PACIFIC NORTHWEST MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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Mid-City Missionaries: Alberta Community Mennonite Church/ Peace Mennonite Church

By Jeanne Zook

The narrative of the Alberta Community Mennonite Church/Peace Mennonite Church, from its beginning to its end, is grounded in the sense of mission: of serving people in cities, like Portland, where neediness often seems more acute; of serving young Mennonites, who in the 20th century especially were drawn to the city; on reaching out to neighborhoods and communities where Mennonites were the minority population. This impulse toward mission work helped form Portland's Peace Mennonite Church in 1928, and the desire to serve others better led to the decision this year to dissolve the church. Final services were held at the Alberta Community Mennonite Church/Peace Mennonite Church on May 30, 2010, as congregants decided closing the church might create space for new ministries to develop.

The Historical Context

From the 1880s to the 1920s, Mennonites moved west, away from the rural community life that had nurtured them. From 1917 on, many were drawn to work in cities across the U.S. and Canada. Families and church leadership were concerned for their spiritual nurture, and some also became concerned for the task of evangelizing other city people.

These dual concerns led to the opening of many missions within North American cities. Too, housing young single Mennonites working in the city became a strong theme for mission centers. Town-dwelling Mennonites in many areas also found spiritual support worshipping with German speaking Baptists, Lutherans, and Methodists. In the 1920s, General Conference Mennonites had increased their city mission work, but by the 1929 Conference in Hutchison, Kan., the nature of its effort was still ill defined. Henry A. Fast, a new member of the Home Mission Board, said, "Our Conference has never formulated a statement of policy in its home mission work or in any definite way given expression as to what it conceives its home mission task to be."

Congregants stand outside the Sumner Street building, purchased by the Home Mission Board in 1939. The picture was taken in 1944.

Opening of a Mission in Portland

At the time, Portland had attracted a considerable number of Mennonites, and missions were opened by the Old Mennonites

(Pacific Coast Conference) and the Mennonite Brethren. The Pacific District of the General Conference Mennonite Church (PDC) noted that Mennonites from Kansas, Idaho, Minnesota and rural Oregon were finding work in Portland, many in the shipyards or in businesses of their own.

Thus Mennonites felt the need for help in establishing a church or mission of their own. Given the success of a similar venture in Los Angeles, the Evangelization Committee of the PDC, on June 27, 1927, presented a recommendation to the 31st annual session of the Conference meeting in Upland, CA that "definite steps toward the opening of a mission or church extension work at Portland" should be taken.

After considerable discussion and inquiry the Conference passed the following resolution: "We are sorry that the Home Mission Board of the General Conference because of lack of funds, does not see its way clear at present to take up home mission work in Portland....Therefore we, the Pacific District Conference, are willing to take up this work and request the Home Mission Board to provide a worker for this field or to contribute to the work as funds permit."

The General Conference Home Missions Committee then requested that Catherine Niswander, who had worked at the Mission in Chicago for 14 years, to come to Portland. Niswander was educated at the Fort Wayne, Ind., Bible Institute and in the Christian Endeavor Movement. In Chicago she had directed much of her effort toward getting neighborhood children into Sunday School. She did extensive in-home visiting.

Niswander was the full time worker on site in Portland, and searched out a storefront building at the corner of NE 26th and Alberta Street, where the first service was held on Dec. 16, 1928. Several of the leading pastors of the PDC were present for the occasion, including Rev. P.R. Aeshchliman, Rev. J.M. Franz, Rev. S.S. Baumgartner and Rev. A.J. Neuenschwander. Meetings were held regularly at this location until the following summer, when the former Norwegian Congregational Church building at the corner of NE 23rd and Sumner St. became available to rent.

