

Date: April 24/75

Place: 174 East Ave., Kitchener

Participant: Elven Shantz

Pre-War

- was a CO during W.W.I; but at that time there was no alternative service program - the CO's were simply exempted from military service and could stay at home; this exposed them to much public harassment and antagonism, eg. he recalls one evening when a fellow was forcefully dragged to a recruiting office by a group of about a dozen ladies
- in response to the needs arising out of the war a relief program was organized; this later grew into the Non-Resistant Relief Organization, which carried on relief work in W.W.II

War

- around 1939, as it became more evident that there was going to be conscription, the Conference of Historic Peace Churches was organized to represent the cause of the conscientious objectors to the government, ie. its creation was in response to that particular need and its function was to act as the official liaison between the Mennonites and the government
- the CHPC initially began as an Ontario effort and only later was there correspondence with the western Mennonites; one of the barriers to understanding the different positions was that of language - the western, Russian Mennonites spoke German, whereas the local Mennonites spoke English
- even provincially, though, there were some difficulties - the more conservative Mennonites, ie.. Old Order and Amish, were not anxious to have any kind of organization - so they were less than enthusiastic in their support for the CHPC
- the original aim of the CHPC was to ensure that the govt. would honour the Order-in-Council granting military exemption to the Mennonites; due to public pressure, however, the govt. was not willing to grant complete military exemption and suggested that there be some sort of alternative service
- at first, the CHPC was not too enthusiastic about this suggestion - but they finally decided to accept it; apparently, E.I. McLoughrie [*i.e.* McLoughry] was influential in persuading the CHPC to go along with the idea of A.S.W. camps - he told Shantz that they would be able to get farm leaves for the boys, anyway; Shantz had great words of praise for the work that McLoughrie did on behalf of the Mennonites
- the CHPC and the Military Problems Committee were aware that the work at Montreal River was not very significant - but this was a government decision and one which they could not argue against
- they were also aware that not all the boys at camp were CO's ie. that they were not really conscientious objectors; the aim of the CHPC was simply to make it possible for all sons of Mennonites not to have to go to war
- the CHPC and the MPC made a conscious effort to deal honestly and openly with the govt., but always trying to gain any concessions they could