



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

(Special Despatch to The Globe.)

Windsor, Nov. 16.—Frankly admitting that their mission in Canada was to discourage recruiting among young men in Huron county, where a series of "revivals" had been planned, ten workers of the Mennonite religious sect were turned back to Detroit by Canadian immigration officials to-day. The party, consisting of six men and four women, was headed by "Bishop" John Fry, an Indiana farmer, who claims to be the leader of the Mennonite denomination in the States of the Middle West and in western Ontario. When questioned by officials, "Bishop" Fry declared 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 Reynolds took the party in hand on hearing that revival meetings had been planned for the express purpose of hindering recruiting, and made out

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. Answer: "We are going to Canada on a visit and to hold meetings." Then the first party was dismissed and I was called in.

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?"

A. "We take no part in it."

Q. "Would you advocate it?"

A. "No sir."

Q. "Would you rather discourage it?"

A. "We certainly do among our brethren."

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

A. "We would dismiss him from membership."

Many other questions were asked, but these are the chief ones. The officer finally said, "Do not think we are deporting 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 and 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.”

Statement of E.L. Frey, Bishop Amish  
 Mennonite Church, travelling  
 Inspector Reynolds and Inspector  
 Immigration Branch  
 Department of the Interior  
 Canada

Kindly do not write of more than  
 one subject in any one letter.  
 In your reply  
 refer to No. 10-916/1111

Windsor, Ontario November 14, 1914

E. L. Frey, Bishop of Amish Mennonite church,  
 My home is in Wauseon, Fulton County, Ohio.  
 Am American citizen by birth. Have ten in  
 my party. We are going to Brantford, Ontario,  
 to conduct meetings of a religious nature,  
 and also intend visiting. These meetings are  
 mostly conducted in German language and are  
 open to the public. There are about 5-50 Mennonites  
 in places where I intend to visit.

Bishop Frey gave the following statement  
 as to the views of himself and his people on  
 the war: -

"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. Have  
 referred to the present war as a calamity in my  
 sermons. Am expressing the views of the Mennonite  
 people on the war. Am only member of party of ten  
 who has been in Canada since the outbreak of  
 war. I was admitted as a visitor early in September  
 1914, at ~~Windsor~~ <sup>Brantford</sup>, Ontario. One -  
 remained four days. On this visit I preached  
 a funeral sermon in church between Baden  
 and New Hamburg, Ontario."

The above statement is absolutely true.

Signed - E. L. Frey  
 Bishop.

*Note 30*

Kindly do not write of more than one subject in any one letter.

In your reply refer to No. 429

Immigration Branch

Department of the Interior  
Canada

112303151

Windsor, Ontario November 14th 1916.

OGA  
*Mr. F. O. Blais*

Sir:-

Today they appeared at Windsor a party of ten Mennonites, destined to Brunner, Ontario, 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.

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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 measures 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,

*W. D. Scott*

Inspector in Charge.

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