In 1931, the 34th annual session of the PDC was held in Portland at the mission church. The assembled delegates approved the recommendation of the Evangelization Committee that Portland' church affiliation be organized under the auspices of the Home Mission Board and the Evangelization Committee. Thus on June 29, 1931, an organizing service was conducted in which the following persons became the charter members: Lena Leisy, Catherine Niswander, William S. and Elsie Bartel, Mr.and Mrs. C.P. Zook, Edna Mae Gunn, Betty Gunn, Louise Talreson, Wilma Krug, Florence Hicks, and Cora Peck.

The document of incorporation states "We the undersigned mutually unite and organize into Christian worship, fellowship and service under the name of the Alberta Community Church. We believe that the Word of God as we have it in the Bible is the all sufficient rule of our faith and conduct. We affiliate and submit ourselves to the rules and Regulations as they are laid down by the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of N.A. and the constitution which we may agree upon for our own use."

Niswander built up the Sunday School to about 85. Being the only full time worker, she did many of the pastoral activities except preaching. Rev S.S. Baumgartner who was pastor in Dallas, OR took alternate Sundays preaching in Portland before

The Pacific Northwest Mennonite and Genealogical Society

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leaving to pastor in Monroe, WA in 1929. After that, preachers from local seminaries and Multnomah Bible School served the congregation on a supply basis when visiting Mennonite pastors could not be there.

The Neighborhoods and the Church's Mission

The original building, a storefront, was used for about six months before renting the church building at the corner of 23rd and Sumner Street. This latter building was purchased in 1939 by the Home Mission Board (GC) for the ongoing work of the congregation. After this the group raised it and excavated a basement that doubled the size of space for use.

At a later date a baby care "cry-room" was added. The building was filled to capacity with a large active Sunday school attendance; for worship there was a choir and an orchestra. Church attendance was usually between 60-70. Many families with children were regular attenders and members, and many brought other children to Sunday school and church. There was an active youth group.

The women had a very active Women's Missionary Society. Later a younger women's group formed; called Mary and Martha, it supported missionaries and local mission with their projects. People also regularly took part in services at the Union Gospel Mission in the downtown.

A large and well-attended men's organization did projects in the church and in the neighborhood. Summer times were filled with activities for fun and outreach. The majority of the people were ethnic Mennonite from many areas, but they made everyone welcome and included. There was not unanimity of theological viewpoints but everyone listened with respect and showed grace to their neighbors.

Still, the size of the building hampered further growth. Some interest was expressed in moving further east in the city, and a location was explored in an area called Cliffgate. Chosen lots there looked favorable to build a little larger building, but a census of that neighborhood revealed that some neighbors did not want to have a church built there. One large family left the congregation following this disappointment.

Between the 1963-65 period, the overcrowding of the little building was acute, and a closed Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB) four blocks to the

Dr. John Edwin Zook died Aug. 14, 2009, of a ruptured aortic aneurysm in Portland, Ore. He was born Oct. 3, 1924, in Tabor, Iowa, to Abram Eyster and Eunice Brenneman Zook, who served as missionaries in South Africa and the Belgian Congo. He grew up in those countries as well as years in Nebraska and Newton, Kan.

He completed medical school in 1954, his internship in 1955 and his residency in surgery in 1969 in Portland. He was a board qualified surgeon, member of the American College of Surgeons and the International College of Surgeons.

He married Jeanne Pierson in 1952. They served as missionaries under the General Conference Mennonite Church and Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission in the Congo from 1955 to 1977.

He practiced surgery in Portland from 1977 until 2002, where he also generously provided care to medically needy people. He was a gifted surgeon with a great love of people.

He and Jeanne participated in the China Educational Exchange program in 1984-88 and conducted frequent surgical visits to the Mennonite hospitals in Congo. He served as a board member of Mennonite Men and as president of the PNMC Mennonite Men for many years. He was a longtime member of Peace Mennonite Church of Portland and taught Sunday school for many years. He was deeply involved in recycling in the church's program to support a local food bank. He will be missed by all for his warm caring spirit and his ability to share a good story. The Congolese Community of Portland also recognized him as their great friend.

