



# Part I: Speaking through interviews



In the fall of 2015, in collaboration with Laureen Harder-Gissing of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Dr. Marlene Epp's undergraduate class in Mennonite History at Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo undertook an assignment to create a museum-ready profile of an Ontario Conscientious Objector ("CO") from the Second World War.

Each of these COs participated in Alternative Service, a wartime program created by the Canadian government in consultation with historic peace churches in Canada.

Each student was matched with a CO who was interviewed by then graduate student David Fransen in the mid-1970s. From the

digitized oral interviews, students extracted basic information, anecdotes, and reflections that appear in this exhibit.

They also chose a suitable photograph from the Archives' significant collections on the CO experience, created a heading for their individual profile, and crafted a question that they would have liked to have asked "their CO." This was an exercise in applied history while learning about the stories of some Canadians who said "no" to war.

Mennonite History (Hist 247) students with David Fransen and Dr. Marlene Epp (seated), and Archivist Laureen Harder-Gissing (standing, far right) in November 2015. On the table are materials used to research this exhibit.





# CONCHIES SPEAK

Ontario Mennonites in Alternative Service 1941-1946

Approximately 30 years after their experience of Alternative Service during the Second World War, 34 former COs agreed to tell their stories. Over the course of the interviews, several themes emerged.

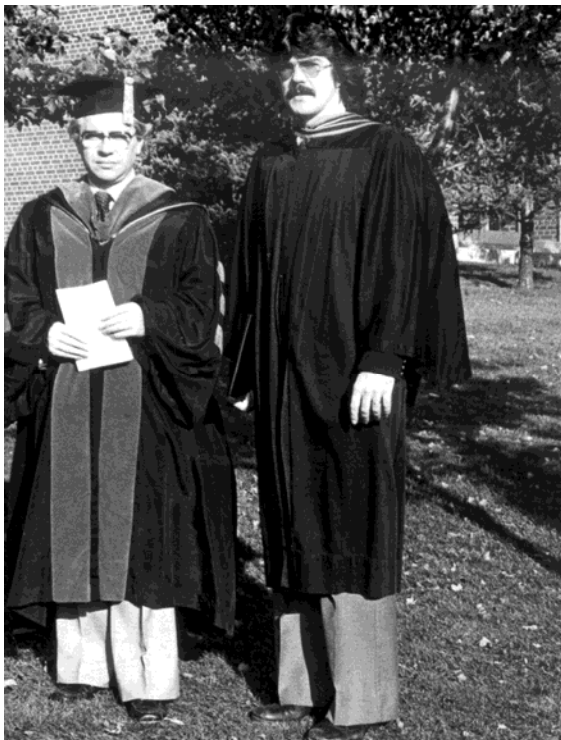
First, the ability of these young men to testify before a magistrate as to the reasons for their refusal to bear arms varied greatly. Some had grown up within homes, churches and communities that had prepared them with the conviction and the language to speak compellingly. For others, their belief in nonresistance was more rote than real.

