loyalist land grants had come to an end.

His Majesty gave up to 200 acres of land in return for the payment of certain fees, usually $37, for the clearing of five acres (including road allowances) and for the erection of a dwelling. As long as a settler was not an anti-British revolutionary and otherwise fitted into the British settlement patterns, he could qualify for one of these grants.

In the new province many sectarian settlers hoped for plots adjacent to each other, but that possibility had been prevented by Crown and clergy land reserves. In a township of 66,000 acres, for instance, there were scattered no less than 96 reserved lots of 200 acres each. Not only did these lots separate the settlers but they placed on those adjoining a reserve the full burden of fencing and ditching. Although the Mennonites took advantage of it, a newly introduced system of leasing the reserves at low rates only partly alleviated these problems.[4] Absentee loyalists further contributed to immigrant settlement problems. Mennonites in Lincoln County, particularly, felt themselves handicapped, and they petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor to remove the obstacles to adjoining settlement as follows:

> Your petitioners are desirous of keeping up as much as
> possible among them [young persons seeking land], those

sentiments of morality and religion which it has been their case to instill into their minds . . . to prevent these fearful evils, your petitioners humbly beg your Excellency will consider, how highly advantageous it would be to them and to the Province in general, were one half, or even any portion of one of the Townships now about to be surveyed . . . to be located by the Mennonists only . . .[5]

Their petition failed because of the feeling at the time "that in future no lands be granted to persons who will not enroll themselves in the Militia and bear Arms in the defence of the Province."[6] Thus there was no easy way for the settlers to achieve the remarkable compactness that had been negotiated in Russia and which would at a later time be transferred to Canada. In that country the Mennonites were virtually forming little states and worlds within the larger state and world of tsarist Russia. The original four settlements (see Table 1) had complete autonomy

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF ORIGINAL FOUR SETTLEMENTS IN RUSSIA

NAME OF SETTLEMENT	PROVINCE	FOUNDING	ACREAGE	VILLAGES
Chortitza	Ekaterinoslav	1789f	102,163	18
Molotschna	Taurida	1804f	324,000	57
Trakt (Koeppental)	Samara	1853	37,800	10
Old Samara (Alexandertal)	Samara	1861	37,800	10

within their respective areas in the Ukraine and Middle Volga regions, totalling over 500,000 acres and 95 villages.[7] They built their own roads, established their own taxing system, their own discipline, their own schools and welfare institutions, albeit with some guidance and the approval, if not ratification, of the Russian government.

The Russian Mennonite villages and the land belonging to them were laid out in such a way as to make its people next-door neighbours. They lived on small plots on both sides of the street with equal access to roads, the common pasture, and individually assigned lands, both the good and not so good, farther away from the village. This homogeneous and self-sufficient system was so conducive to the separatist development of sectarian community

that one sociologist referred to it as "the Mennonite common-wealth."[8]

The Russian experience represented the pinnacle of the long transition from a prophetic protest movement to a withdrawn, peaceful, largely rural culture, and then to a full-fledged ethnic entity. Not only did these Mennonites in Russia develop a common language, culture, and familial relationships, but they also controlled their own government affairs. Church and state once again became closely allied as almost everyone within the Mennonite territory was a baptized Mennonite.[9]

Although they were "ethnic Mennonites" in the sense that they shared with their European counterparts a unique culture and geneological heritage, the Mennonites of Ontario were in no position to develop any Russian-type commonwealth. Geographically the settlers and settlements were too separated and scattered. By 1841, one of the earliest years producing a reasonably complete census, they could be found in no fewer than 30 townships in 7 of the 17 census districts. In 23 of these townships the Mennonite population was less than 50 and in only 7 were there more than 200 (see Table 2).[10] No township had a majority of Mennonites and even in the "heavily Mennonite" township of Waterloo they barely exceeded 10 per cent of the population. In Woolwich they approached 30 per cent, but only because the non-Mennonite population was so small. The largest number of Mennonites in any one district was 3,022 in the Niagara area; this was more than half the provincial total of 5,379. But the Niagara people were scattered over 13 townships in which there were some 20,000 other people, so that Mennonites had difficulty maintaining a separate identity. Before too long a high degree of integration would obliterate some of the scattered islands of Mennonitism.

Where the Mennonites approached compactness of settlement, as in Woolwich and Waterloo, they did not necessarily form homogeneous communities. The immigrants to Waterloo County originated in at least half a dozen counties in Pennsylvania. They included the poor and the wealthy, those who migrated because they would never be able to pay $100 per acre in Pennsylvania and those who could afford very substantial investments of land.

LOCATION OF MENNONITES
IN UPPER CANADA DISTRICTS, 1841

Miles
0 10 20 30 40 50
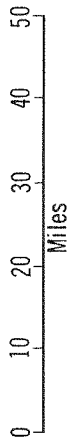
· Each dot represents
4 Mennonites