Survivors include his wife of 57 years, Jeanne Zook; three children, Rebecca Roth of Salem, Daniel John Zook of Portland and Paul Michael Zook of Austin, Texas; two sisters, Ruth McQuilkin of Portsmouth, R.I., and Mary Ellen Schultze of Puyallup, Wash.; and 11 grandchildren.

Memorial services were held at Peace Mennonite Church. Burial was in Forrester Cemetery in Estacada.

The Peace Mennonite Church building on Glisan and N.E. 196th in Portland, dedicated in July 1975.

east was contacted as to their willingness to sell. The price was $90,000, out of reach for the small congregation. One year later, they were approached again, and after some negotiation a sale was arranged for $50,000 in March 1965. The Alberta Church was able to borrow $40,000 from the GC Church Extension Services and the sale was arranged. The move was a source of much joy, with the little church building on 23rd being sold to a Korean congregation associated with the Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends for $13,500 in March 1965.

The Ten Year Interim Church

The first years were times of joy and expansion, growth and optimism. Some of the people from the EUB church began attending; one entire long pew was filled with widows from that closed congregation. Other people from the area attended; some joined as members. House to house visitation and Vacation Bible School and Sunday school were promoted. The youth helped in many projects, including a clinic to fix the bikes of nearby youth.

The larger building changed the perceived identity of the group, and a more commodious space allowed many activities not undertaken before. A large kitchen and dining room permitted more meals together. The building's size allowed the church to host many Oregon events. Between 1965 and 1970, there was an increase in membership of 33 persons. An organ was purchased, which changed the sound of the music. A large choir, led by Dr. Nobel Sack, continued.

At the same time, the neighborhood character was changing: the ethnic make-up of the neighborhood was changing, and there were also more elderly people and fewer families with children. There seemed to be more renters than homeowners. Vandalism to the building increased, and the younger people in the congregation were choosing to live in the eastern reaches of the city, not in the Alberta community. The church had no off-street parking, causing problematic congestion on the streets.

All in all, the larger building began to seem somewhat of a burden to the trustees who had to look after it. Rev. Elmer Friesen and family were called to serve as pastor and after a number of months, his advice was to look for a way to move the congregation to the eastern part of Portland. The building was put up for sale and was purchased by a black congregation, St Luke's Church of God in Christ, who agreed to make monthly payments.

Earl Balzer and Stanley Anderson composed a committee to explore finding a location to build. They began to look at the property at N.E.196th and Glisan Street, composed of seven city lots. It took a lot of faith for the little group to explore developing another location when they had so few resources.

The church began to hold meetings in a funeral home on NE182nd Avenue. During this transition, discussion began about a name change since the Alberta area would no longer be the congregation's home. Of the several possibilities suggested, the name Peace Mennonite Church was chosen. It expressed the commitment of Mennonites since their earliest days to actively pursue peace with others, as well as to know the peace of God through Jesus Christ, and to resist injuring anyone.

During this transition, a large number of young couples and working people began to attend services.

Plans were drawn up for a building; volunteers with building skills were sought to help with construction. Initial steps, such as the siting of the sewer system and siting of the building, were accomplished. A solid cement slab was poured, large enough for the entire building, although only the smaller fellowship hall and kitchen were to be used in the first phase.

The building's entire shell was completed at once with volunteer labor from Kansas and locals. At first, a pot-bellied wood stove heated the one room. After two years in the partially completed building, money was obtained through church resources to complete the entire interior of the building, and in July1975 it was dedicated.

The congregation had grown during the transition. Although several families from the previous location declined to travel so far to church, some families from the Rockwood area began to attend. They generally knew little or nothing about Mennonites, though there was also gain in those who came from Mennonite communities in Oregon or the midwest.

The Red Barn

A large historic horse barn on the church property was so dilapidated, the fire department suggested Peace Mennonite could burn it. But some people liked it, and sought grant monies to put foundations under the side rooms to preserve the structure; the workshop for the building project was located in one side. In 1975, a concrete slab porch was added and a community recycling project opened.

