Provenance

Open-air Revival Meetings

6. Mid-Century Renewal Movements

Had the Mennonites not entered upon this disastrous course [ruinous factionalism], but few schisms would have occurred and they might rank among the leading denominations of this country — H. P. KREHBIEL.[1]

THE SOLIDARITY of the Mennonite congregations and the influence of their dedicated leaders was to be sorely tested in the middle of the 1800s. Internal as well as external change confronted the rather independent bishops, the relatively autonomous congregations and the loose organization of the conference with problems they could not competently handle or peacefully resolve. Occasionally, the leaders themselves were the problem; they were often caught unprepared by the engulfing trends of the time and by the undercurrents in their congregations. These long-ignored rumblings eventually erupted.

As new ideas, ways, and movements challenged the old, and as the established order reacted against the new threats, the Mennonite community once again fell prey to the *Taeuferkrankheit*.[2] Again, the Anabaptist sickness brought psychological injuries so deep and left organizational scars so lasting that for the most part they could not easily be healed. Indeed, the century of division, as this phase of the Mennonite experience in the 1800s may properly be called, extended into the 1900s, in spite of the ecumenical

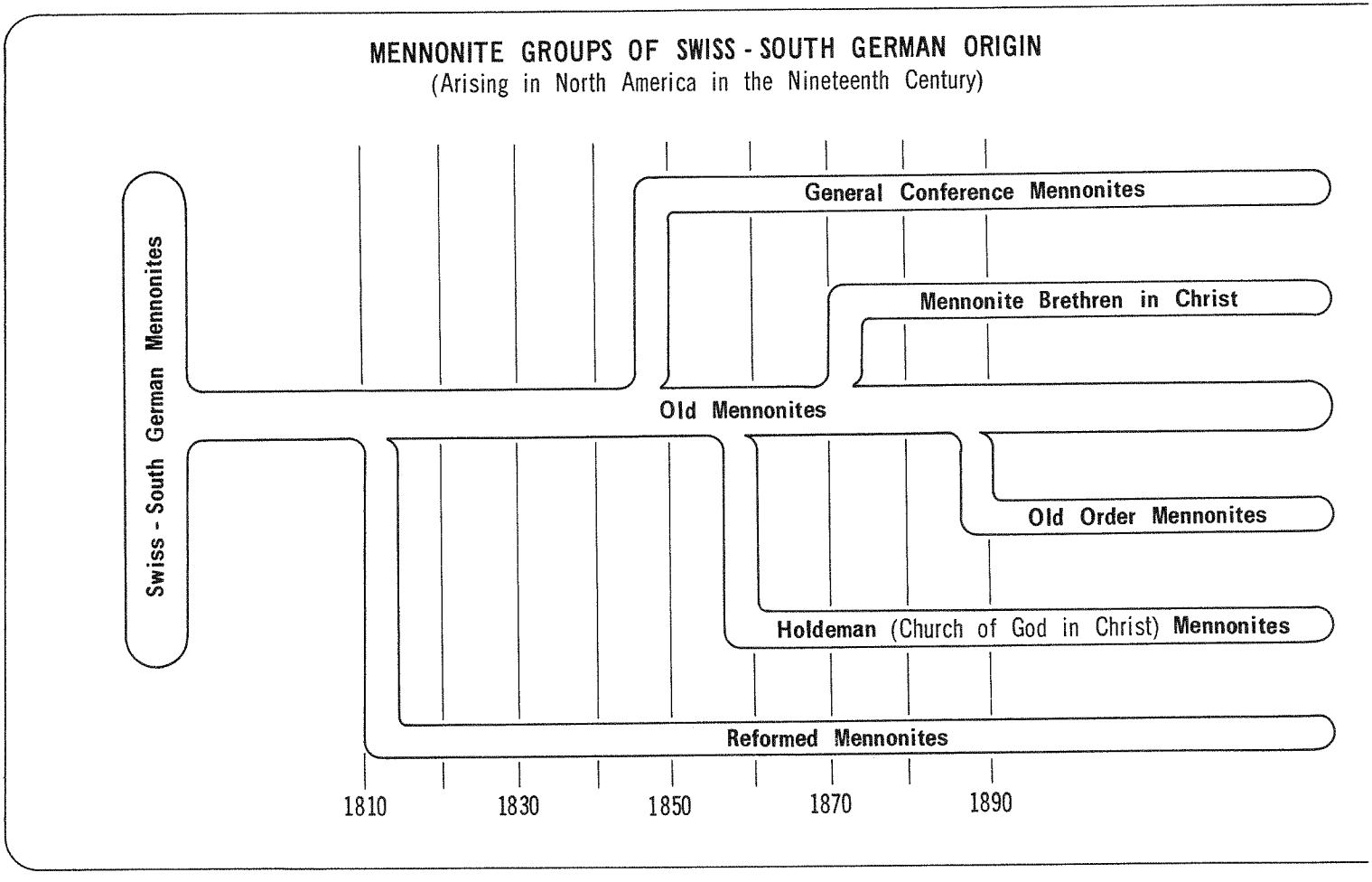
movements which cropped up subsequent to almost every division.

The Canadian experience of fragmentation was not an isolated phenomenon. The internal divisions in Ontario were not only duplicated, but at several junctures actually conditioned, by developments in the United States. In spite of the revolution, the migrations, and the War of 1812, the destiny of the Mennonites was still very much felt in continental terms. And what was happening among the Swiss-German Mennonites in North America again had its remarkable parallelisms among the Dutch-German Mennonites in Russia. The two Mennonite families were not aware of each other's factionalisms, but their common tendency to divide led to a later western meeting of some of the Dutch and Swiss factions.

Nor was the Mennonite experience unique in the ideological sense. It was duplicated, often preceded, and at all times certainly influenced by the surrounding religious environment from which even Mennonite separatism had not been able to escape. As a people whose worldview was uniquely religious, they could not avoid responding in some fashion to the religious movements about them. The second great awakening in the United States[3] and the great revival in Canada,[4] both of which sought in the early nineteenth century to evangelize North America by revivalistic means in the tradition of Methodism, were a strong influence on Mennonites. Some protested the new emphases; others proceeded toward imitation. The latter was especially true among those groups that liked to think of themselves as progressives or as new Mennonites. Whatever the response, the Mennonites joined with their fellow North Americans in fragmenting into many new groupings to be known as denominations.[5]

The renewal theme, to be explored here mainly in its mid-century manifestations, had some earlier antecedents which must not be overlooked. The most important for Upper Canada was the Lancaster movement founded by John Herr (1782–1850) in 1812. Herr's father, Francis Herr, had been expelled from the church in 1800, giving as the reason his demand for reform; according to others excommunication was due to a dishonest horse deal. Whatever the reason, the entire family had subsequently remained aloof and unbaptized, though they carried out their own religious services.