Home

LAKE ONTARIO

Niagara

Wellington

Gore

Huron

Brock

Talbot

ERIE

London

LAKE
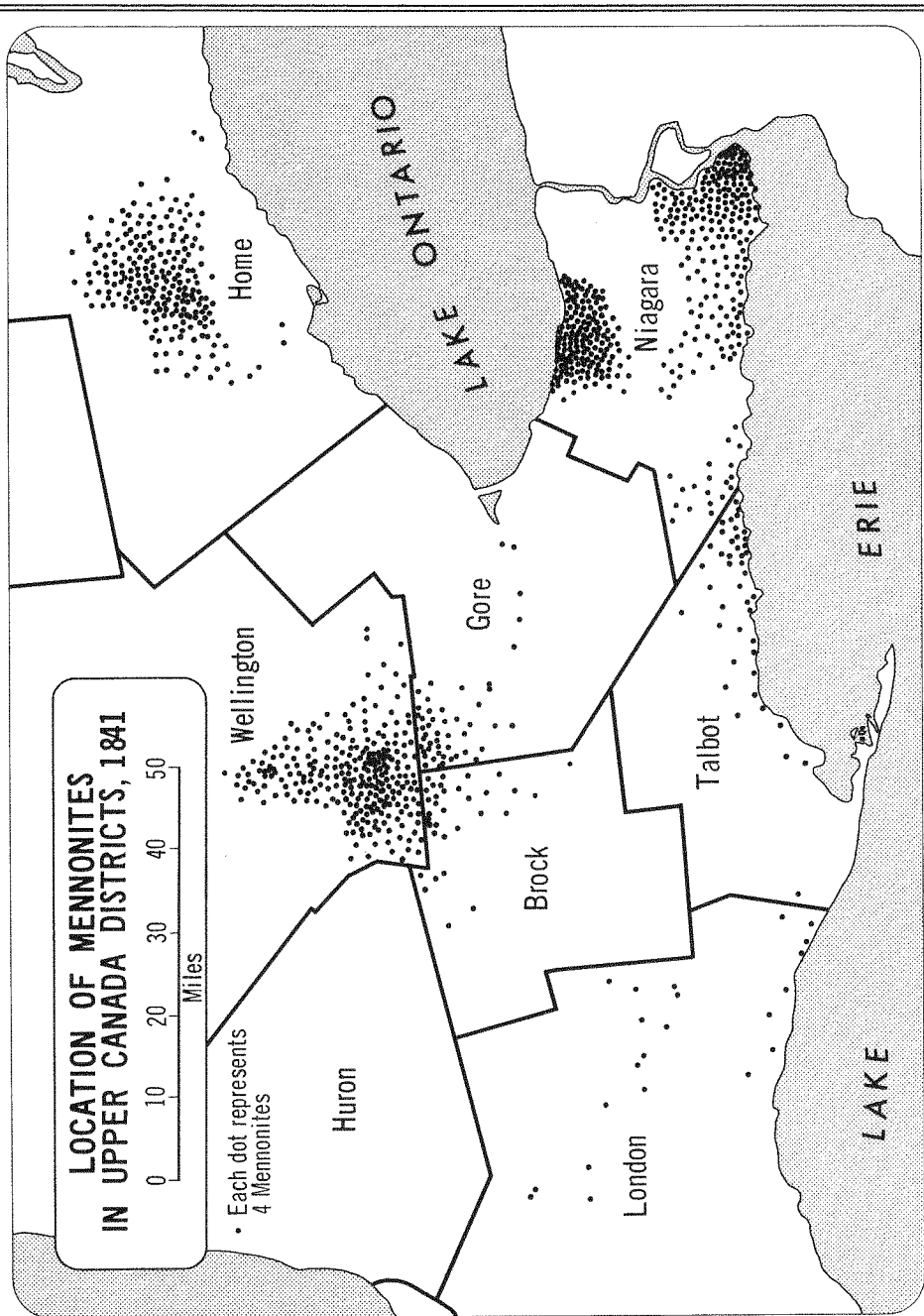
TABLE 2

MENNONITES AND TUNKERS
IN UPPER CANADA TOWNSHIPS IN 1841*

DISTRICT AND TOWNSHIP	MENNONITES	TUNKERS	TOTAL
LONDON			
Bayham	17	—	2,196
Colborne	15	—	437
Dorchester	23	—	620
Ellice	—	4	200
Lobo	18	—	1,169
Malahide	9	—	2,187
Westminster	17	—	2,680
Yarmouth	7	21	3,762
Others (27)	—	—	19,006
Total	106	25	32,257
TALBOT			
Woodhouse	31	10	1,694
Charlotteville	12	—	1,974
Townsend	—	11	2,512
Houghton	2	3	277
Others (3)	—	—	3,169
Total	45	24	9,626
BROCK			
East Oxford	—	7	1,185
Zorra	24	—	2,768
Burford	10	—	1,986
Blenheim	100	21	1,689
Others (6)	—	—	7,993
Total	134	28	15,621
WELLINGTON			
Woolwich	271	—	1,009
Wilmot	259	57	2,220
Waterloo	463	78	4,424
Others (7)	—	—	6,198
Total	993	135	13,851
GORE			
Nelson	—	12	3,060
Puslinch	23	14	1,709
Beverly	—	159	2,684
Dumfries	180	70	6,129
Barton	—	9	1,434

DISTRICT AND TOWNSHIP	MENNONITES	TUNKERS	TOTAL
Ancaster	20	—	2,930
Others (10)	—	—	24,631
Total	223	264	42,577
NIAGARA			
Bertie	349	108	2,318
Caistor	—	8	599
Clinton	377	18	2,122
Crowland	43	—	973
Gainsborough	13	27	1,598
Grimsby	7	11	1,784
Humberstone	133	—	1,376
Louth	211	28	1,392
Pelham	—	33	1,522
Thorold	—	17	2,284
Wainfleet	158	—	1,147
Willoughby	120	—	895
Cayuga	57	—	837
Dunn	19	—	345
Rainham	83	4	716
Walpole	41	—	831
Others (8)	—	—	42,716
Total	3,022	504	63,455
HOME			
York	7	—	538
Pickering	22	—	502
Markham	455	188	4,636
Vaughan	198	110	3,421
Whitchurch	169	37	2,718
Etobicoke	7	—	1,794
Uxbridge	1	1	99
Chinguacousy	—	10	3,970
Others (31)	—	—	46,723
Total	859†	346†	64,401
10 Other Districts with 132 Townships‡	—	—	197,957
GRAND TOTALS	5,382	1,326	439,745

* Compared to total population.
† 1839 figures.
‡ No figures for Johnstown; two districts based on 1840 figures.