The congregation's young people voluntarily operated the recycling program for many years. Proceeds were given to SNOCAP, a church sponsored program for meeting the needs of the poor. The City of Portland awarded a prize to the project as an outstanding example of recycling in 1984.

The Red Barn Recycling program operated from 1975-2009. For many years it functioned as a work site for the Multnomah County Community Court as a diversion program for people ordered to do community service. Most years, 70-80 people came through that program. Each year, $2000-$4000 was contributed to the SNOCAP budget for feeding needy Portlanders.

Mennonite Voluntary Service (MVS)

In 1973, Bonnie and Norris Kramer, from South Dakota, came to establish a Voluntary Service Unit, which remained open for about twelve years. The Kramers were committed to serving the needs of older adults in the Alberta community, doing home care, building ramps for homes, and other tasks.

The Voluntary Service program was organized and supervised by the Commission on Home Ministries of the General Conference Mennonite Church, though with local Support Committee oversight. Individuals applied to get into the MVS unit, and if they found work that aligned with the unit's goals, they would come to live in and serve in the city.

The unit was self-supporting; each member got a small stipend. Earning members contributed their salaries to the unit and received the same stipend as the others. The people who came had many skills and found interesting jobs, including draft counseling, working in homeless ministry at "Baloney Joe's," after school and summer children's programs, in-home help, home repair, and support services for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and other agencies. Some worked as nurses, teachers, and other earning professions.

Perhaps 35-40 people moved through the unit over twelve years. Some were very involved in the congregational life and others were not. The unit lived in various residences, including a large three-story home on Ainsworth Street the unit repaired in return for a low rental rate. One house was purchased on Mallory Avenue.

The congregation provided a Support Committee who met with volunteers on a monthly basis, helped problem-solve, and became the close link between church and unit. For many, the MVS unit became a jumping off place for them to locate permanently in Portland.

Because the unit continued to focus its ministry on the North Portland area, the congregation—once it moved—gradually became less involved with their life. The group who did home repair developed a separate incorporation and eventually a 501C(3). They blessed hundreds, especially elderly trying to maintain their homes, with low cost repairs.

Summer Work Camps

Each summer, from 1975-85, a work camp for teenagers from across the country was held at Peace Church. The group of 15-18 older teens came for two weeks to live and work together in Portland. The entire congregation was involved, though Earl and Lois Balzer gave tremendous energy both in planning and executing the work camps.

Young people worked in the downtown area, with MVS unit projects, and on the church grounds. The church became their home, where they fixed meals, played ball, slept. Sponsors lived with them and gave guidance. The last four days of work camp, participants experienced camping, hiking, and exploring the Oregon coast and mountains. Some of the students' art work on the Red Barn left an enduring memory of their creativity.

During 1991, an attempt was made to initiate a MVS unit again at the Glisan Street location. Three or four people did do extensive volunteer work, but the request for this group did not gain Conference approval, and no unit was established.

Relationship to the Conferences

The relationship of Alberta/Peace Mennonite to the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Pacific District Conference was deep and continuous, especially as these bodies had birthed the congregation. People from within the congregation took active roles in the Pacific District Conference, and there was a deep loyalty to those in the General Conference offices and functions.

After the move to the Glisan Street location, the Church joined the Pacific Coast Conference (OM) and became dually affiliated. This required dual activities and support; however, this was done in an honest effort to make the church accessible to those from the Old Mennonite background.

For several years in the late 1980s and early 90s, there was talk of a convergence or integration of the two largest Mennonite groups to come together, which happened for the three West Coast Conferences in 1994. Three conference organizations were suspended and out of the ashes rose two new Conferences, the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference and the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference. This action preceded the move on the national level. Both of these Conferences are now members of the new Mennonite Church USA, and Peace Mennonite has been very active in the business of the PNMC.