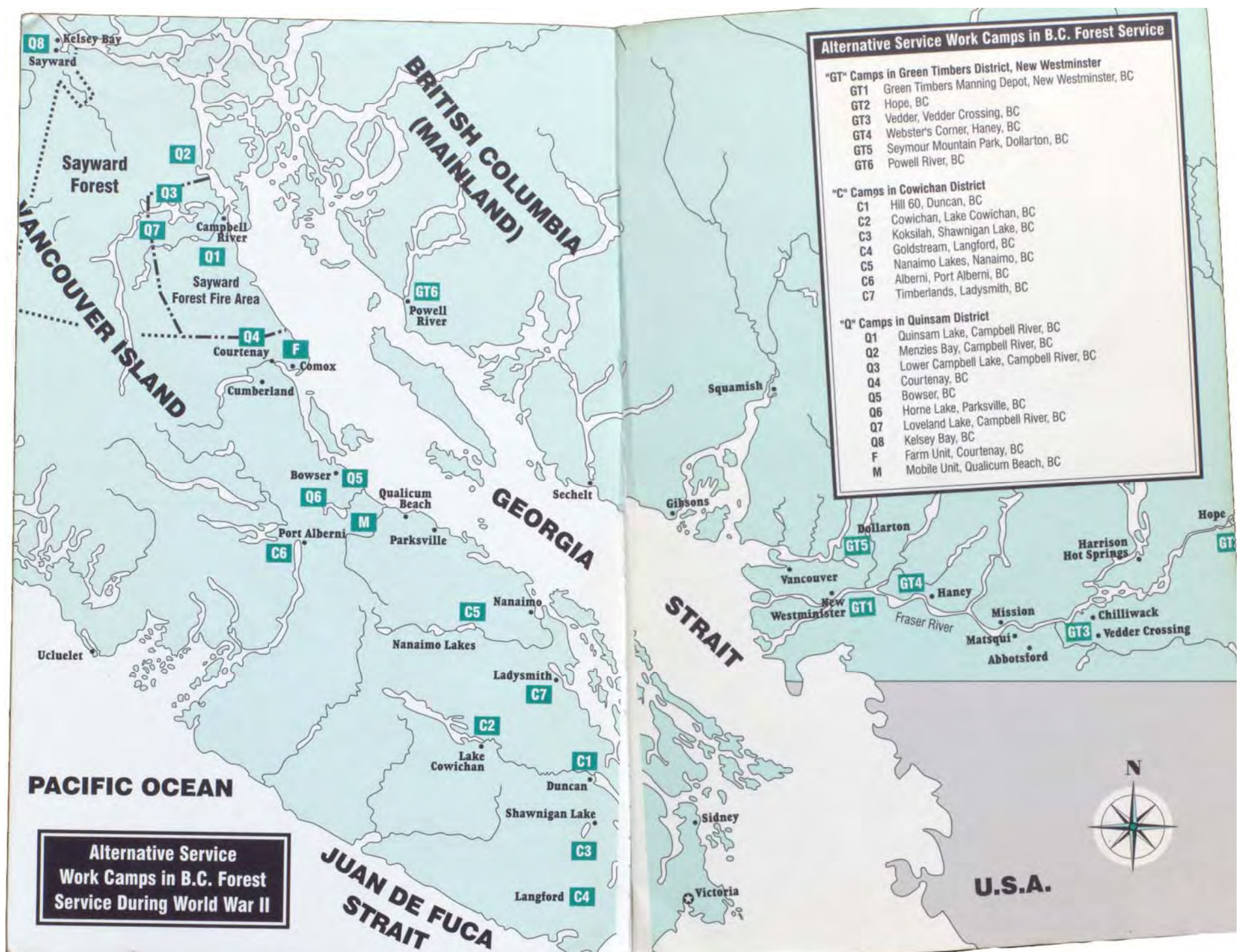
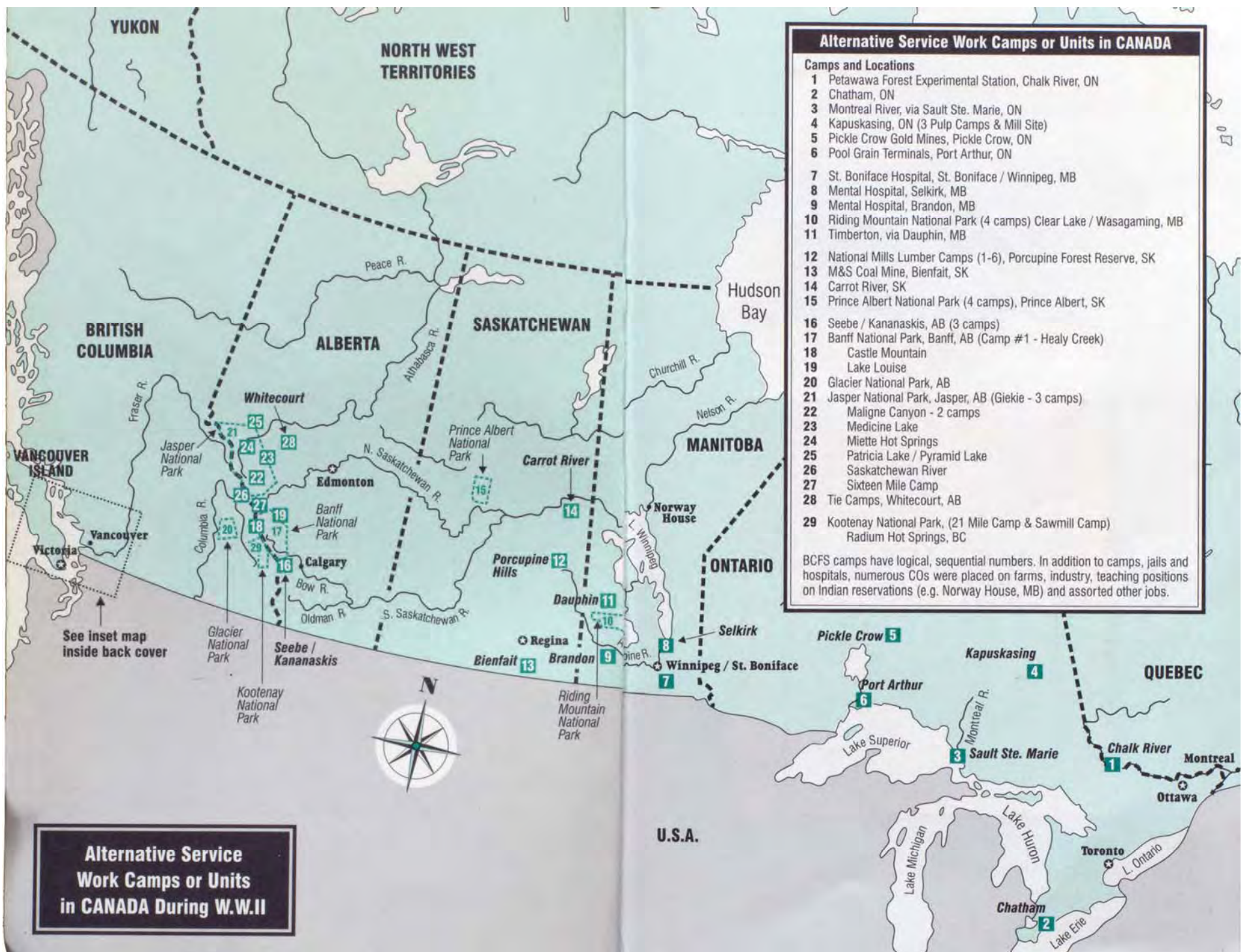
Secondly their experience in the camps opened their eyes in new ways to the world around them, and to themselves.

Thirdly, many of these young men returned home with a conviction that they had a duty to look beyond themselves to a world in need, a world which could benefit from their help. Alternative Service was transformed into lives of service.