John Herr took over when his father died. Much like the earliest Swiss brethren, he had himself baptized by a member of


MENNONITE GROUPS OF SWISS - SOUTH GERMAN ORIGIN
(Arising in North America in the Nineteenth Century)
Swiss - South German Mennonites
General Conference Mennonites
Mennonite Brethren in Christ
Old Mennonites
Old Order Mennonites
Holdeman (Church of God in Christ) Mennonites
Reformed Mennonites
1810
1830
1850
1870
1890

the group selected for that purpose. After being chosen minister and elder, again without an officiating bishop from the established church, he baptized all the rest and immediately proceeded to advance the thesis that the church had strayed far from the Bible and the writings of Menno Simons and that it was the duty of reform-minded Mennonites to bring about a renewal of the true church. He wrote six small pamphlets and books and went on many preaching tours, including some to Upper Canada where he died in 1850.

Wherever he went he found others disillusioned with the conventional Mennonite church, its permissiveness in elections, political campaigns, attendance at county fairs and horse races, and drinking. The dissenters, a total of 2,500 by the time of his death, were gathered into the "true" Mennonite church, once again to practise consistent foot-washing, the kiss of peace, and the discipline of erring members. The old church referred to them as Herrites. They themselves preferred to be called Orthodox or Reformed Mennonites, the latter name eventually becoming official.[6]

TABLE 1

REFORMED MENNONITE CONGREGATIONS IN CANADA

NAME	YEAR OF FOUNDING	LOCATION
Humberstone	1825	Welland County
Rainham	1825	Haldimand County
Stevensville	1835	Welland County
Hostetler's	1844	Waterloo County
Kingwood	1850	Waterloo County
Amulree	1850	Perth County

The assumption of the Herr group was that renewal of the true church could be found only by returning to the fundamentals of the faith and the old customs. By contrast, the renewal groups that arose at mid-century, with one or two exceptions, sought renewal in new experiences and new organizations, although their looking to the past was never completely absent. The main body of the church stood somewhere in between the Herrites and the new Mennonites.

These new Mennonite groups, having started in local congrega-

tions, each with its own dissenting leader, were quite numerous in their North American beginnings around the middle of the nineteenth century. Eventually they coalesced into several minor groups and two major ones: the General Conference Mennonite Churches in North America and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. The Mennonites in the United States were affected primarily by the former group, while the church in Canada was most affected by the schisms resulting from the emergence of the latter group.

The founding father of the General Conference Mennonites was John H. Oberholtzer (1809–95), although he was by no means alone in advocating change. A number of Oberholtzer's ministerial colleagues, including his own bishop, John Hunsicker, deplored what they thought was an intolerable spiritual sterility, ecclesiastical standstill, and social separatism. Their quarrel was not so much with old theology as with old methods and the opposition to all new trends. English preaching, Sunday schools, extra meetings for prayer and evangelism, better relations with other denominations, involvement in community affairs, changes in clothing styles — none would be sactioned by the established leadership.

That leadership consisted of five bishops, 40 ministers, and 25 deacons in 22 congregations in eastern Pennsylvania. Loosely organized as the Franconia Conference, they met as a council semi-annually to agree on preaching appointments for the coming months and otherwise to regulate the affairs of the churches. Such regulation proceeded not so much as a process of discussion, clarification and negotiation, but literally as regulation, the reinforcement of those rules and practices which had been made sacred by custom and tradition.

Yet, the utility and validity of many of those practices were being questioned, as outside influences arising from education, commerce and increased mobility made themselves felt. There was no easy way to resolve the resulting differences, because both the attitude and the mechanism necessary for such resolution were missing. The majority of Mennonites and their bishops had not yet learned, perhaps had no intention of learning, the process of resolving differences and conflict through discussion, negotiation and compromise. The only way known to deal with new influences was to reaffirm the old laws. Sometimes such action brought peace, but most often only temporarily, since the inner revolt of the dissidents was thereby intensified. The results were

endless grumblings, bickerings, and personality clashes. In the words of H. P. Krehbiel, one of the earliest historians of the period, the situation was one of war and no peace:

> Peace, peace! that was the watchword; but there was no peace. Instead of fraternally cooperating, many churches, animated by intolerant prejudices, came actually to antagonize each other with great bitterness.[7]

The differences between conservatives and progressives had begun to surface first on the school issue, after the issuance in 1834 of a new law which strengthened the public role in education. Some Mennonites opposed this growing influence of the American society on themselves and tried to shut it off wherever they could. Others saw much good in interaction and no harm in some of the changes. The more tolerant and accommodating ones not only approved of public education but also attended county fairs, political conventions and even courts of law. They adopted the new oil-cloth covers for their wagons and shed the plain coats for newer styles of dress. In their social life they allowed marriage with non-Mennonites and in their liturgy they favoured open communion.

Those who were proponents of change did not necessarily agree among themselves. Some, like the Abraham Hunsickers, definitely wanted more secular involvement. Others, like the Johnsons, wanted modernness without discarding some of the sacred traditions. Still others, like the Gehmans, saw rejuvenation in evangelical excitement and emotionalism. In the middle stood the Oberholtzers, who insisted that they simply wanted healthy religious progress. None wanted basic changes in historic Mennonite doctrine, such as voluntary baptism, discipleship, and nonresistance. However, once the doors of change were opened on minor matters, the major or fundamental matters rarely remained unaffected. The bishops probably felt this instinctively and therefore holding the line became for them the imperative of holy office, the essence of their divine calling, the only reasonable response to the confused calls for change.