The Congregation's Mission Orientation

From its inception, the church had a live zeal for mission in the city and overseas. Etta Davis, a worker from Japan, interpreted overseas life for the group. The Women's Missionary Society prepared items to be sent overseas, and missionary speakers were commonly invited to the church.

When Abram and Eunice Zook returned from mission service in Africa and settled in Portland, they brought contacts and activities to the church. Earl and Ruth Roth and family were active in the church prior to their leaving for Congo mission service in 1954. Dr. John and Jeanne Zook were active members and commissioned to service in Congo in 1955. Later Samuel and Honora Ediger and children returned from Congo service and he served as pastor for two years. Harold and Joyce Harms served in the

Dr. John Zook and Jeanne Zook practice medicine during their Congo mission work.

Congo for many years and were active in the church at several periods of time.

Local mission in the city was a regular activity at the Union Gospel Mission. The younger women of the congregation organized as the Mary and Martha Missionary group, stressing both overseas and local supportive activities.

John and Jeanne Zook and their children, Rebecca, Daniel and Paul continued their active participation over the years; whenever they were not in Congo they were at home in the congregation. John eventually began a surgical practice in Gresham and was active there until his death in 2009

In 1979, the congregation adopted a Mien couple, relocated to this country from Laos. The experience was a good one. The Mien people were supported by many church groups and especially by the Adventist mission that had been active in Vietnam. Many Mien converted to Christianity and started churches of their own in this country.

From within Peace Mennonite a vision for serving the area's homeless people began with a weekly meal called Table of Peace that provided a Wednesday noon meal for two years. Amarette Cunnings gave herself tirelessly to making and serving this meal. Steve and Diane Kimes, members at Peace, have had a deep commitment to serving these folk even before they joined the church.

Steve Kimes organized a church for the homeless named Anawim (the righteous poor who trust the Lord); this group has been housed in various locations and currently uses the Peace Mennonite building for a once-a week-meal, shower and preaching service every Saturday. Other services are held in a church building on 39th Street. The Kimes' home on Williams Avenue is a community house for the Anawim, a member church of the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference.

Anger, Anxiety and Conflict

Despite the commitment of the congregation to Anabaptist ideals, at times the reality of the messiness of human relationships reared an ugly head. The move of the congregation and the influx of people from other groups caused some stress, but the changing church culture probably caused the most anxiety: from being a small group to large, from relatively rural/small-town mores to urban, from a milieu where the rules were not written but understood to a highly organized congregation with copious written guidelines. There was also dissent over the building, the style, the details and how to build it.

The changing tides of societal and religious pressures overlaid some of the anxieties. There were changing authority patterns in the denomination. Music changed: hymn singing was challenged by the new praise songs. Could people raise their hands in worship or not? Dress codes were in flux, and people wondered what constituted simplicity in today's church life?

Despite these tensions, people worked at resolving questions and finding answers. Some of the situations centered on a particular pastor. Several church consultants worked at clarifying and helping

Members stand for worship during a Sunday morning gathering at the Peace Mennonite Church building on Glisan.

to work through issues. Each situation caused the loss of some people to the congregation; each had an impact on the vision to be a people of peace.

Sixtieth Year Celebration

In summer 1988, the congregation celebrated its 60th anniversary with a homecoming service. Many former members attended. The highlight of the day was making a telephone contact with Catherine Niswander, then in her ninties. The conversation was played over a loudspeaker so everyone could hear. It was a memorable occasion.

Peace Community Church, Mennonite

Between 1992-96, the congregation made a decision to call itself Peace Community Church, Mennonite, hoping to create a more open invitation to welcome people of the Rockwood area. But the name led to some confusion locally and nationally. The change back to the name of Peace Mennonite Church in 1996 was a reclaiming of the Anabaptist/ Mennonite identity and of letting that be known.