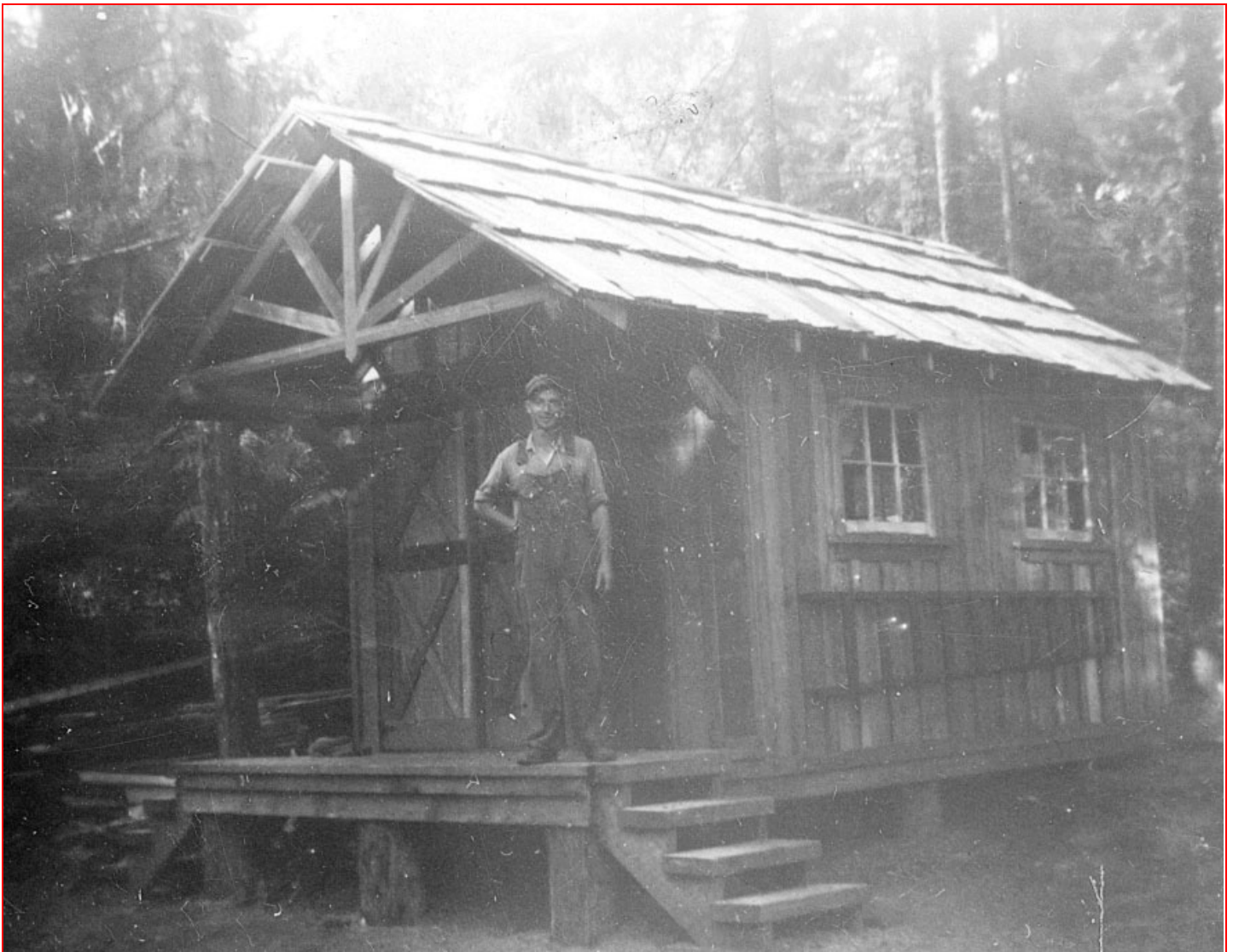
David Fransen, 2015

Left: Dr. Frank H. Epp and David Fransen, Epp directed Fransen's oral history interviews with COs in 1974-75. Below: Oral history project materials in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario.





Maps from A.J. Klassen, *Alternative Service for Peace*



*Leonard A. Bechtel*  
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by Michelle Truong

# Leonard “Len” Bechtel

**Born** 1916 to Owen and Melissa Bechtel,  
raised on a farm in Wilmot Township

**Married** Nora Brubacher, 1941

## **Work & education:**

Following Grade 8, worked as a carpenter  
After the war, founded L.A. Bechtel Construction

**Church life:** Member of Mannheim Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Emory Creek Alternative Service Work Camp, 1942  
Cowichan Alternative Service Work Camp, 1942-1943  
Portable Sawmill Project, Vancouver & Victoria, 1943



### **An interesting fact :**

Len was chosen with a group of Alternative Service men to design and build portable sawmills to cut wood during a fuel shortage caused by the war.



### **The photograph :**

Len Bechtel with a building he built at Lake Cowichan



### **My question:**

Do you think that if you were a single man without a child that your Alternative Service experience would have differed, especially in terms of homesickness?

**“I think maybe I size it up this way: don’t do something where your conscience is going to bother you, where you can’t do it with a clear conscience.”**

Len Bechtel grew up learning about nonresistance largely from church, as did his wife, Nora. She remembers, “Every quarter of Sunday School had a lesson on nonresistance. It was just ingrained on us from the time we could read.” Bechtel had a general acceptance of nonresistance and viewed it as “a natural thing.” In his family, the nonresistant stance was assumed. “As Mennonites, you don’t go to war . . . you don’t take up arms.”

Reflecting on his experience, Bechtel provides the following answer to how he would advise a young person: “Do whatever his personal feelings are on that. . . . Some are more sensitive and if it bothers them . . . to take up arms, I’d say he shouldn’t go into the army . . . if they feel that they’re fighting for a cause like for their country, I don’t think I’d try and change their thinking. . . . I think maybe I size it up this way: don’t do something where your conscience is going to bother you, where you can’t do it with a clear conscience.”

Listening in, Nora recalls “as the fellows come back, you just plain wanted to forget about that and try to pick up life here at home.” But years later, she can see how the Alternative Service experience “made bigger persons out of us.”



Siblings Dave, Martha and Norma pose in front of their father's exhibit profile. Dave is holding a binder of letters and photographs that his parents exchanged while Len was in Alternative Service. Norma is holding her father's firefighter identification tag. The couple made the boxes (below) to hold their letters. The family donated these items to the Archives after viewing the exhibit.







*Peter Heufeld.*  
Signature of Registrant

by James  
Loewen

# Peter Neufeld

**Born** 1918 to Gerhard and Marie Neufeld  
in Paulsheim, Molotschna, South Russia  
Immigrated to Ontario in 1926 and settled in Vineland

**Married** Kaethe Peters, 1942

## **Work & education:**

Graduated high school, worked in farming

**Church life:** Member of Vineland United Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941-1942

### **An interesting fact :**



Neufeld had a passion for flying and had his heart set on becoming a commercial pilot until he realized this would increase the chance that he would be called into the Air Force in the event of war.



### **The photograph :**

Hand drilling at Montreal River, 1942



### **My question:**

Do you regret not learning to fly, or do you feel that even after the war you would have been conscripted into military service had you become a pilot?

# **“In my family nonresistance was kind of indoctrinated because my father was killed through violence.”**

For Peter Neufeld, being nonresistant is central to his identity because of his direct experience with violence. In 1917, Russia became enveloped in a revolution and civil war which resulted in the formation of the Soviet Union. Various groups attacked Mennonite settlements.

During one of these attacks, Neufeld’s father was shot at the family home. Seeing the violence involved with firearms led his family to “indoctrinate” him in nonresistance. He says his family “didn’t even want me to have a shotgun or .22 to go hunting rabbits because of the violence involved with firearms.”

Mennonites in Russia refused to bear arms, however the Russian state required some form of service in times of both peace and war. Mennonites negotiated alternative forms of service, primarily non-combatant medical service or working in the forestry service. Neufeld’s father served his alternate service largely as a stretcher bearer for the Russian Red Cross to help the wounded during the First World War in 1916 and 1917.

The Second World War was the first time Mennonites in Canada were required to perform alternative service. The Russian Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s had experience with alternative service going back to the 19th century.