Caught in the middle of the argumentation was Oberholtzer, who aggressively pursued newness and his idea of progress. Once a teacher, then a locksmith and printer, he became at the age of 33 a minister in the Swamps Mennonite Church. His oratorical talent, leadership ability, and general stance on nonconformity soon got him into trouble with the bishops. Their sole way of

dealing with a novelty was to ignore it, to avoid it or to oppress it. Oberholtzer, on the other hand, was not given to patience. In and out of season, he preached renewal of both content and form in the church. He started children's Bible classes, introduced new materials of instruction, and began to advocate more formal ministerial training, as well as missionary endeavours.

Perhaps Oberholtzer's greatest "offences" were his excursions outside of the Mennonite denomination, and his change of ministerial attire, first when he went out and later also at home. The styles for men's clothing were changing as mid-nineteenth century approached, and Oberholtzer soon found himself exchanging the plain coat, the ministerial long-tail, straight-collar, no-lapel uniform, sanctioned by use since colonial days, for a more modern style. His coats had no tails, fewer buttons at the top, and the high collar turned over to form a lapel, thus exposing the shirt, which would soon be begging for the decorative tie.

Going out to preach the gospel was one thing; bringing back new and unacceptable ideas was quite another. One of those ideas was a new constitution which, in his opinion, would clarify the internal decision-making process and strengthen the ties between the congregations. He wanted rules of procedure adopted and minutes kept of council meetings. Above all, he wanted to guarantee a hearing for the dissenting minority, including himself, which was so often arbitrarily overruled by the conservative bishops.

While Oberholtzer's advancement of the new ideas and the rejection of the plain coat had set the stage for the ensuing clash, it was the preparation of a constitution which brought on the real crisis. Having been denied the vote at ministerial meetings in 1844, Oberholtzer had returned to wearing the plain coat in 1847 in order to give his ideas on the constitution a better chance. He had also recruited some support. Not only was his own bishop encouraging him, but 13 ministers and deacons were supporting the presentation of the constitution to council. The ministerial council, however, refused to allow its reading and forbade also its printing and circulation in advance of the fall meeting. The dissenters, led by Hunsicker and Oberholtzer, printed and circulated the document anyway. When the fall came they had 16 ministerial supporters. All of them were expelled from the meeting for subscribing to the document. Reinstatement, the bishops ruled, could only happen if proper confession of error were made.

The dissenters, being equally uncompromising, believed too

much in the rightness of their cause to repent. On October 28, 1847, they formed the East Pennsylvania District of Mennonites, with Abraham (brother to John) Hunsicker as chairman and Oberholtzer as secretary, taking one-third of the Franconia membership with them. This included the majority in six congregations, where the rest were left to erect new meeting-houses. In other places the new Mennonite minorities erected their own meeting-houses, and in still others the two groups worshipped in the same place, though on alternate Sundays.

Meanwhile, Oberholtzer had taken full advantage of the new freedom to advance his ideas. Beginning in 1847, he gathered the young people around himself on Sunday afternoons for religious instruction and thus founded the first Mennonite Sunday school in the United States, which achieved formal organizational status by 1853. He helped introduce organ and other instrumental music into worship services. In 1852 he founded the *Religioeser Botschafter* (Religious Messenger), the first American Mennonite periodical, through which he stirred missionary interest leading to the formation of missionary societies.

Most of all, he was concerned with organizational questions both within and among the congregations. The constitution, or *Ordnung* as he termed it, was made an all-important document of proper governance and discipline. It provided for a *Hohe Rath* (High Council or Executive Committee) which had some of the authority formerly held by the bishops, perhaps even more so, but whose membership was subject to election, whose discussions were open, and whose decisions were public. Indeed, the *Verhandlungen des Hohen Rathes der Mennoniten Gemeinschaft* (the Proceedings of the High Council of the Mennonite Society) became the "broadsides" which the pamphleteering and crusading Oberholtzer spread throughout the populace.

Sometimes these broadsides were directed at the new Mennonite society itself, because there were many differences of opinion within the group. Whenever the new Mennonites contrasted themselves with what was old, these differences were overcome, but whenever they tried to agree on what should be new, they became disunited. An attempt to compromise was made, however, and for this reason the society remained flexible; indeed, it vacillated on issues quite important to the old society. In the first decade the society completely changed its position on prayer meetings from approval to disapproval, on foot-washing from encouragement to declaring it unnecessary, and on mem-

bers of secret societies attending communion from forbidding the practice to allowing it. To help resolve the internal conflict the Hohe Rath on one occasion formulated a ten-point decision at the heart of which stood the following sentence addressed to the new society:

> We ask all ministers and all members to have patience with each other . . . every minister should consider it his duty, if the church requests it, to submit himself for the sake of peace.[8]

Discipline within the church also became a matter not to be taken too seriously because of its disruptive effect. One historian claims that this was one of the greatest points of real difference (a position probably somewhat exaggerated) between the new Mennonites and their opposites, those who came to be known as old Mennonites.[9]

In spite of the reduced discipline, reflecting greater tolerance, the new Mennonites experienced further divisions in their first decade. For some the Oberholtzer views were too conservative, and one faction, wanting even more community and political involvement, separated under the leadership of Abraham Hunsicker, the presiding chairman at the 1847 founding. For Henry G. Johnson, the Oberholtzer tendency to make foot-washing optional was much too liberal, and his people bowed out to form another independent organization that would retain some of the sacred traditions while pursuing some of the new ideas. William Gehman saw the substance of renewal in private meetings attended only by the inner circle. By 1858, the year in which the Johnsons withdrew, the Eastern District Conference was sufficiently disturbed by the manifestations of emotionalism and super-piety that Gehman and 22 others were dismissed. The result was another denominational grouping known as Evangelical Mennonites, which will enter our story again at a later time.

These splinter groups were small, however, and as much as they hurt the Oberholtzer cause they did not deter his external purpose of bringing together in a general conference all dissenting groups that shared the ideas of the progressive Eastern Pennsylvania group. Some of these factions could be found on the western frontier, particularly in Ohio and Iowa and beyond. In Ontario also there were members and leaders who were drawn to the new Mennonite movement.

The diverse character and views of the Oberholtzer following

were an asset as well as a liability in this task. Although the secularists, the traditionalists and the emotionalists had as groups been separated from the middle-of-the-road Oberholtzers, their views remained represented in the emerging General Conference. This helped to attract a diversity of other groups, but it also meant that complete internal unity in that General Conference would always be less than perfect. Very soon the slogan appeared "In fundamentals unity, in secondary matters diversity, in all things charity." The formula was simple enough, but with differences of viewpoint arising precisely on which matters were primary and which were secondary, charity, forever in great need, would somehow always be in short supply.