There were other factors militating against community development. Culturally, the Ontario Mennonite settlers were not as clearly differentiated from the total population as were the Mennonites in Russia. Governmentally they were not autonomous, although in many ways community development depended on their own initiative. Religiously they were not sufficiently united and uniformly motivated to successfully counteract all the cultural forces surrounding them. Not all of these factors were disadvantages, however, for the British society which was hoping to shape the sectarians was itself largely unstructured. Its ultimate character depended greatly on the initiative of the people. In the area of religion, Upper Canada was officially Church-of-England territory, but this strength was offset sheerly by the non-Anglican population and their much more zealous clergy (see Table 3).[11]

In the final analysis the cultural realities of Upper Canada leant toward the background of the people who lived on and cultivated the land, and who developed their own institutions. And where land and people met, the Mennonites found assets favourable to the solid development of their communities. Above all, they came equipped with a deep love for the soil and with the skills, developed through generations of experience in agriculture, to manage it.

In Europe the Swiss and Swiss-Palatine Mennonites had been the first to introduce such practices as crop rotation, use of animal manure and lime for fertilizers, and legumes to enrich the soil. In Pennsylvania they had been credited with the "first intensive agriculture in America."[12] One of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Rush, a Philadelphia physician, wrote about Mennonites and other Germans:

> ... taken as a body especially as farmers [they] are not only
> industrious and frugal but skillful cultivators of the earth.
> They are noted for their good fences, the extent of their
> orchards, the fertility of the soil, the productiveness of the
> fields, and the luxuriance of their meadows.[13]

Their way of life required the marriage of the people to the soil and to agriculture, which they recognized as the foundation of civilization. More than just a way of making a living, agriculture was for them a way of life. Clearing of the land was therefore not so much a burden as it was an exciting challenge and adventure without which life would be incomplete. Years later a

TABLE 3

RELIGIOUS CENSUS OF UPPER CANADA BY DISTRICTS*
IN SELECTED CATEGORIES IN 1841

DISTRICTS	DENOMINATION OR CHURCH BODY								
	ENG-LAND	SCOT-LAND	ROME	METHO-DIST	MENNO.	TUNK-ER	QUAK-ER	OTHERS†	TOTAL
Western	—	—	3,464	4,357	—	—	89	15,116	23,026
London	7,322	3,744	1,144	5,422	103	25	364	14,133	32,257
Talbot	800	190	131	2,325	45	24	54	6,057	9,626
Brock	2,655	2,042	415	3,921	134	28	873	5,553	15,621
Wellington	2,108	1,648	1,426	925	993	135	38	6,578	13,851
Gore	9,683	6,599	2,514	2,340	223	264	181	20,773	42,577
Niagara	—	71	1,800	6,498	3,022	504	1,069	50,491	63,455
Toronto	6,754	1,503	2,401	1,698	—	—	5	1,888	14,249
Home‡	15,825	12,468	3,709	8,395	859	346	1,097	21,702	64,401
Newcastle	12,397	—	5,726	7,293	—	1	606	15,929	41,952
Victoria	1,852	962	1,709	3,591	—	—	113	4,472	12,699§
Midland	2,383	1,004	1,689	2,370	—	—	58	24,704	32,208
Prince Edward	2,581	542	1,314	5,342	—	—	882	4,000	14,661
Bathurst	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	24,674	24,674§
Johnstown	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Ottawa	1,703	2,459	3,723	956	—	—	—	483	9,324
Eastern	4,519	11,820	9,246	2,356	—	—	—	2,338	30,279
Total	70,582	45,052	40,411	57,789	5,379	1,327	5,429	218,891	444,860

* From southwest Upper Canada to northeast.
† Including Episcopalians, Wesleyans, British Connexions, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Universalists, Restorationers, Mormons, Lutherans, Baptists, Jews, Apostolic Church, Unitarians, Disciples, Irvinites, Church of God, Cameronians.
‡ 1839 figures.

London Free Press reporter, visiting the Mennonites for the first time, described them precisely in this way:

> ... a hospitable, kindly folk, who, in the face of tremendous odds pushed into Western Ontario ... and laid the foundations of an agricultural development unparallelled anywhere else in the province.[14]

A people responding kindly to the beauty and bounty of nature found that nature responded likewise to them, revealing its abundance and potential: unpolluted streams bubbling with fish, woods abounding with live venison, trees in creek beds thick with plums and berries, bee-trees filled with tubfuls of honey, and maple trees dripping with gallons of syrup. Pigeons often darkened the skies by the tens of thousands, and early Mennonite folklore had it that a young farmer named Shantz at one shooting downed 84 of the birds as they rose from the wheat stooks. One writer described this relationship between the benignity of nature and these enterprising people:

> The timber was of mammoth growth and diversity. Stately pines, whose trunks were six feet in diameter waved their topmost branches more than 200 feet above the ground ... The first table used in the county was in the dwelling of Joseph Sherk and consisted of a huge pine stump, five feet in diameter over which the house had been erected.[15]

The Indians, too, were part of that generous environment; they were friendly to the extent that the settlers were friendly to them. As the Indians led them down the trails to the choicest lands, to the best hunting grounds and fishing waters, the Mennonites shared their bread and milk and frequently the huge fireplaces which were incorporated into even the earliest homes. Indian women gladly and reliably watched over Mennonite babies and young Mennonite lads learned the skills of surviving in the woods from their Indian teachers.