Building Sharing

The Philadelphia Romanian Pentecostal congregation shared the building with Peace Mennonite between 1992-96, and the congregations occasionally shared meals or special events. They grew into such a large group they finally moved into a building of their own.

A Mennonite Brethren Hispanic congregation used the building for services for several years on Sunday evenings. More recently, a Hmong church, Trinity, continues to use the building on Sunday afternoons. On Sunday evenings, an African immigrant congregation, Bethel City International Church, has been regularly worshiping in the premises. There have also been rentals to groups for one-time events.

The Congregation's Multicultural Character

Beginning in the 1980s and after, there was a growing number of Congolese people attending the services and participating in church life. The church expressed great openness to people in recovery at various stages. Hispanics have been a part of the group. Homeless people have lived in members' homes and worshipped with them. At times this has required interpretation and negotiation but this has seemed to be a calling that best represents the Kingdom of God. At times, the congregation's desire to be inclusive has been frustrated by the inability to speak other languages and to comprehend the finer points of each other's culture.

Letting Go

The decision to close the congregation did not stem from any particular event, but from a persistent decline in membership, which had been around 20 persons recently. Good things happened within the church, but finally the expense of keeping the building open was difficult for an aging church body.

Several attempts at community outreach failed to bring in new people. Efforts to make the building more visible did not yield results. Finally a period of group discernment and prayer yielded the consensus of the fifteen remaining members that it was time to allow some new form of ministry to arise. Thus on May 30, 2010 a final celebratory service was held to recognize the many people who had been a part of the Alberta Community Mennonite Church / Peace Mennonite Church.

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society

Spring Meeting

Featuring

Lee Snyder

Oregon native, former president of Bluffton College, author

March 20, 2011

2:30 p.m.

Salem Mennonite Church

A Soldier of The Lord

By Melanie Springer Mock

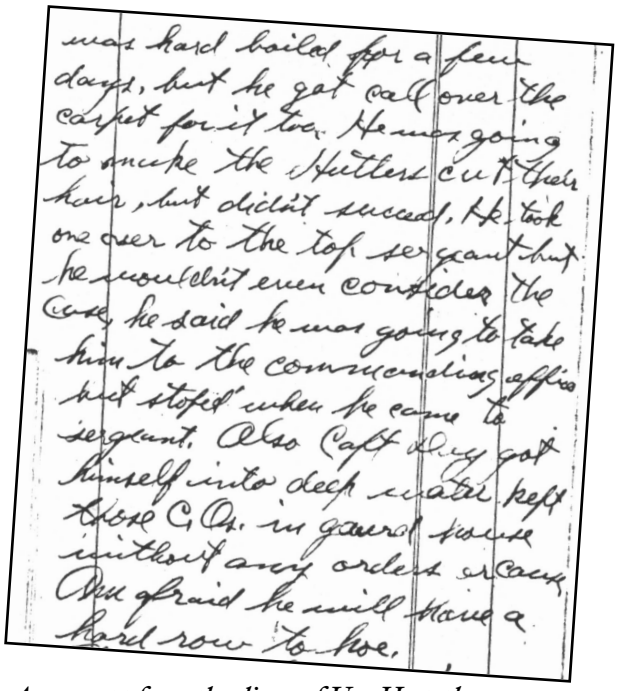
At the March 2010 meeting of the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society, I presented my research on conscientious objectors in World War I. In 2003, my research was published in *Writing Peace: The Unheard Voices of Mennonite Great War Objectors* (Cascadia), and my presentation to the historical society was based on that book. Because I spoke from an outline rather than from a completed essay at the March 2010 meeting, I agreed to share an essay I produced on the topic in 2003. Although the essay was written at the beginning of the Iraq War, and about a world war fought nearly a century ago, the thoughts I express here are hopefully still applicable now, more than seven years after the Iraq conflict began.