Among those in the distance who eyed the Oberholtzer movement with favour were people of the Twenty, where the gathering of fringe Mennonites and other divergent elements into a unified congregation had never been completely successful. It was in the Niagara peninsula area more than at Markham or Waterloo that outside influences were felt first and most, and where external absorption of the Mennonites had been evident from the beginning. The reasons for this may lie in part in its closer proximity to Pennsylvania and to the direct line of United States–Canada traffic. The Niagara settlements lacked compactness compared to Waterloo, but in the end compactness did not spare Waterloo and Markham.

Openness to outside influences was also conditioned in part by the Mennonite churches and their leaders. Benjamin Eby, for instance, had in his own way been progressive, in many of his emphases anticipating the work of John H. Oberholtzer. But preoccupation with internal economic and ecclesiastical affairs sapped their energy and prevented them from doing all they might, or would like to, have done. The *Diener* (ministers and deacons) wrestled intensely with some of their problems, but their responses to the spiritual and moral problems of the times were considered quite inadequate by some people and their spokesmen.

One of these problems was alcoholism, and some Christian groups, notably the Methodists, organized temperance societies to combat the evil. The Mennonite leaders, however, discouraged membership in the temperance society, partly no doubt because of an old aversion to membership in outside societies of any sort, be they secret or public, religious or secular. In their opinion, membership in the Christian congregation was fundamental and should be all-inclusive. Other memberships, even the good ones,

could only harm the Christian community. Their strongest words, therefore, expressed in a 1842 resolution, were temperance and moderation. They may very well have been the most helpful words for a time which knew mostly only excesses and extremes.[10]

An examination of the resolution reveals a compromising spirit and the attempt to reconcile divergent views. "Young brethren" who had already joined the temperance association were not asked to remove themselves but rather only to stay away from meetings and otherwise not to agitate because "temperance is already sufficiently commanded to us as Christians." In making this request, the ministerial council expressed the traditional Mennonite attitude to outside societies, which was that they were probably evil, but if not evil then surely unnecessary. Those opposed to membership, on the other hand, should not "take offence" at those who were members. Both should "bear with one another in love." Further, it was considered "not good" for "additional brethren and sisters to join so that further misunderstanding may be avoided."

On drinking itself, the three bishops, 15 preachers, and 14 deacons also advocated temperance, rather than abstinence, and tolerance. It was generally recommended to "avoid use of strong drinks as much as possible." On the occasion of social visits, the hosts, in order to avoid abuse, should "not be so much concerned to set the same before visitors." At auction sales likewise, strong drink should be kept away in order to avoid disorder. Also at large gatherings of workers "all abuse shall be prevented" so that our light "may shine before others who are not in our churches."

The ministerial conference did not take an abstinence stance, as one writer has concluded.[11] That same 1842 meeting took strong action on "shows," ruling that "it is forbidden every member to go to such places and to give money to see a show." Repeated transgressions without repentance would be followed by discipline and excommunication. By contrast, the action on drink represented no such ruling. Strong drink, but not all drink, was discouraged at social events and larger public gatherings, but not in private. In other words, a position of moderation and not total abstinence had been advanced.[12]

A similar moderating stance was taken when the issue of prayer meetings came up several years later. In 1849 it was ruled that "prayer meetings for all true worshippers" were permitted "as long as it is done in an evangelical order, especially with the weak and sick who cannot attend the regular church service." But the

evangelical order above all required that those who believed or did not believe in such meetings bear each other with "love, meekness, and patience." No minister should be required "to act contrary to his feeling, or his view of the Word." The scriptural order was that all things should be done "in charity."[13]

To the renewal-minded, the Conference positions and proceedings were not sufficiently positive, clear-cut and determined. To them, the Methodists with their abstinence crusades, tent meetings, and efficient organization were more impressive and by their definition much more spiritual. Methodist models of theology, strategy, and organization were later adopted by the dissenters. Some families joined the Methodists and large numbers tried to emulate them, especially those Methodists who most perturbed the Episcopalians and other established orders. "Ignorant enthusiasts" the Anglican bishop of Quebec called the revivalists, characterizing them:

> The Methodist uses all kinds of techniques. His approach was often highly emotional. He threatened his listeners with the torches of everlasting hell-fire. He painted glorious pictures of salvation. He did not believe that the devil should have all the good times.[14]

This outside influence was also not wanting in the Markham area, and especially at the Moyer Mennonite Church in Vineland. In the 1840s its disruptive effect was reinforced at Moyer's by misunderstandings and rivalries among three ministerial personalities, one of them a bishop, two others likely candidates for that office. It was thought that Jacob Moyer, Jr., ordained to the ministry in 1824, might eventually succeed his father as bishop. But Jacob, Jr., died in 1831, two years before his father. Ordained in 1831, Daniel Hoch, a very able preacher and energetic leader, was not considered by some to be the right man to succeed the senior Moyer as bishop in 1833 because of his impulsiveness and occasional stubborn streaks. Thus the election of a bishop was delayed, while Benjamin Eby exercised the "bishop oversight" until at least one more minister could be ordained. The result was that Jacob Gross was elected minister in 1833 and bishop in 1834, both times under the supervision of Eby.

Both Gross and Hoch were open to outside influences and by the early 1840s definitely tended in evangelical directions. Both became interested in the prayer meeting movement, though Gross was more interested in the example of the Methodists than was

Hoch. Gross was particularly fascinated by their temperance movement, baptism and communion. However, since the majority of his congregation would not support him, he and his followers left the church in 1849 and formed or joined what was known as the Evangelical Church Association. It was still under Methodist influence when the man who would be Gross's successor reported in September of that year:

> Their evening meetings and prayer meetings became louder and louder and more often. They have had already for a time in order to help them, a daughter of the Methodist preacher, William Hippel. And two others were baptized by the Methodists three times backwards under the water. Daniel Hoch thus far will not have anything to do with Methodists, as a part of the others also. Last Sunday the most of them went to the Methodists to communion. They had a big meeting which lasted 10 days about 10 miles from here.[15]

With Bishop Gross gone, Daniel Hoch could once again have been in line for the succession to the bishop's office, except that in 1842 two of the late Bishop Moyer's other sons had been ordained to the ministry. Abraham, the older, known as "Big Abe," was ruled out because of illness.[16] Dilman Moyer, however, like all the Moyers before him, stood solidly in the main traditions of the Moyer Church, which, in spite of the withdrawal of Gross, still struggled with its various factions.