The cordiality and mutual helpfulness did not remain, however. As the settlers, among them Mennonites, established distilleries, and as liquor became one of the ingredients of social relationships and trade, acute problems developed. In 1808 the Legislative Assembly heard a petition which stated that one Abraham Stauffer, a Mennonite of Waterloo Township, had been shot by a

drunken Indian and was in danger of his life. Request was made that trading with spirits be stopped by law lest settlers be endangered and Indian children, unprovided for by drunken parents, be forced to go begging.[16] The petition to that effect entered by John Shoop, Joseph Bearinger, and 25 others said in part:

> Several of our township inhabitors take kegs and barrels full
> of spirits from the distillers and trade with the Indians,
> which causes them to get drunk and lie about and not follow
> their hunting, and their young ones starving for hunger,
> going about begging and hallowing for victuals before our
> doors like beasts, and at the same time often the old ones
> coming along and being drunk, scaring ourselves, and our
> families by their bad behaviour.[17]

Rarely did the Indians become farm help for the settlers. The settlers in Upper Canada, however, were not without some cheap labour brought along from the States. Although the importation of slaves to Canada was abolished in 1793, existing master-slave relationships were still respected, "voluntary contracts" of nine years' duration were permitted, and children born of slaves after 1793 were allowed to go free only at the age of 25. Slavery was not quickly abolished in practice; slaves were bought and sold in Toronto as late as 1806. Whether or not Isaac Jones, who was brought into Canada by Abraham Erb, was such a slave or perhaps a runaway who had found security with Erb cannot be ascertained definitely.[18] In Pennsylvania slavery had been rejected by most Quakers and Mennonites, but some had accepted it. Mennonite history is not as explicit as Quaker history on this question, but at the time of the civil war Mennonites in at least one area were praised for their loyalty to the constitution and the government "which protects the slave holders as well as themselves."[19]

Apart from slave-holding, common labour itself was cheap. A day's wages amounted to one dollar, the equivalent in value of five pounds of butter or cheese. If salaried by the year the labourer would be worth $100, enough to buy a horse with saddle and perhaps a cow.

Whatever the settlers owed the Indians and other cheap labour, the actual agricultural skills required for settlement were theirs. It was not uncommon for a Mennonite to be handy in all manner of wood, brick, iron, and leather work. He did not have to be told how to build a log cabin, how to make a clearing in

the woods, how to construct a fireplace, or how to repair his harness. As time went on, of course, specializations developed among blacksmiths, masons, and carpenters. The farmer's basic knowledge, however, was sufficient, as long as there were relatives and neighbours to help him and to assist with the tasks too heavy for one family.

Relatives, it seems, made up for much that was otherwise lacking due to the scattered nature of the Canadian Mennonite communities. In small as well as large settlements it was common for a number of brothers and brothers-in-law to settle together. Frequently parents with large families would uproot themselves in Pennsylvania and move to frontier areas where each member of the family would some day have his own parcel of land. Ezra Eby's biographical history gives some examples:

> David Gingerich travelled from Lancaster . . . in company with his wife, his father Abraham Gingerich and wife, and eight children . . .[20]

> In 1819 Peter Martin and family, which numbered only nine sons and eight daughters, came to Waterloo . . .[21]

> In 1820 David Martin and family of twelve children . . .[22]

> In 1826 came Henry Moyer and family, Jacob Clemens and family . . . Jacob Kolb and family, Solomon Gehman and family, Henry Clemmer and family, Charles Mohr and family, Martin Schiedel and family . . . Abraham Thoman and family . . .[23]

The 1820s brought numerous immigrant families to Upper Canada from Pennsylvania, especially after 1825 when times became unusually bad there. A harvest day's wage for labourers working from sunrise to sunset, for instance, was less than 40 cents. This period of depression, though temporary, marked a turning point for many, including the Amish, who now also set their sights on Upper Canada and who became closely tied to the Mennonite communities.