As I write this essay, the United States has been five days at war. Like most Americans, I am transfixed by the images beamed into my satellite dish, of Baghdad on fire, of embedded journalists, of violent peace rallies, of stoic leaders denouncing Saddam one day and French Fries another. On one occasion, I watched the same reports, the same news stories, the same military analyses, several times over, too inert—or appalled, or distraught—to turn the television off. The satellite feed fills me with hopelessness, and helplessness, and despair: what could I, a new mother, an assistant professor of writing at a small Quaker school, a faceless American, do?

Like many United States citizens my age, this is my first real encounter with war. I was too young to remember Vietnam, too self-absorbed to pay attention during the first Gulf War. Certainly I grew up knowing that war exists: I heard shadowed references to Vietnam, and played with Laotian refugees down the street, victims—my parents must have told me—of war in their own country. Still, even as I remained sheltered from war and rumors of war, I knew, as a Mennonite, what my stance should be. I was to remain a pacifist, was to refrain from physical violence at all costs, was to oppose war in all cases, even as I had never felt the specter of war, nor understood, really, that which I was implored to speak against.

For Mennonites, such passionate instruction in nonresistance started young, so that by the time we were ten or eleven, we knew we were to remain pacifists, even if we could not explain why or on what grounds. At 18, my Mennonite peers and I formally registered our conscientious objection to war through the church; this was considered its own Mennonite rite of passage, similar, I suppose, to first communion, or to a bar mitzvah. Even though I was female and would probably never be officially called to war, like other young Mennonites, I knew this statement of conscientious objection was what I needed to do, part of my continued conviction about pacifism, part of my initiation to the faith. No one in my church or family explained, though, the biblical or historical bases for my ardent convictions; I, in turn, could not explain my nonresistance to anyone who asked. It was just meant to be.

In many ways, my upbringing was similar to Mennonite youth who grew up nearly a century earlier and who, in 1917-18, faced what would probably be one of the biggest trials in their young lives. When I began several years ago to study the first person narratives of these Mennonite conscientious objectors from the First World War, I was struck by the similarities between their lives and my own. We both grew up in a time of relative


was hard boiled for a few days, but he got all over the carpet for it too. He was going to smoke the Hutters out their hole, but didn't succeed. He took one over to the top sergeant but he wouldn't even consider the case, he said he was going to take him to the commanding officer but stopped when he came to sergeant. Also Capt Kay got himself into deep water, kept those C.O.s in guard house without any orders or cause. Am afraid he will have a hard row to hoe.

An excerpt from the diary of Ura Hostetler, a Great War Mennonite conscientious objector.

tranquility and prosperity, in a time when our beliefs were not challenged by war nor by want. Of course, Mennonites in the early twentieth century lived without many of the accoutrements of modernity; still, like me, they grew up grounded in their Mennonite faith and heritage, surrounded by Mennonite peers, assured they were to remain nonresistant Christians in the face of war, even though they could not articulate—to themselves or to others who asked—what being a nonresistant Christian meant.

This inability to explain their nonresistant stance caused Mennonite objectors certain difficulties: in a time when most of their American compatriots were supporting the Great War, it was hard to explain why they could not. When Mennonite objectors were forced into military camps, they could not explain to military officials why they could not heft a weapon or work in a camp mess hall; when objectors were grilled by government officials as regards their stance, they could not express their convictions with conviction, beyond what seemed the rote recall of several key Bible verses. Mennonite leaders wrung their hands: clearly, they had failed to impart to their young people the full significance of the Mennonites' peace witness, nor had they taught their youth the theological foundation of nonresistance and its influence on the whole of Mennonite church history. The war, and conscription, made this failure strikingly clear.