Daniel Hoch and his followers, designated by himself as the prayer-minded group, stood out against the *gebetslose Teil der Gemeinde* or the non-praying group.[17] The non-praying group, however, saw it the other way around. After all, Daniel Hoch had already voiced non-support for the prayer veil, the traditional head-covering of worshipping Mennonite women, by supporting his wife, who had already discarded it. Holding themselves to these sacred traditional symbols and the conference prayer resolution of 1847, the followers of Dilman Moyer saw themselves on surer ground as far as prayer was concerned than the impulsive though extremely able and aggressive Hoch. Attempting to reconcile the two factions once again was Benjamin Eby, who in his later years had once again assumed the "bishop oversight." Three times in 1849, and at three levels, unity was sought and to an extent achieved: on May 25 within the congregation, on August 18 between Eby and Hoch, and on September 15 at the provincial conference with 28 out of 30 ministers, deacons, and

bishops in attendance. But every time relationships broke down again, with Hoch, Moyer, and their followers blaming each other.[18]

Hoch, however, would not be easily discouraged or silenced. Not only did he immediately establish relationships with Oberholtzer and Hunsicker of Pennsylvania as they entered Ontario in 1850, but he travelled extensively himself, especially in the small congregations and isolated districts where internal Mennonite neglect and outside Methodist influences prepared for him a ready audience. In 1853 all those interested in his work promised him sufficient financial support if he would become an itinerant minister in the churches. Two years later he organized the Conference Council of the United Mennonite Community of Canada West and Ohio for the purposes of home missions and evangelism.

Supporting Hoch were dissident groups in Waterloo, Lincoln, and York counties in Ontario and a newly organized congregation at Wadsworth, Ohio, led by Ephraim Hunsberger, whose members were Oberholtzer immigrant families from the east. Before the end of the 1850s, Hoch had established a fully organized "Home and Missionary Society of the Mennonites." Moreover, Hoch, Hunsberger, and Oberholtzer were sufficiently united to make even greater plans. They had come to the conclusion that reconciliation of the dissident groups with the mother church was not a likely possibility and so they proceeded to organize the General Conference of the Mennonite Churches of North America at West Point, Iowa, on May 28, 1860. Only three congregations were represented at that meeting but, with Oberholtzer as chairman, a plan of union was worked out, and on that basis eight congregations attended the second meeting at Wadsworth, Ohio, a year later.

It was an auspicious beginning, but there were problems ahead. One of the obstacles to a wide and solid union was once again fundamental disagreement on what constituted renewal. The newness represented by the General Conference was not quite what Hoch and others had in mind. The result was their later defection and the gradual formation of a second new Mennonite alliance. But some defections also benefited the new General Conference, namely dissident individuals and groups separating from the old Mennonites. With more immigrants arriving from Switzerland, Poland, Prussia and Russia, the Conference soon showed signs of becoming the second largest Mennonite grouping in North America (see Table 2).[19]