*Otto Giesbrecht*  
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By Svetomir  
Ignjatovic

# Otto Giesbrecht

**Born** 1919 in Molotschna, South Russia,  
immigrated first to Manitoba  
then settled in Ontario in 1937

## **Work & education:**

Attended Canadian Mennonite Bible College  
then worked in construction

## **Church life:**

Member of the Vineland United Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941-1942

### **An interesting fact :**



With his wife Mary, Otto volunteered with Mennonite Central Committee as house parents in Asuncion, Paraguay, 1954-1956

### **The photograph :**



Alternative Service workers from Ontario at Montreal River inside their sleeping tent. Left to right: Aaron Weber, Melvin Brubacher, unknown, Orlan Martin, Menno Wideman, 1941

### **My question:**



You spoke about a doctor at Montreal River who was an outspoken critic of conscientious objectors and treated you badly. Was he an exception, or was this common behaviour?

**“I had promised my Lord that I would want to follow in His steps. . . . and on that day since I never considered shouldering a gun if there was another way.”**

Otto Giesbrecht is an active supporter of service programs because of his faith and his own experiences, both during war and in times of peace. A decade after his Alternative Service at Montreal River, he and his wife spent two years volunteering as house parents in Asunción, Paraguay. These experiences had a powerful impact on his life and he values them greatly.

Regarding the Mennonite peace stance, Giesbrecht says “we could have a much stronger witness if we made ourselves heard and seen not only when the sabre rattles.” Mennonites should work to make their peace position clearer to the government and to Canadians so that it is apparent that these beliefs are always with them, and that they don’t follow these beliefs only when it suits them.

He speaks of a dream to someday “see a program initiated by the Mennonites offering to the government a service of two years for every able bodied young man to give for humanitarian purposes either in this land or abroad, as the Canadian government might see fit.” He has tried to gain support from Mennonite community leaders with limited success, but he won’t give up. He believes “if the Canadian government saw that Mennonites are committed to service in times of peace as well as war “our testimony would be stronger and it would ring just a little truer.”



*Raymond M. Good*  
Signature of Registrant

by Eric McAlister

# Raymond “Ray” Good

**Born** 1920 to Jacob and Sarah “Irene” Good  
in St. Jacobs

## **Work & education:**

Attended two years of high school and took other courses,  
Mechanic at his father’s shop, Good’s Garage, in St. Jacobs

## **Church life:**

Member of St. Jacobs Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941  
Cowichan & Goldstream Alternative Service Work Camps, 1942-1944  
Building portable sawmills in Vancouver, 1943-1944



### **An interesting fact :**

Ray’s brother served in Alternative Service at Montreal River, but then opted to join the Air Force



### **The photograph :**

Ray Good describes building the Goldstream (Langford) camp recreation hall and chapel from materials found in the forest, 1942



### **My question:**

Did your brother’s decision to join the Air Force affect your relationship with him once the war ended?



**“We felt that we were really  
serving our country as well as  
our Lord in what we were doing  
. . . and I still have a good feeling  
about it.”**

Ray Good’s experiences in Montreal River and British Columbia paint two very different pictures. When Ray left home for Montreal River in July of 1941 he was excited, calling it “a thrill to think that we were going to work on the Trans-Canada Highway.” However, his four months there were defined by the slow pace of the work and feelings of not making great progress. Ray never regarded the work as bad but a lack of modern equipment, isolation from cities and visitors, and the anticipation of returning home did not make for a fulfilling experience.

During his British Columbia experience, Ray was able to help fight forest fires, plant trees, and build portable sawmills that supplied schools with wood they would use for fuel. Even though he was unable to go home for almost a full two years, Ray was still able to take satisfaction from his work because of the tangible results he saw, especially building the sawmills. He says the process “gave us a feeling that we were really doing something worthwhile because schools were reopening. . . . It kind of gave you a good feeling when you know that you were doing something worthwhile.”



*David H Jantzi*  
Signature

by Marina Vrebac

# David K. Jantzi

**Born** 1916 to Solomon and Sarah Jantzi  
in Milverton

**Married** Lavina Kuepfer, 1940

**Work & education:**  
Cabinet maker by trade

**Church life:**  
Raised Old Order Amish,  
became a Western Ontario Mennonite Conference pastor

**Alternative Service:**  
Seymour Mountain Park Alternative Service Work Camp,  
1942-1943



**An interesting fact :**

Pastor of Riverdale Mennonite Church, 1948-1982



**The photograph :**

David Jantzi (far right) and friends examining the identification tags they were assigned by the British Columbia Forest Service, 1942 (*photo courtesy Mennonite Heritage Centre*)



**My question:**

You said you regretted that the church did not fully explain the peace stance. How would you change this so that young people today would have a better understanding of what it means to be a C.O.?

# **“Nonresistance is much deeper than not going to war. There are other ways to derive a peaceful attitude.”**

David Jantzi came from an Old Order Amish family. With this upbringing, he was “instructed at a very young age that it was wrong to participate in warfare.” However, Jantzi was not quite convinced of these ideals. He felt an obligation to choose Alternative Service because “the church required it,” it was just the way of their tradition to be conscientious objectors in times of warfare. He was married with a young son before he left for Alternative Service, and the uncertainty of how long he would be absent weighed heavily on his mind. It was only in his second year of service that he felt that the C.O. conviction became his own.

His experience in Alternative Service informed Jantzi’s work as a pastor. He “regretted that the church didn’t give us as young people a deeper, spiritual understanding of why we were doing this, and I hope as a minister that I’m able to be true” to the Mennonite peace stance.



*Doug. Miller*  
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by Jeannie  
Bairos

# Doug Millar

**Born** 1920 to Fred and Ida Millar in Kitchener, grew up on a farm outside of town

## **Work & education:**

Graduated from high school, worked in insurance

## **Church life:**

Member of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941  
Agricultural service in southern Ontario, 1941-1944



### **An interesting fact :**

Millar's C.O. experience led to more community involvement after the war. He was a member of the first board of Conrad Grebel College in the 1960s.



### **The photograph :**

Donald Millar, Gordon Eby, Bob Rahn, Doug Millar. The Millar brothers were conscientious objectors; their friends joined the Air Force.



### **My question:**

You said that you are impressed by the depth of knowledge that young people today (in the 1970s) have on conscientious objection. Do you think you and others had a trailblazing effect on future generations?

