

Detroit River, Windsor

Bishop E.L. Frey turned back at the border

In November 1916, Ohio Bishop Elias L. Frey tried to

enter Ontario to conduct revival meetings at the Blake Amish Mennonite Church in Huron County. When the border inspector asked about his position on recruitment for the war, he declared his belief that war was wrong and that he would preach against it.

The inspector did not deport Bishop Frey and his companions officially, but advised them to return to the United States voluntarily, which they did.

The First World War was the cause of the first real tightening of the Canadian-U.S. border, which had previously been mostly permeable. Report of the incident in The Globe of Toronto. The article inaccurately reported that the group had been "deported."

MENNONITES DEPORTED: OPPOSED TO RECRUITING

Party Planned to Hold Series of "Revival" Meetings in Huron County

mitting that their mission in Canada was to discourage recruiting among young men in Huron county, where a series of "revivals" had been plauned, ten workers of the Mennonite religious sect were turned back to Detroit by Canadian immigration cials to-day. The party, consisting of six men and four women, was headed by "Bishop" John Fry. farmer, who claims to be the leader of the Mennonite denomination the States of the Middle West and in western Ontario. by officials, "Bishop" Fry the Mennonites were opposed to war under any circumstances, and that if a member of that Church enlisted he would be promptly excommunicated. Chief Immigration Inspector Reyn-

olds took the party in hand on hear-

ing that revival meetings had blanned for the express purpose

An excerpt from Bishop Frey's version of the incident in the Mennonite newspaper Gospel Herald, January 18, 1917

We were 9 grown persons and one child in our party. We started from home to Ontario and were barred at Detroit, and then went to Huron Co., Mich. We were too many in our party; this attracted attention. One of our party was taken into a private room and asked where we were going, and what our purpose was. swer: "We are going to Canada on a visit and to hold meetings." Then the first party was dismissed and I was called

Question to me: "What is the nature of those meetings you expect to hold?"

Ans. "They are religious."

Q. "What do you think of this war over here?"

A. "We take no part in it."

Q. "What is your attitude toward war? what do you believe about war?"

A. "We believe that war is wrong."

Q. "What do you believe in regard to recruiting?"

"We take no part in it."

"Would you advocate it?"
"No sir."

"Would you rather discourage it?"

"We certainly do among our brethren."

"If one of your members would volunteer, what would you do with him?"

"We would dismiss him from mem-

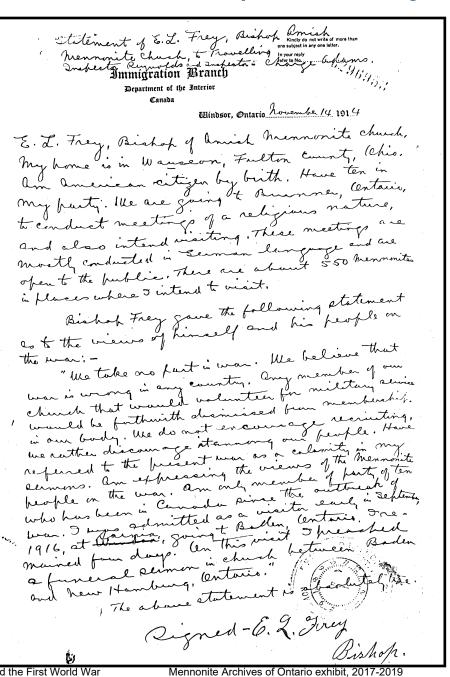
bership."

Many other questions were asked, but these are the chief ones. The officer finally said, "Do not think we are de-porting you. We are only advising. If you knew the danger you are exposing yourself to you would not go. Better wait until the war is over, then come preach all you want. We believe that war is wrong, just as well as you do; but we are officers of this government and must do our duty."

Statement of E.L. Frey at the Windsor border crossing:

"We take no part in war. We believe that war is wrong in any country. Any member of our church that would volunteer for military service would be forthwith dismissed from membership in our body.

We do not encourage recruiting, we rather discourage it among our people. [I] have referred to the present war as a calamity in my sermons. [I] am expressing the views of the Mennonite people in the war."



Kindly do not write of more than

In your reply

1236:15

Immigration: Branch

Department of the Interior

Canada

Windsor, Ontario November 14th 916.

Today their appeared at Windsor a party of ten Mennonites, destined to Brunner, Onterio, and other points in that district.

The party was headed by E.L. Frey, Bishop of the Mennonite Church. On examination he clearly stated that his church did not encourage recruiting, but rather discouraged it, and further stated that any member of his church volunteering for military service would be forthwith dismissed from membership.

After discussing the matter with Travelling Inspector D.H.Reynolds, I thought it wise to refuse them admission on account of the views, expressed by the bishop, regarding recruiting and volunteering. I also read over, very carefully, the letter sent me on October 13th, 1916, in reference to Bible Students Association and thought your views expressed therein should apply in this case--refusing entry under war messures regulations. They were not served with Form B as they voluntarily returned to the United States.

Enc.

Attached is signed statement of Bishop Frey.

I am sending this along for your information as I am under the impression this matter will be taken up with the Department.

Your obedient servant

Inspector in Charge.

W. D. Scott, Egg. Superintendent of Immigration, Ottawa, Ontario.