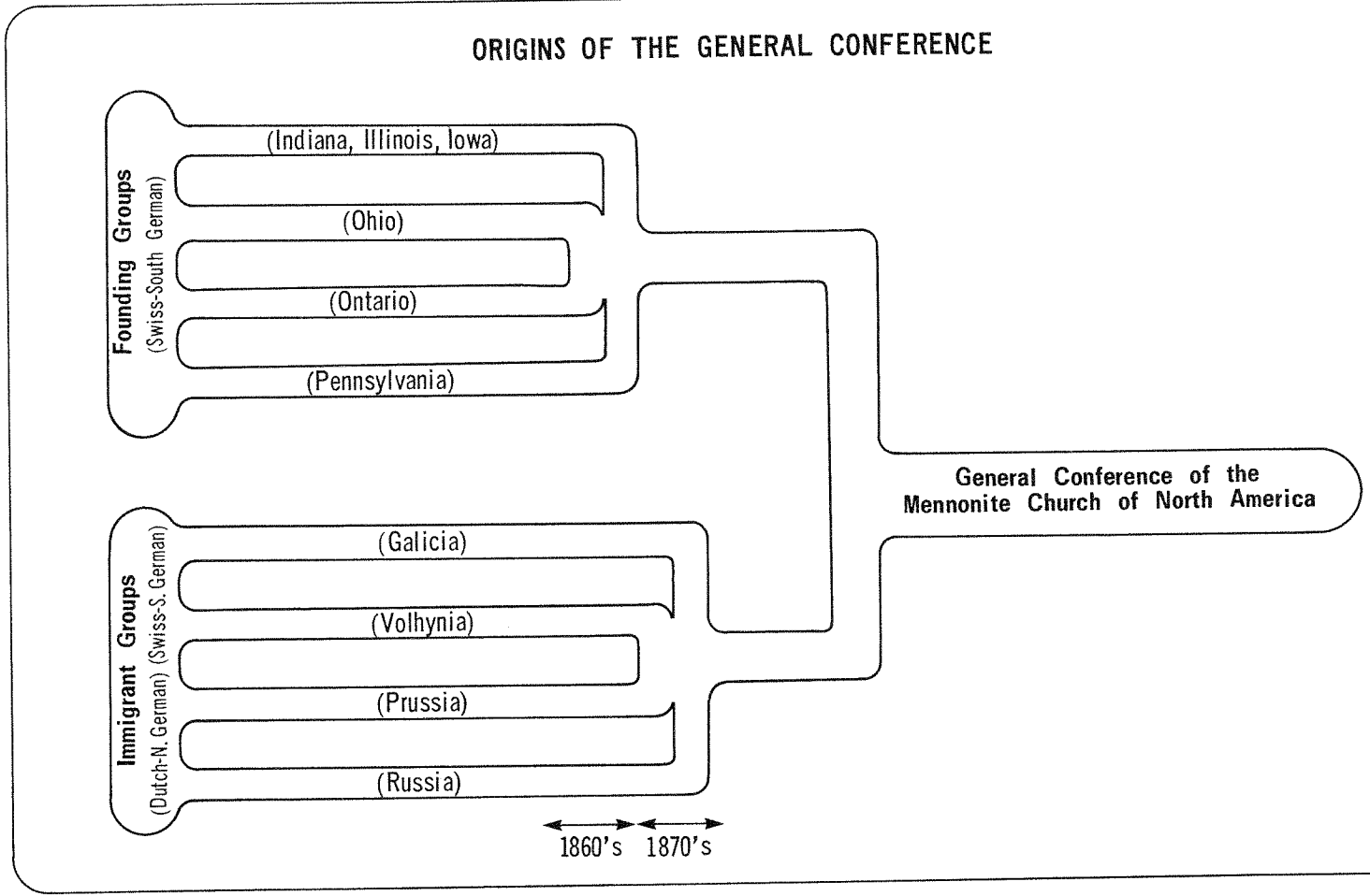

ORIGINS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE
Founding Groups
(Swiss-South German)
(Indiana, Illinois, Iowa)
(Ohio)
(Ontario)
(Pennsylvania)
Immigrant Groups
(Dutch-N. German) (Swiss-S. German)
(Galicia)
(Volhynia)
(Prussia)
(Russia)
1860's
1870's
General Conference of the
Mennonite Church of North America

TABLE 2

SUMMARY OF GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF MENNONITE CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA IN 1884

LOCATION	NO. OF CONGREGATIONS	MEMBERSHIP*
Ontario	1	30
Pennsylvania	15	1,290
Ohio	1	60
New York	2	60
Missouri	5	150
Kansas	9	1,620
Iowa	2	210
Indiana	1	180
Illinois	1	150
South Dakota	1	150
Total	38	3,900

* Based on votes at Tenth General Conference in 1884. The number of members in a church which could be represented by one vote was multiplied by 30.

The General Conference might very well have become the largest formation in North America except for several other forces at work. A minor factor was the presence of other schismatics. In Ohio, for instance, John Holdeman in 1859 began preaching the return to the true church, meaning the fundamental doctrines, the experience of the new birth, church discipline, and social separation. Very much in the tradition of John Herr of the Reformed Mennonites, he also formed a separate dominational group, which became known popularly as the Holdeman Church, although he named it the Church of God in Christ Mennonite.[20] In two decades Holdeman's influence was to extend to Canada, as will later be seen.

A second factor limiting the growth of the General Conference was the "awakening" which took place among the old Mennonites themselves. That story must be told later, but already in the 1860s the man who became "the outstanding leader of the [old] Mennonite Church in the nineteenth century" made his influence felt.[21] He was John F. Funk (1835–1930) of Elkhart, Indiana, whose ideas and initiatives had much in common with John

Oberholtzer. But, unlike Oberholtzer, Funk determined to stay with his brethren, and to bring "progress" to them no faster than they could bear it. Funk attributed many of his Oberholtzer-type ideas on Sunday school, evangelism and religious publication to D. L. Moody, a renowned American evangelist with whom he became associated in Chicago. Like Oberholtzer, Funk exerted much of his influence through a monthly periodical, which he started in 1864, but he did Oberholtzer one better by publishing his *Herald of Truth* in both English and German.

So great was the ferment of the time, however, that neither Oberholtzer, Holdeman nor Funk could together contain or direct all the stirrings in the church. As the General Conference brought together the groups dissenting from the old church and the old world, another new Mennonite alliance gathered up those renewal groups which, because of distance, leadership or differing point of view, did not readily relate to the General Conference. This grouping of new Mennonites arose in various places in Ontario and under several leaders between 1850 and 1860. All had common complaints — the church was too rigid and sterile, too formal in its worship, too reserved in its religious expression, and not sufficiently explicit in preaching the new birth. The dissenters also seemed to advocate a similar formula for renewing the church — more prayer meetings, more services in the evangelistic style, more preaching for a decisive verdict, a climactic conversion experience which in the imitation of the Methodist tradition meant more fire and brimstone, and, above all, better direction and organization.

The first locus of this new Mennonite movement, as has already been indicated, was at the Twenty in the 1840s with Daniel Hoch and his followers, though, as we have seen, Hoch chose to go the way of the General Conference, at least at first. In the 1850s a new centre arose at Markham where two men, despite their lack of ordination, felt the call to preach subsequent to their conversion. The followers of these two men, Abraham Raymer and Christian Troyer, gathered around them and in 1863 built the first church of the movement at Markham. In the Waterloo area small congregations of new Mennonites arose at Blair, New Dundee and Breslau. The adherents met, with or without ministers, mostly in homes to "sing, pray, and testify as the Holy Spirit would direct."[22]

This new Mennonite movement in Ontario remained one of the most isolated groups throughout the 1860s. But the "con-

version" of Solomon Eby, a preacher in the old Mennonite Church at Port Elgin in Bruce County for 11 years, both increased the number of supporters and added direction. Soon his whole congregation followed him in the new ways. The Mennonites in Waterloo County, who had heard rumours of the whole church in Port Elgin going Methodist, sent a delegation to investigate. Their favourable report reinforced similar tendencies in Waterloo County.

Bishop Joseph Hagey, who had succeeded Benjamin Eby upon his death in 1853, was not ready, however, to incorporate all the "new things." He refused, along with the majority of the church, to baptize some of the candidates instructed by Preacher Daniel Wismer who, like Solomon Eby, was a revivalist. After a year of special conferences and much haggling, the dissenters called Bishop John Lapp of Clarence Centre, New York, to come up and baptize those unacceptable to Hagey, and in 1871 Lapp consented to do so, wrongly assuming that the converts would none the less be incorporated into the old church.

Meanwhile, a similar struggle between the old and the new had surfaced in Northern Indiana, where Daniel Brenneman (1834–1889) was attempting to renew the church after the style and manner of Solomon Eby in Bruce County, Ontario. Brenneman, however, was even more able, eloquent, and aggressive, and at the same time popular. He was known as the preacher who spoke in English and who sang bass. Both the English sermon and four-part singing were progressive signs of the times. The aggressive and popular evangelist soon clashed, not only with "exceedingly conservative" people, but also with other, perhaps more moderate, progressives. The former were led by Bishop Jacob Wisler of the Yellow Creek congregation, where Brenneman was minister. Jacob Wisler, like John F. Funk, will re-enter our story as part of a later nineteenth-century theme.