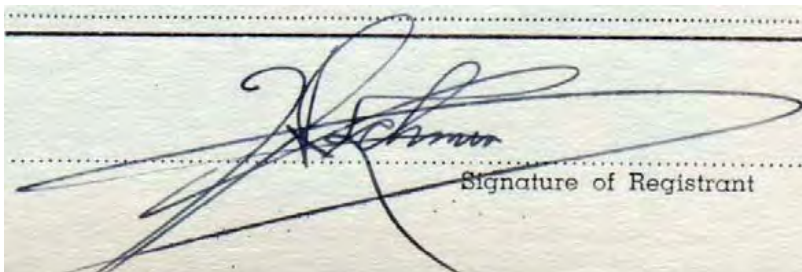
# **“The older I get, the more I think war is an absolute crime against humanity.”**

In the summer of 1941, Doug Miller was among those sent to the Montreal River camp. He recalls that the camp was “ill prepared” for their arrival. While the “Mennonite boys worked hard,” he believes their efforts could have been applied to more relevant work.

Due to the remoteness of the camp and the many different denominational groups represented, “at first religious life was very irregular.” Eventually, visiting Mennonite clergy provided a unified religious program. It was a confusing time for all concerned and Millar recalls that for him and many other youths “all the doctrinal, theological stuff” was not “straightened out in our heads.”

Thirty-five years later it was clear that Millar had time to get his peace stance “all sorted out.” He also expresses his awareness that his time in Alternative Service should not be taken for granted, as “others who felt the same way . . . didn’t have the exemption we had.”



  
Signature of Registrant

by Daniel  
Penner



# Harold Schmidt

**Born** 1920 to Abraham and Clara Schmidt  
in Baden, Ontario

## **Work & education:**

Graduated high school and took  
university courses in business and economics,  
worked in a bank and managed the family farm

**Church life:** Member of Shantz Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941  
Seymour Mountain Park Alternative Service Work Camp, 1942-1943



### **An interesting fact:**

After the war, Schmidt became prominently involved with the Mennonite Aid Union and Mennonite Benefit Association



### **The photograph :**

Alternative Service workers pose with non-conscientious objector camp staff (Harold Schmidt at right), 1942



### **My question:**

Were there ever any tensions between you and the other conscientious objectors because you were working so closely with the supervisors employed by the government?

**“My beliefs which I thought  
came to me simply and  
honestly . . . to the other fellow  
looked pretty ridiculous.”**

Much of the time Harold Schmidt spent as a conscientious objector was in British Columbia. Most of the Alternative Service workers were tasked with helping put out forest fires and maintaining the woodlands of southern British Columbia, but not Harold Schmidt. He was educated in economics and business and because of this Harold was asked to work in the camp office and perform administrative duties. This included sorting mail, answering phone calls, and filing timesheets.

“Out there I saw some of the critical letters that came to our office from the public about ‘we C.O.s’ ” recalls Schmidt. “These letters came in to our office and the officials said, ‘You’re a good letter writer, reply to this one.’ “

This exercise deepened his understanding of the importance of the work he was doing as it forced him to justify the conscientious objectors program to the public. He was forced to consider “how the other fellow [the writer of the critical letter] saw me; my beliefs which I thought came to me simply and honestly but to the other fellow looked pretty ridiculous.”



*Nelson Hunsberger*  
Signature of Registrant

by Jonathon  
Graham

# Wilson Hunsberger

**Born** 1919 to Abram and Mary Hunsberger  
in Bridgeport

## **Work & education:**

High school and teacher's college  
After the war, acquired a B.A. and Masters of Social Work

## **Church life:**

Member of Erb Street Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941  
Koksilah Alternative Service Work Camp, 1942-1943  
Japanese-Canadian Teaching Service, 1943-1944



### **An interesting fact :**

From 1946-1948, Hunsberger volunteered with Mennonite Central Committee on a reconstruction program in Poland.



### **The photograph :**

Due to his teaching experience in Waterloo County, Hunsberger was assigned to teach interned Japanese-Canadian children near Neys, Ontario



### **My question:**

How did you react to the disruption in your classroom caused by the “prominent citizen?” Did you explain or defend your Mennonite pacifist tradition?

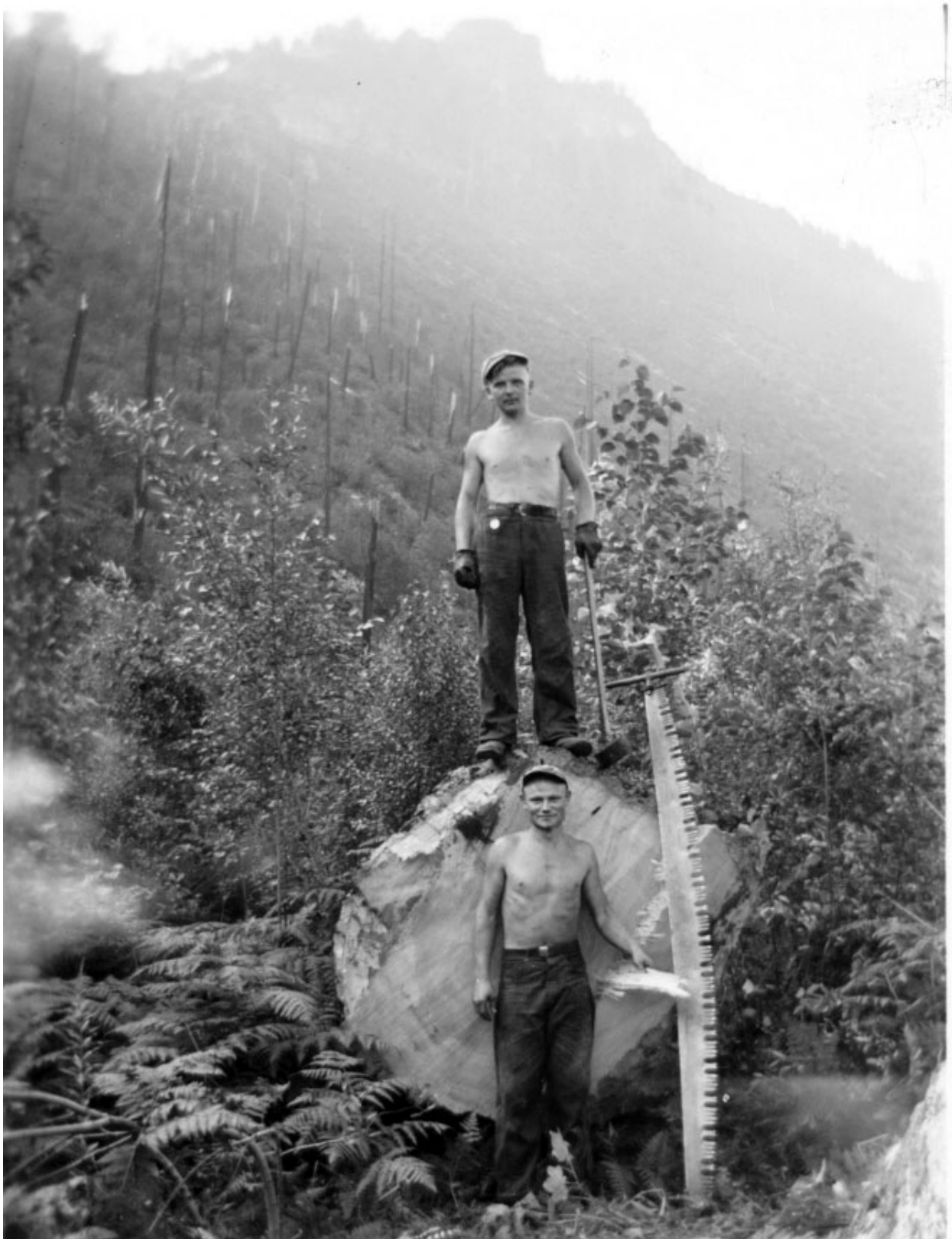
# **“The [Mennonite] youngsters knew where they stood and what they believed.”**