The Amish movement began in 1822 when Christian Nafziger, a peasant farmer from Bavaria, arrived in Waterloo County. He had hitch-hiked to Amsterdam where he had boarded a freighter to New Orleans. After travelling overland on foot to Pennsylvania, he came to Canada by horse. The Mennonite leaders in Waterloo directed him westward to the township later called Wilmot, a
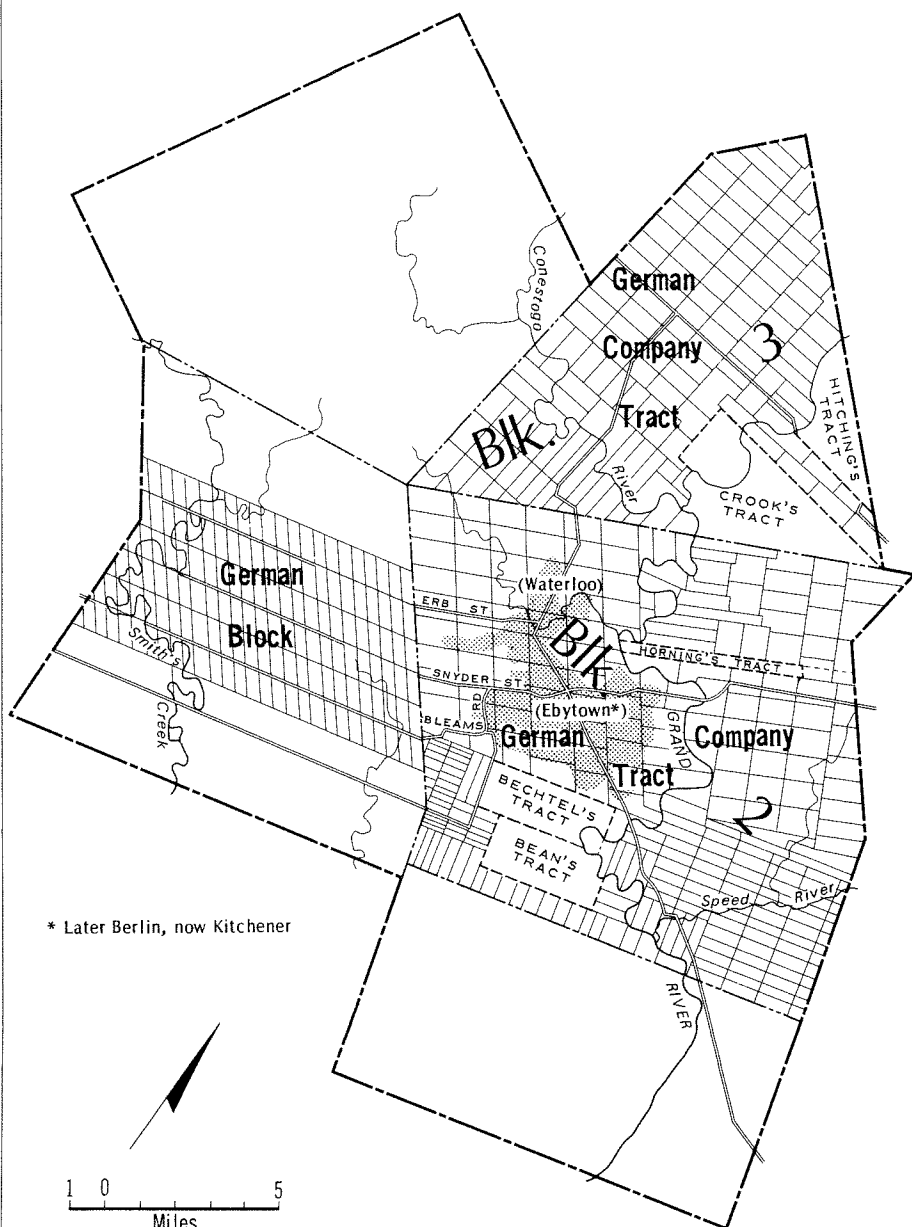
Crown reserve untouched except for three road lines running into it. Nafziger conferred with Governor Maitland, who reserved the land for Nafziger's people, naming it the German Block. Mindful of the Beasley affair, Nafziger wasn't satisfied with his deal until he had seen the King himself. In London, George IV, being himself of German descent and sympathetic, confirmed the governor's offer and even assisted Nafziger financially.

On his way back to Germany, Nafziger told the good news in the Palatinate whence it quickly spread to Amish settlements in Alsace and even America. Nafziger himself did not emigrate until 1826, three years after Amish settlers had actually begun to arrive, first from Pennsylvania and then from Europe. With the help of a Mennonite settlement committee from Waterloo County they settled in 200-acre plots along the township roads in the German block. The Amish migrants trickled into the country for about fifty years, during which time there was also considerable movement to the United States and back again.[24]