The moderate progressives, who clashed with both the Wisler and Brenneman types, were led by Funk, the publisher-minister who had come to Elkhart from Chicago in 1867, hoping to renew the entire church. In 1872 Funk and Brenneman had shared the platform in what was called "the first revival compaign held in the Mennonite Church in the United States."[23] These two able men could, however, easily become rivals in the reform movement, which is precisely what happened. Funk chose to renew the old church from within; Brenneman ended up attempting to renew the church from without, though not entirely by his own

choice. He was strengthened in his position by Solomon Eby, with whom he conferred first when Eby visited Indiana and later when Brenneman was travelling in Ontario.

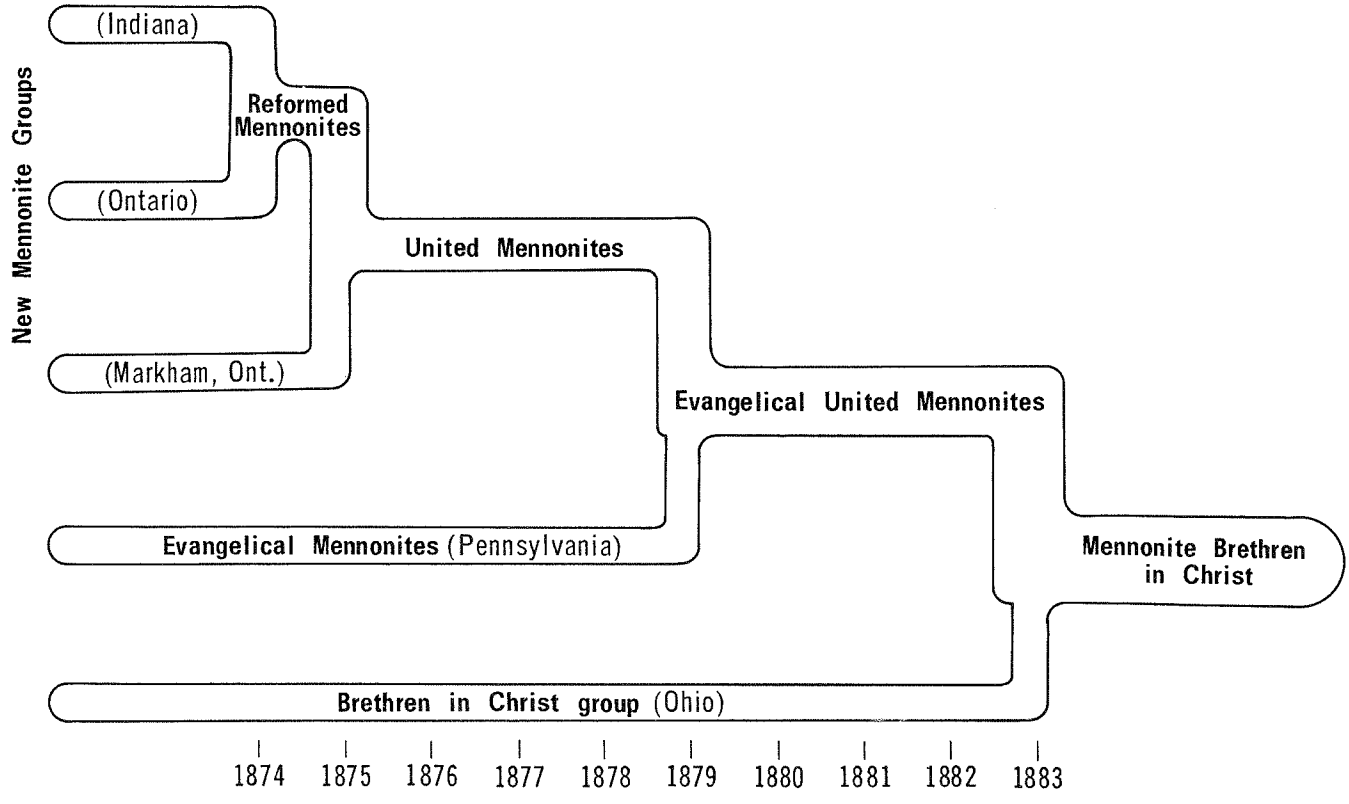
By 1873 both Eby and Brenneman were in trouble with their respective conferences, which disagreed not only with their revivalism and emotional Christianity but also with their independent methods of operating. Their cases and the issues they represented came up at respective meetings of the Ontario and Indiana conferences, with the result that in 1874 both were declared not to be conference members because of the dissension and disorder that resulted from their activities.

Immediately thereafter, on May 15, 1874, at a conference held in Berlin, Ontario, Eby and Brenneman organized their followers into the Reformed Mennonites, being similar in name though not in outlook to the Herrite group. The organization provided for Indiana and Ontario districts under the leadership of Brenneman and Eby respectively. The size of the separate group was approximately 500 adult members, including four ministers and three deacons in Ontario and two ministers in Indiana. A year later, at a Union Conference held at Bloomingdale during March 23 and 24, 1875, the new Mennonites, officially so called, of the Markham area joined with the Reformed Mennonites to form the United Mennonites.

That three-day conference based the union on "the Word of God as contained in the Old and New Testaments, and a synopsis of the Word of God" as contained in the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. In addition it spelled out its emphasis on revival meetings, the acceptance only of those who had experienced conversion, the missionary cause, prayer and fellowship meetings, Sunday schools, house visitations and family worship. Negatively, the union conference spoke out on membership in secret organizations, the manufacture, sale and use of spirituous liquors, the use of tobacco, unbecoming modes of dress, foolish talking and jesting and attendance at wordly amusements.