In the early days of the war, before his time in Alternative Service, Wilson Hunsberger was a public school teacher. Many of his pupils were Mennonite.

One day “a very prominent Kitchener citizen,” who was himself the grandson of a Mennonite bishop, barged into his classroom to speak to the children. Out of a sense of personal patriotic duty, this man wished to express “how important it was now to support the war effort.” Hunsberger interprets his actions as not hostile, but rather an earnest attempt to try to “convert the people from deeply entrenched way of life and belief to his way of thinking.”

“It didn’t really affect me or really affect the youngsters because they knew where they stood and what they believed and what their parents believed,” he recalls. Hunsberger and his pupils would not be swayed.

What Hunsberger experienced was a clear challenge to not only his fundamental belief of what it meant to be a Mennonite, but also a challenge to his students’ beliefs. Society continued to challenge the Mennonite way of life by pressuring them to support the war effort, but it was their conviction to live a Godly life that strengthened their resolve.



*Jacob Peters*  
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by Elizabeth  
Milne

# Jacob “Jake” Peters

**Born** 1916 to Peter and Helena Peters  
in Romanovka, South Russia  
Immigrated to Manitoba in 1925,  
and then to Ontario in the early 1930s

**Married** Katherine Bartels, 1943

## **Work and education:**

Completed Grade 8, worked in furniture factories in Kitchener

**Church life:** Member of Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Emory Creek Alternative Service Work Camp, 1942  
Cowichan Alternative Service Work Camp, 1942-1943  
Industrial work at Krug Furniture, 1944-1945



### **An interesting fact :**

Peters' father served his alternative service as a cook in the Russian Army during the First World War



### **The photograph :**

Brothers Jake and George Peters with a felled tree



### **My question:**

What was your relationship with Mennonites who served in military service? Were you able to accept and reconcile the choices they made?

**“Everything was new. And it was not organized to what it could have been, but... it was all for the first time.”**

To defend the west coast from forest fires caused by potential enemy bombing and alleviate labour shortages, Alternative Service was expanded to include forestry services. Jake Peters was among the first group of young men assigned to work at Emory Creek camp.

It seemed to Peters that the British Columbia Forest Service was not ready for them. The facility had no beds, no windows, no screens nor doors. Upon arrival, the men found themselves having to pull boards from broken buildings in order to make bunks. The first night there were no mattresses, so they gathered twigs and young trees and covered them with branches to make something on which to sleep.

Even with the rough start, Peters remembers his first boss with affection. The foreman at Emory Creek was an atheist and didn't see eye-to-eye with him and the other Christians. He couldn't understand worshipping someone unseen. Despite that, Peters was impressed that on those occasions when the foreman did express what might be considered “negative feelings” about faith or conscientious objection, he never did so in anger. He harboured no ill feelings toward Peters or the others. This foreman was fair and treated the men under his supervision well.





*Andrew Steckly*  
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Signature of Registrant

by Katie  
Steckly

# Andrew “Andy” Steckly

**Born** 1919 to John and Annie Steckly near Milverton, the family soon moved to Shakespeare

## **Work & education:**

Completed Grade 8,  
worked in his father’s carpentry business

## **Church life:**

Amish Mennonite (Western Ontario Mennonite Conference)

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941  
Seymour Mountain Park Alternative Service Work Camp,  
1942-1943



### **An interesting fact:**

Steckly took 8mm movies of the camps in British Columbia



### **The photograph :**

Men on the move at Seymour Mountain Park  
Alternative Service Work Camp, 1942



### **My question:**

Did any conflicts arise in the camps due to the differences between groups? Were there ever conflicts between “Swiss” and “Russian” Mennonites?

# **“It was a growing experience. It was a lesson in understanding human nature”**

Despite his lengthy stay as a conscientious objector in Alternative Service camps, Andrew Steckly felt that the experience was truly valuable. One of the most significant parts of the experience for him was getting to know new and diverse people. To Steckly, the most important part of the experience was, “getting along with people,” and “getting to know a lot of different people, different kinds of people. And learning how to get along with all different types of people.”

When he first arrived in the Alternative Service camp at Montreal River, Steckly started to meet Mennonites of a different background than his own. Andy was fascinated by Russian Mennonites and how they seemed “more like other people [non-Mennonites]” than the Old Order Mennonites of his own background. He enjoyed making friends with and learning new things from them. He appreciated their “broader outlook on life, and broader educational sphere.”

Overall, Andy considered his conscientious objector experience to valuable and fulfilling. He felt that he learned a lot about other people, and about himself. “It was a growing experience. It was a lesson in understanding human nature.”



*Clayton Burkholder*  
Signature of Registrant

by Thomas Fast-Sittler

# Clayton Burkholder

**Born** 1919 to Oscar and Mary Burkholder  
in Breslau

**Married** Helen Erb, 1943

## **Work and education:**

After Grade 10, worked at Canadian Tire in Kitchener

**Church life:** Member at Breslau Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941  
Goldstream, Cowichan & Hill 60 Alternative Service Work  
Camps, 1942- 1944



### **An interesting fact :**

After their marriage, Helen relocated to British Columbia to be nearer to her husband.



