



CONCHIES SPEAK

Ontario Mennonites in Alternative Service 1941-1946

Part II: Speaking through newsletters

The *Northern Beacon* made its first appearance in January 1942. The paper was started as a community building exercise within and between Alternative Service camps and to inform friends, family and the outside world of the work of conscientious objectors. Circulation eventually reached 1,055.

Articles on religious life, sports, camp doings, personal profiles, letters from readers, poetry, work project updates and reports from American COs captured many interesting aspects of the Alternative Service experience.

With the transfer of the men from Montreal River to the British Columbia Forestry Service camps, publication was temporarily discontinued. However, former editor Wes Brown and others revived the paper, now called *The Beacon*, from their new camps in British Columbia. John L. Fretz later took over the editorship. Both Brown and Fretz were from Ontario. The paper ceased in 1945 following the closure of the Forest Service camps.

Editor John Fretz wrote that the viewpoints of the various groups within the camps “were published so as to strike a balance and no viewpoint of any one group was to become the belief of the paper. No political issues or discussions were allowed in the paper.”

Today, the paper is widely recognized as a significant source of Alternative Service history. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario has digitized the faded copies to preserve CO voices.

- with text from *Alternative Service in Canada*
by J. A. Toews



Staff of *The Northern Beacon* at Montreal River with the first issue, January 3, 1942

Rufus Jutzi's handwritten dispatch to *The Beacon*

Hello everybody C-4 reporting. Here we are back at the camp with which we associate many days spent firefighting. On April 23, just one week after we came back from Hill Sixty, where we helped plant innumerable trees, a trail of us came down to Langford Camp to clean up. ^{before} the gang came ^{from the} there tended a long winter for Nyle Shenty who spend nearly all his time here, the last two weeks alone. The rest of the fellows came down on the 24th. While we enjoyed our winter camp at Lake Cowichan it seems the boys were all glad to be back at C-4. Here the majority of us had our first taste of camp life and here also we were introduced to the art of lighting fires.



Printing *The Northern Beacon* using a duplication machine, 1942