Sociologically speaking, the Amish had at least two things in common with the Mennonites: a love for land and for large families. The sons all became farmers like their fathers. The girls all learned to milk cows, to plant vegetable gardens, to weave wool, to spin flax, and to sew their own clothes. Every home had its loom, its apple cider barrels, and its vegetable cellars, and some, especially the Amish, had their wineries, striking another similarity with the Rhineland.
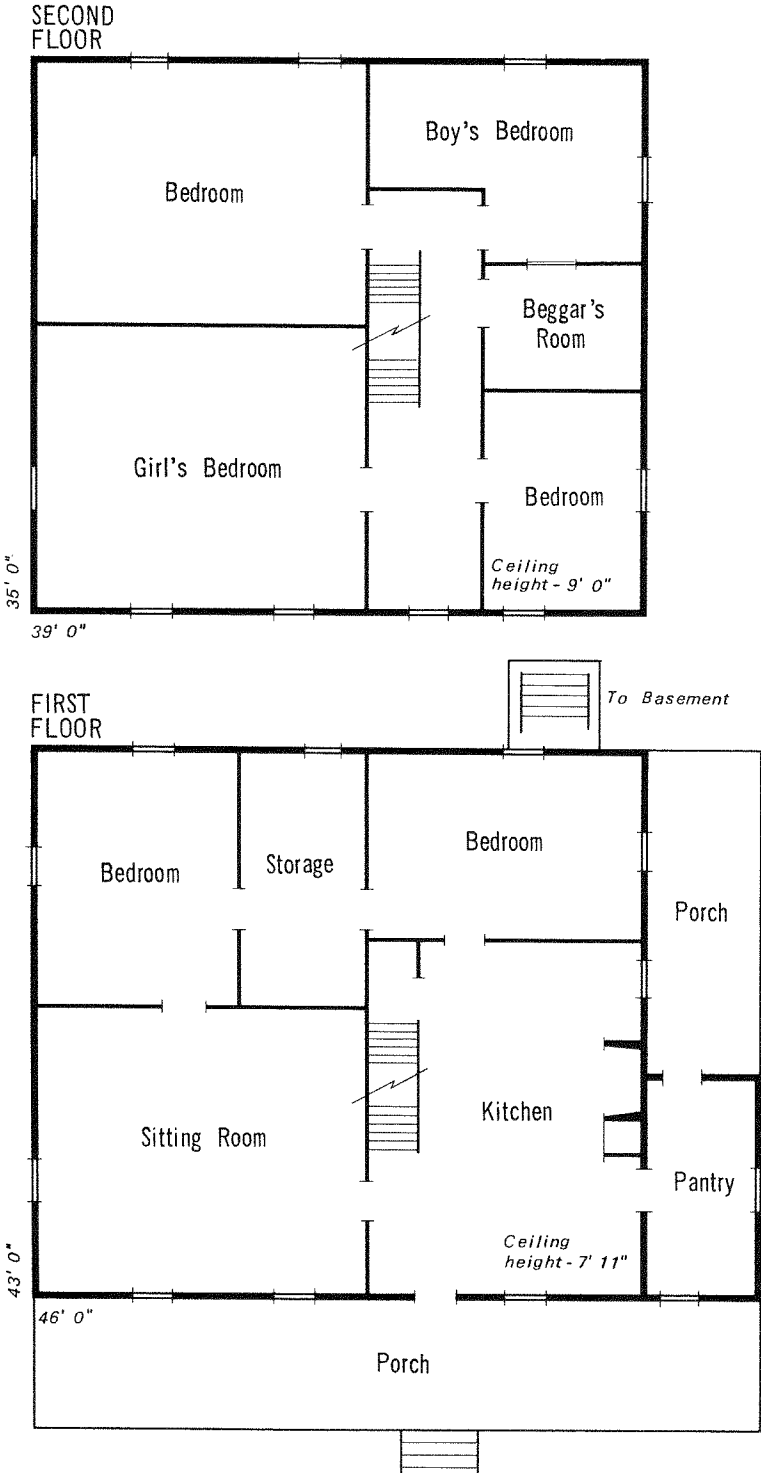
Not all the requirements of pioneer life and community building could be met in the context of the family, no matter how large. Besides, some families were small and there were also bachelors homesteading there. But for everyone help and fellowship, and indeed fun, could be found in the working parties or "bees" that were formed. Through these bees entire communities of men and women would do together what could not otherwise be accomplished. Often this was the way roads were built, barns raised, and sheep fleeced. The working bees were necessary, dictated by circumstances, for all the pioneers; but for the Mennonites they were an outgrowth of their religion of sharing and the practice of intimate community dating from the Anabaptist beginnings. Believing mutual aid and other self-help programs to be a Christian obligation, they resisted insurance policies promoted so vigorously by the world outside. Their special kind of teamwork became best known to the public through their communal barn raisings.[25] Mutual aid eventually expressed itself in the formal establishment of both Amish and Mennonite insurance

THE GERMAN BLOCK AND GERMAN TRACTS
IN WATERLOO COUNTY
(c. 1830)

German
Company
Tract

3

Blk.

HITCHING'S
TRACT

River

CROOK'S
TRACT

German

(Waterloo)

Block

ERB ST

Blk

HORNING'S TRACT

SNYDER ST

Smith's

Creek

BLEAMS

RD

(Ebytown*)

German

GRAND

Company

Tract

BECHTEL'S
TRACT

2

BEAN'S
TRACT

Speed

River

RIVER

* Later Berlin, now Kitchener

1   0   5
Miles

TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN OF ONTARIO MENNONITE HOME

SECOND FLOOR

Boy's Bedroom

Bedroom

Beggar's Room

Girl's Bedroom

Bedroom

Ceiling height – 9' 0"

35' 0"

39' 0"

To Basement

FIRST FLOOR

Bedroom

Storage

Bedroom

Porch

Kitchen

Sitting Room

Pantry

Ceiling height – 7' 11"

43' 0"

46' 0"

Porch

organizations, designed to replace fire and storm damage. The Ontario Mennonite Aid Union, the first in North America, was officially organized in 1866.

While a substitute for commercial insurance, Mennonite mutual aid was more than a business venture. It had deep religious roots and was an effort to restore the community which had been ex-emplified by the Apostolic Church as well as by the Anabaptists. The acts of brotherhood also included hospitality to strangers. Scores of transients obtained food and night lodging in Mennonite homes, sometimes in exchange for such chores as splitting wood. Permanent homes built by the settlers between 1820 and 1870 included a beggar's room, especially for transients.

One common community task requiring a maximum of co-operation concerned the building of good roads, especially since not much help was forthcoming from York (Toronto).[26] The provincial government was concerned primarily with building trunk roads to meet the requirements of defence before the needs of settlement. This fact, of course, was not entirely a disadvan-tage, since military garrisons provided the first ready markets for the produce of the agricultural pioneers. The settlement roads themselves evolved from trails through the woods. At first the swamps were bridged with tree trunks up to two feet thick. Eventually they were covered with earth or gravel, generally a thin layer, leaving them very rough and bumpy. The commonest, easiest, and quickest mode of travel was by horseback, and every farmer had two or three saddles, which were particularly useful in the spring when roads were almost impassable for vehicles.