The separation from the old church and the formation of the new movement was not without blame cast in both directions.[24] The new Mennonites insisted that Brenneman and Eby had been excommunicated without good reason, there having been no immoral conduct. They were guilty only of having progressive ideas, being a generation ahead of their time, and being zealous in missions and evangelism. The old Mennonites, on the other hand, remembered that English preaching, Sunday schools, prayer meet-

THE FORMATION OF THE MENNONITE BRETHREN IN CHRIST



ings and spiritual awakenings had all happened and been tolerated before the new Mennonites had come along. According to them the cleavage was caused not so much by "particular activities" but by "the spirit in which they were undertaken and the disposition behind them." Two historians of the respective groups agreed on one thing:

> Had a little more tolerance and patience been exercised on both sides at the time, the division might perhaps have been avoided.[25]

In 1879 the United Mennonites, meeting at Blair, incorporated the Evangelical Mennonites of Pennsylvania (the Gehman group), the resulting union being called the Evangelical United Mennonites. In 1883 an Ohio faction of the Brethren in Christ (Tunker) group, which had also been fragmenting in similar ways, joined the group and the more permanent name of Mennonite Brethren in Christ was adopted. At that point the new denomination had about 1647 members (see Table 3).[26]

TABLE 3

SUMMARY OF MENNONITE BRETHREN IN CHRIST IN 1883

DISTRICT	APPOINTMENTS*	MEMBERS
Ontario	43	909
Indiana-Ohio-Michigan	22	452
Pennsylvania	14	286
Total	79	1,647

* Congregations and mission points

The membership of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ was increasing rapidly, not only because of defection from the old Church but also because of new converts. The ministers of the new group went about preaching with great zeal. Open-air "field" and "bush" meetings were common, and the results were immediately consolidated in the formation of congregations under the supervision of strong, centrally organized conferences whose Methodist-type superintendents wielded an oversight and direction stronger than any of the Mennonite bishops.

Why didn't the two new Mennonite movements, the General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, join their forces in a common organization? They had much in common — emphasis on evangelism, missions, publications, organization, trained ministry, education and vigorous opposition to secret societies. It should be noted that there was some fellowship between the two groups in the early stages, until Daniel Hoch and his followers withdrew from the General Conference. The parting and permanent separation seem to have been for several reasons. The new Mennonite movement represented by the General Conference occurred earlier and reached an ecumenical peak at least 20 years before that of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. Besides, the main locus of the former movement was in the United States while that of the latter was in Canada.

There were also, however, real differences in emphasis and direction, as real as the differences between Oberholtzer and those like Gehman in Pennsylvania and Solomon Eby, who later left the Mennonite Brethren in Christ to join the Pentecostals in Ontario. Most important, the General Conference movement sought very consciously to temper its reform activity with a strong emphasis on maintaining the Mennonite tradition.[27] The Mennonite Brethren in Christ, by contrast, would with time largely abandon that tradition, including the pacifist position. These differences in orientation gave direction to future Mennonite developments and identities. Accordingly, in the next century the General Conference and the old Mennonites would come closer together once again to become champions of the Mennonite heritage, while the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, by their own choice, would not only drop their name but would move outside the Mennonite family altogether.

FOOTNOTES

1. H. P. Krehbiel, *History of the Mennonite General Conference*, Vol. I (Canton, Ohio: published by the author, 1898), p. 8.
2. See p. 38.
3. Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River* (Boston, 1958). On the revivalist movement which especially influenced Upper Canada see: Whitney R. Cross, *The Burnt-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950).

4. A general survey is provided in: S. D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948).
5. On the American concept of denomination see especially: Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). For comments on the use of the term "denomination" in Canada see: H. H. Walsh, "The Challenge of Canadian Church History of its Historians," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, V (1959); and his "A Canadian Christian Tradition," in J. W. Grant, ed., *The Churches and the Canadian Experience* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963); cf. John W. Grant, "Asking Questions of the Canadian Past," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, I (1955).
6. "Reformed Mennonite Church," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, IV, p. 268. Interpretations of this schism have by no means been uniform but tend to correspond to denominational commitments. For example, see: Leland Harder, *op. cit.*; H. P. Krehbiel, *op. cit.*; Robert Friedmann, *op. cit.*; J. C. Wenger, *op. cit.*, and his *History of the Mennonites of Franconia Conference, op. cit.*; Edmund G. Kaufman, *The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest Among Mennonites of North America* (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1931); F. Pannabecker, "The Development of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America in the American Environment," (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1944); "Oberholtzer Division Issue," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLVI (October 1972). See also: Wilmer J. Eshelman, "History of the Reformed Mennonite Church," *Lancaster County Historical Society*, XLIX (1945), pp. 85–116.
7. Krehbiel, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
8. "An das Publikum . . . ," *Oberholtzer Papers*, May 1, 1851 (MSHL).
9. J. C. Wenger, *Franconia Conference, op. cit.*, p. 359.
10. J. Boyd Cressman, "First Mennonite Church, Kitchener," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XIII (July 1939), pp. 159–86.
11. Cressman, *op. cit.*
12. Conference Resolutions in Waterloo at Benjamin Eby's Meeting House, May 28, 1842 (CGC and AMC).
13. Conference Resolutions, Ontario Mennonite Conference, 1847–1928 (CGC and AMC).
14. Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
15. Letter from Dilman Moyer to Jacob Gross, Stouffville, P.O., September 6, 1849 (CGC).
16. Burkholder, *op. cit.*, p. 301.
17. Daniel Hoch, "Wichtige Begebenheitem . . . in Bezug der Trennung unserer Gemeinden," September 30, 1868 (CGC).
18. *Ibid.* See also: "Die Scheidewand" in the *Daniel Hoch Papers* in the CGC Archives. Also see: L. J. Burkholder postcript to letter

from Dilman Moyer to Jacob Gross, *op. cit.* Also, L. J. Burkholder, *op. cit.*, pp. 142ff.

19. Krehbiel, *op. cit.*, pp. 380–81.
20. John Holdeman, *A History of the Church of God as it Existed from the Beginning, Whereby it May be Known, and How it was Propagated Until the Present Time* (Lancaster, Pa.: John Baer's Sons, 1876); Clarence Hiebert, *The Holdeman People: The Church of God in Christ Mennonite, 1859–1969* (South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1973).
21. Quote from "John Fretz Funk," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, II, pp. 421–23.
22. Everek R. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church* (Elkhart, Ind.: Bethel Publishing Company, 1958), p. 34.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 46–7; Burkholder, *op. cit.*, pp. 191–93.
25. Burkholder, *op. cit.*, p. 192; Jasper Abraham Huffman, ed., *History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church* (New Carlisle, Ont.: Bethel Publishing Company, 1958), p. 37.
26. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, p. 603.
27. Harder, *op. cit.*