### **The photograph :**

The Robertson family stands outside Hope Hall, a Plymouth Brethren church, in 1943. The Robertsons frequently hosted both Alternative Service workers and military men far from home.



### **My question:**

What influence did the Mennonite church have on your decision to become a conscientious objector?

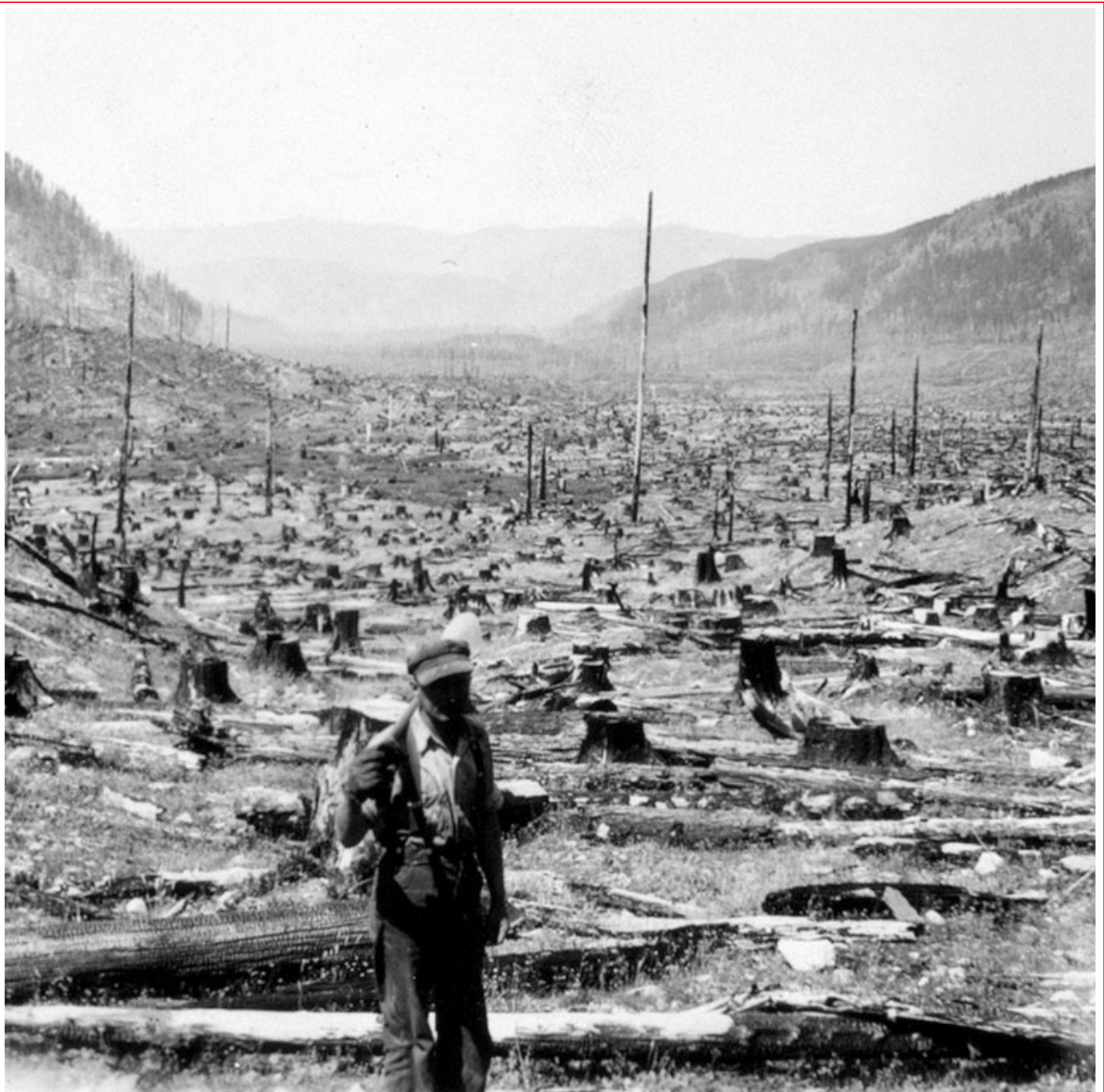
# **“The interchange with the community was one of the real experiences in British Columbia for me.”**

While at the Montreal River camp, Clayton Burkholder worked on a portion of the Trans-Canada Highway, but didn't feel the work he did was terribly important.

In July of 1942 he was called to British Columbia to fight fires, which he felt was more important work. Before the arrival of the Alternative Service workers, “the custom for forest firefighting was to take the men off the street, ‘Stop your car, you come fight fire!’ It was that important.”

Burkholder felt their firefighting function helped integrate Alternative Service workers into the local community. He recalls, “the community dances always sent invitations out to our camp to those who wanted to come.” Conversations sometimes started with curious locals wondering if “Mennonites” were the same as “Mormons.” Mr. Robertson, a railroad man and thus able to travel, would call Burkholder's wife and say, “Helen, I'm coming for your cherry pie!”

Burkholder says that lifelong friendships were formed. “We were there long enough to make contacts with families, and to this day, those contacts are still kept up, we visit them in our homes.”



*Albert Erb*  
Signature of Registrar

by Tim  
Greenwood

# Albert Erb

**Born** 1921 to Menno and Salome Erb  
in Wellesley

## **Work & education:**

Completed two years of high school,  
then became a store clerk  
After the war, he operated Erb Farm Supply

**Church life:** Of Amish Mennonite background, he later joined  
Erb Street Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1943  
Agricultural work in Chatham & Centralia, 1943



### **An interesting fact :**

Erb later became mayor of Wellesley Township (1981-1991)



### **The photograph :**

This photograph shows the remoteness of many of the worksites. Ben Veer, a camp employee, in the Robertson Valley on Vancouver Island, a tree planting area.



### **My question:**

Did your experience of being a C.O. make you question the degree to which Mennonites are involved, or would you see more from future generations in terms of aiding in times of war?



**“Things just roll along too smoothly for us all the time . . . we should have a little setback once in a while, set us straight.”**

Like many of his companions, Albert Erb recalls his experience in Alternative Service fondly. He felt no negative attitudes or acts of malice from the public that the conscientious objectors might have expected, or heard might happen. Indeed, so far removed from the centres of the populace, it was hard to have those kinds of run-ins.