Another common task concerned the building of schools. For many years the settlers in Upper Canada who wanted schools for their children had to establish them through their own initia-tive with the resources available in the neighbourhood. Attempts were made in the Legislative Assembly to establish public schools as early as 1804 but the bills failed to pass. And although eight grammar schools, one in each of the districts, were established with $400 annual subsidy in 1807, public education as it was later known did not arrive until the passing of the Common Schools Act in 1842.[27]

The Mennonites were not particularly worried about the lack of government support for education. To many of them, government intervention in education was an intrusion into their value system and was not particularly welcome. Indeed, the time would come when they would fight government-funded education to the ex-

tent of founding their own schools, thereby submitting themselves
to double taxation. On the frontier, however, the Mennonites took
strong initiative in founding community schools. In Waterloo
County four schools were established before 1830. In that year
Abraham Erb deeded $2000 of his estate, or the interest thereof,
for educational purposes, especially for the poor and the orphaned.
That legacy was administered for 60 years by trustees of the
Mennonite Society and the Waterloo school portion was eventu-
ally transferred to the Waterloo County Board of Education.[28]

In Mennonite areas the school instruction was generally in the
German language and included such subjects as reading, writing,
arithmetic and religion. The neighbourhood schools were usually
located in private homes, abandoned dwellings, unused shops or
meeting houses; sometimes they were in the open air or under any
available and convenient shelter. Later log schoolhouses were built
and funded by private subscriptions. Schools were kept open dur-
ing the winter months only, and the teachers were preachers or
people who had no special professional qualifications and were
engaged in other occupations the rest of the year.

The community aspect of the schools established in Mennonite
and Amish areas cannot be overemphasized, inasmuch as it repre-
sented yet another difference from the Mennonites in Russia. The
common dialect among German Mennonites, Catholics and
Lutherans contributed, of course, to the easier mixing of the
people. Be that as it may, a spirit of openness and tolerance
toward non-Mennonites became characteristic of some Mennonite
communities to a greater degree than could be observed elsewhere
in North America. Common burial grounds were another ex-
pression of neighbourliness, and some Mennonite meeting-houses
were freely used by other denominations for their services.

Frontier settlement on the whole served well the purpose of
bringing diverse peoples together and of melting down traditional
enmities, including those already indicated between Mennonites
and Catholics, dating back to the Reformation. Mennonite-Amish
and Catholic sources both speak of warm relationships between
the two groups and mutual helpfulness in settlement. The words
of one Catholic chronicler are worth noting:

> The newcomers from Europe, having scanty means and
> being quite inexperienced in bush-life, obtained valuable
> advice, employment, and credit from their better-situated
> Mennonite neighbors. These were uniformly kind, neighborly
> and hospitable to a degree. In fact, without this helpful

disposition of the Mennonites, the European settlers could scarcely have remained in the wilderness. Almost every one of them could tell of many instances of getting help in distress and great need.[29]

The manner of farming was primitive in the early nineteenth century; implements were simple, many of them hand-made. Ploughs were usually wooden and the first harvests were cut with sickle and scythe. Threshing, done with the flail, took all winter. The grain drills, the reapers, and the threshers did not make their appearance until the 1840s and 1850s. Team threshing was to become common only after 1860, and the twine-binder wasn't perfected until near the end of the century.

The installation of small industrial units, however, did not have to await complete agricultural mechanization. As the Mennonite settlers sowed and harvested their first wheat in the small clearings and among the stumps they began to establish corporate grist mills. The Erb brothers, John in Preston and Abraham in Waterloo, became prominent grist mill owners. As the farmers cleared the land they became lumbermen and established saw-mills; then wood-working establishments and later pulp and paper mills were begun. As game was taken from the forests for food, the skins were dried and tanneries were developed. The weaving of wool from many sheep led to the creation of woollen mills.

As agriculture expanded and barley was introduced, breweries were added to the grist mills; both flour and alcoholic beverages were considered essential to the social economy of the day.[30] By mid-century 150 distilleries and breweries in Upper Canada were producing 1.17 million gallons annually, most of it being consumed by a population of less than one million. Social drinking patterns soon became an issue of religious controversy which the Mennonites, too, could not escape. In the words of Gourlay, an Upper Canada statistician:

> To this fault the early settlers here were peculiarly exposed, from the manner of life they had followed several years in the army, their want of cider, that common drink in which they had been accustomed before the revolution, and the facility with which distilled liquors could be procured as a substitute.[31]

The Canadian pioneers were gifted not only in extracting spirits and wine from the domesticated and wild fruits, but also in pro-

ducing from plants medicines and home remedies of many kinds. Among the healing powers derived from the natural environment, those of the elderberry bush rated particularly high. The juice of the root cooked in water could induce vomiting and urination. The flowers and the bark of the elderberry likewise contained laxative powers. A tea-like drink from the flowers had the effect of inducing perspiration in cases of influenza, smallpox and measles. The elderberry was also used for reducing inflamed swellings, for muscular pains, and for checking ulcers and contagious diseases. Last, but not least, the elderberry bushes yielded pleasant elder wine.

Bitter sage or mint tea and a little bit of charming seemed to cure many diseases. Charming, or prayer incantations, was sometimes also called "powwowing" or "Braucherei."[32] One formula for the cure of goitre, preserved with others for posterity in the Jordan Village Museum at the Twenty, is as follows:

> At the beginning of each new moon,
> Look at the moon,
> Rub the goiter,
> and say the following words:
> "I see something that grows,
> I rub something that goes,
> In the name of Jesus."[33]

Like other social and practical problems, medical problems were abated by genuine neighbourliness and community spirit. Every cluster of neighbours boasted a midwife and a bone-setter ready, willing, and able to attend to those medical needs which tea could not cure. As the 1820s approached there still were no "medical practitioners" in any of the communities where Mennonites lived. A limited census of 1817 indicates shortages of other public servants, such as preachers and teachers. Otherwise there were signs of material progress, seen partly in the tripling and quadrupling of land prices in about two decades.

The general experience of early self-sufficiency and prosperity in the Mennonite community did not mean the absence of adversity. On the contrary, the pioneers were confronted by many problems, including the vicissitudes of natural and man-made disasters. In 1806, for instance, raging forest fires destroyed a large number of houses, barns, fences, pastures, and animals in the Blair, Preston and Berlin areas. One Abraham Bechtel lost his barn, house and all the provisions he had stocked up to receive

friends from Pennsylvania. To give another example of pioneer misfortune, the year 1816 brought frost every single month, including seven heavy frosts in the months of June and July alone. On June 1 the ice was thick enough to bear the weight of wagons on small ponds and heavy snow fell as late as June 26. Provisions for the people and food for the animals were in extremely short supply. The only available hay was the wild growth in marshes of heavier meadows. Wheat that had been selling as low as 50 cents a bushel increased in price six times; the same price rise also affected other essentials.

Perhaps the most difficult and continuous hardship was the separation from families and friends in Pennsylvania. Visits to and fro were rare and letters went slowly and only as frequently as riders or stage coach drivers would take them. Perhaps the women who left parents, brothers and sisters behind to join their young husbands on the frontier deserve the greatest credit of all in the pioneer venture.

In all their loneliness, pioneering and community building, the settlers enjoyed a resource which so far has hardly been mentioned. The reference is to the congregational sector and its leaders who nurtured the spirits of the settlers. Indeed, so significant was the religious impulse in building and dividing the communities that special attention will be given to this phase of the settlement experience in Chapter 5. But first, in the next chapter, there must be a review of how Mennonitism related to the law of the land, especially with reference to the militia of Upper Canada.

FOOTNOTES

1. Douglas J. Wilson, *The Church Grows in Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Council of Churches, 1966), p. 75.
2. L. J. Burkholder, *Mennonites of Ontario* (Markham, Ont.: Mennonite Conference of Ontario, 1935), p. 25.
3. Mabel Dunham, *Trail of the Conestoga* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1924), pp. 124–25.
4. Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years 1784–1841* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), pp. 50, 131. See also Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada* (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1822), Vol. I, p. 321.

5. PAC, *Upper Canada Land Petitions*, R. G. 1, L3, Vol. 340, "M" Bundle 12, #83. Petition of the Mennonites (or harmless Christians) of the District of Niagara, Jacob Meyer—Minister, April 7, 1819.

6. *Ibid.*

7. "Russia," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, IV, p. 383.

8. E. K. Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, 1789–1914: A Sociological Interpretation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XXV (1951), pp. 173–82, 200.

9. E. K. Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," *op. cit.*; "The Nature of the Ethnic Group," *American Journal of Sociology*, LII (March 1947), pp. 393–400; "The Russian Mennonites: From Religious to Ethnic Group," *American Journal of Sociology*, LIV (September 1948), pp. 101–7; Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment 1789–1870," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XXV (January 1951), pp. 17–33.

10. Canadian Government Census of Canada, Population Returns for the Year 1841.

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12. Ira D. Landis, "Mennonite Agriculture in Colonial Lancaster County, Pennsylvania," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XIX (October 1945), p. 254ff.

13. *Ibid.*

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15. *Hundred Years Progress in Waterloo County: Semi-Centennial Souvenir, 1856–1906* (Waterloo, Ont.: The Chronicle Telegraph), pp. 6–18.

16. Province of Upper Canada, *Journal of Legislative Assembly*, February 18, 1808.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Miriam H. Snyder, *Hannes Schneider and his Wife Catherine Haus Schneider: Their Descendants and Times, 1534–1939* (Kitchener, Ont.: published by the author, 1937), p. 188. For the detailed story of slavery in Canada see Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971).

19. Samuel Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1967), p. 26.

20. Ezra E. Eby, *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township: A History of the Early Settlers and Their Descendants* (Berlin, Ont.: published by the author, 1895), p. 168.

21. Snyder, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
24. Orland Gingerich, *The Amish of Canada* (Waterloo, Ont.: Conrad Press, 1972), p. 27ff.
25. Edwin Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 160–61.
26. Petition: complaint about state of roads between Waterloo and lake ports. November 9, 1828. Mennonites included. (CGC Archives)
27. Thomas Pearce, "School History, Waterloo County, and Berlin," in Snyder, p. 211.
28. M. A. Johnston, "A Brief History of Elementary Education in the City of Waterloo," *Waterloo Historical Society*, LIII (1965), pp. 56–66.
29. Eby, *op. cit.*, p. 52. See also *Waterloo Historical Society*, XVI (1928), pp. 26–30.
30. Theobold Spetz, "The Catholic Church in Waterloo County," in *ibid.*, p. 269.
31. Robert C. Gourlay, *Statistical Accounts of Upper Canada* (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1822), Vol. 1, p. 252.
32. "Medicine," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, p. 208; "Powwowing," *ME*, IV, pp. 550–52.
33. Jordan Village Museum Scrapbook, Jordan, Ont.