Erb saw the whole idea of Alternative Service in Montreal River as something that did not accomplish much more than getting the Mennonites and other conscientious objectors out of sight and out of mind. “What we accomplished there was, well sure we hauled gravel, and put it on the pile, but I mean, the length of time it took for these 200 people, or 225 people, and what we did, you know. To me it just didn’t make sense.”

Work certainly could have been done much quicker with machines, and yet, Erb is quick to point out that this seeming menial and unnecessary work was important to the conscientious objectors. They felt they had a part to play, and as Erb concludes “at least we were gone and we were doing something.” Indeed, it is this positive attitude and memories of kind supervisors that remain with him.



*Ward A. Shantz*  
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by Lane  
Huggett

# Ward Shantz

**Born** 1918 to Aldred and Cinetta Shantz  
in Waterloo

## **Work and education:**

Completed a portion of high school,  
worked as a farm hand

## **Church life:**

Member of Erb Street Mennonite Church

## **Alternative Service:**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, 1941



### **An interesting fact:**

Shantz was the founding chairman of the Ontario Mennonite Relief Sale in New Hamburg in the 1960s



### **The photograph :**

Ward Shantz and Sylvester Martin with a bear caught in the woods near Montreal River, 1941



### **My question:**

You said the road work at Montreal River felt insignificant compared to the firefighting in B.C. What type of work at Montreal River would have been more worthwhile?

# **“It was really a worthwhile experience being with these 150 other men.”**

Ward Shantz reflects that he and the other men had many questions while they arrived at the Montreal River camp, and most felt that the roadwork they were doing was rather insignificant. Shantz felt the work could have been better accomplished by machinery and further expresses, “We felt that...we probably could have been doing something more worthwhile.” The labour aside, he fondly remembers the friendships he formed with others in the camp.

Shantz remarks, “When we were home, some of the rest of us would be talking about our experiences up there.” He then reflects on the feelings of a church friend who did not attend the camp. “I could sense that he sort of felt sorry that he didn’t have this experience.”

Upon looking back thirty years, Shantz evaluates his time as a C.O. as an experience that “was something that you’ll always . . . cherish even if you thought of the time as something you didn’t like.” He feels that overall the experience of being a C.O. “did something for the person” and that sharing a Christian experience with the other C.O.s at Montreal River was something that Shantz says he will “never forget.”



*Isaac F. Brubacher*  
Signature of Registrant

by Jaimie Bain

# Isaac Brubacher

**Born** 1914 to Melinda and Michael Brubacher,  
lived in St. Jacobs and Waterloo

**Married** Agnes Weber, 1941

## **Work & education:**

After Grade 8, worked on farms

**Church life:** Born Old Order Mennonite. When he was 7, his parents joined a Mennonite Conference of Ontario church

## **Alternative Service:**

Seymour Mountain Park Alternative Service Work Camp,  
June-December, 1942



### **An interesting fact :**

Isaac's son was born when he was at camp. Due to the slowness of the postal system, Isaac and Agnes were not able to communicate about choosing a baby name.



### **The photograph :**

A forest fire near Koksilah on Vancouver Island



### **My question:**

You said "I would have gladly done something more worthwhile." If you could have chosen more worthwhile work, what would it have been?

# **“Then I felt I was doing something more worthwhile.”**

Isaac Brubacher had adventure on his mind; he left home wanting to see what the world had to offer him. He figured that going into Alternative Service would be different and it would be a nice change. His attitude shifted once he was working at Seymour camp, where the primary task was improving parkland. He thinks back to how “we didn’t think we were doing anything worthwhile.” He thought about his wife and child at home, and felt any work he would be doing back home would make more of a contribution.

After being injured in Alternative Service he was sent home on extended leave. “I got into manufacturing again because they let some others get back into factory work and the soldiers children were not having shoes. . . . Then I felt I was doing something more worthwhile.” He felt this work was a way of helping his community without going to war.

As a conscientious objector in factory work, Brubacher was obligated to turn over part of his wages to the Red Cross. He says, “I really felt I was doing more for the country when I was working a general job than what we did out there.”



*David Wiens*

by

Abby Neufeld Dick



# David Wiens

**Born** 1919 to David J. and Mary Wiens  
in Kamenka, Ukraine  
Immigrated to Leamington, then Waterloo County

**Work and education:**  
Completed teacher's college, then taught in Waterloo

**Church life:**  
Member of Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church

**Alternative Service:**  
Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp,  
1941, 1942-1943  
Agricultural work near Chatham, 1944



**An interesting fact:**

When his family arrived in Canada, Wiens attended school part time and helped his father drive horses on the farm



**The photograph :**

Montreal River Alternative Service Work Camp, located where Montreal River meets Lake Superior, 1941



**My question:**

How do you think Mennonite churches could better stress their peace stance so their members can truly live out these deeply rooted pacifist beliefs?

# **“War is wrong. Killing is wrong. We will not participate in war.”**

At Montreal River, David Wiens shovelled and used dynamite to build roads so others would have the ability to get through that area; while in Chatham he was a farm hand helping out with various tasks. Through these experiences he was surrounded by men of different faiths and backgrounds which helped to broaden his narrow point of view.

Wiens recalls that being a conscientious objector helped him mature as a person. Despite no longer getting to eat his mother’s cooking, he was grateful for the Alternative Service option provided by the government. While he believes his service did little good for Canada he knows the opportunity in his formative years contributed to a big transformation in his attitude. It gave him the opportunity to move away from prejudices he once held by listening to and accepting the beliefs and thoughts of others.

Wiens believes nonresistance is not as intentional as it should be in the Mennonite church. He says, “Peace should be stressed more so that there is an inward commitment rather than a superficiality of the church that holds this doctrine.” For Wiens, nonresistance was an ideal that quickly became a reality in wartime.



**The Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association loaned John H. Dick's boxing gloves to the exhibit. John's son Ernest provided the following story.**

# John H. Dick's boxing gloves

**“Did Dad box?” asked Ernest Dick when he first saw his father’s gloves. “I couldn’t imagine this. Boxing was such a premediated and deliberate aggression and Dad was such a calm and gentle man—and surely always an exemplary Mennonite?”**



“His answer was absolutely they boxed, particularly up in Montreal River. This many young men together had to blow off steam and Dad’s gloves got plenty of use. Boxing was popular in the 1930’s. He wasn’t embarrassed, bemused or curious about my question—he simply didn’t understand the question.”

John Dick (doing handstand), 1942