Thus the Great War compelled Mennonites to reevaluate the ways they were living their nonresistance, teaching their nonresistance, and witnessing nonresistance in a war-hungry world. During the Great War, telling stories about nonresistant Christians became one way Mennonites educated their members about pacifism, about the church's history and about the biblical foundations of nonresistance. Mennonite leaders often told stories about the early Anabaptist martyrs—men and women who chose suffering and death for their faith. In narrating the experiences of others who remained peacemakers in the midst of violence, Mennonite leaders gave courage to their young men, who faced the decision of how they could best be peacemakers in military camps; they also educated their men about why they should be peacemakers, given the attractiveness of several alternatives. In some cases, these narratives were written into Mennonite periodicals, creating a pseudo-hagiography of Mennonite objectors who chose to be Great War martyrs, following the bloodied Anabaptist trail of nonresistance. In other cases, Mennonite young men constructed their own narratives, believing that in telling their stories of nonresistance, they could inscribe their experience into history: Mennonite history, certainly, but also the history of the Great War, and of the objectors' place in it.

Ura Hostetler was one of the 2000 some Mennonite young men who heard stories of Mennonite nonresistance, and were strengthened; and who learned, in 1918, what it really meant to be a nonresistant Christian; and who decided, as a response to the hardships of objection, to construct a wartime narrative about peace. Like so many others, Hostetler's life was challenged, and irrevocably changed, by the Great War. A life-long Mennonite, Hostetler lived in relative prosperity before the war: although he only had an eighth grade education, which he earned at age 18, Hostetler was making a lucrative living in Harper, Kan., as a farmer and silo-builder. Hostetler was hewn tightly to his Mennonite community, making the church he attended central to his life.

Hostetler was conscripted in May 1918, and was sent to Camp Funston, Kansas, a place

Amish and Mennonite conscientious objectors drill with an officer at Camp Funston, Kan.., 1917.

by then well known for its intolerance of conscientious objectors. He left for the military camp only months after his marriage to Della Balmer, only weeks after his sister unexpectedly died of typhoid. Hostetler's journey to the military camp proved harrowing: jammed tightly in a railroad car with other conscripts, Hostetler was shocked by their rowdy drunkenness. His life in Harper amongst other Mennonites little prepared him for what he saw, nor for what he would experience once he arrived in camp.

At Camp Funston, Hostetler was initially barracked with regular conscripts because of a two week quarantine imposed on the camp. Those first days were particularly difficult for Hostetler, who missed his wife and family and who also did not get along well with the other soldiers. The regular conscripts resented him, because he did not have to drill or stand inspection. The soldiers manifest their distaste for Hostetler by verbal taunts and by stealing his clothes, making him don the uniform he refused to wear, and taking pictures of him in the puttees and military shoes they crammed on his feet. Officers did their own part to harass Hostetler, cornering him alone and cajoling him into dropping his conscientious objection and taking up noncombatant or even combatant work.

Finally, Hostetler was brought before the company captain, who, Hostetler wrote, "talked to me and then cursed me and everything else" in hopes of persuading Hostetler to renounce his conscientious objection. Because Hostetler refused to accept any type of military duty, he became one of countless Mennonite boys whom military officials believed "bovine-faced" and "stupid" because he could only quote scripture, rather than articulating what the scripture meant in his life. Because of his refusal to accept military duty, Hostetler was removed from his barrack and confined to a cell in the cantonment's stockade; sitting in a solitary cell did little to quell his loneliness, as there was not much to do in the guardhouse and he was only one of two conscientious objectors interned there. He was observed constantly by armed soldiers who marched the confined men to the mess hall and followed them to the latrine.

After nearly two weeks in the guardhouse, Hostetler was transferred to the conscientious objector detachment, a camp of tents located almost one mile from Camp Funston. A few weeks later, Hostetler joined the approximately 175 conscientious objectors at Camp Funston in a sojourn to Camp Dodge, Iowa, where they were to appear before the Board of Inquiry, a panel of three men who would decide whether the objectors were sincere in their objection or not. Those who were not deemed sincere would be sent to train for war or, should they refuse that, to the federal penitentiary for a lengthy and harsh sentence. By the time Hostetler received his hearing, one year after objectors had been interred in camps, the government had decided that Mennonite objectors deemed sincere could be furloughed to farms to work until the war's conclusion. Thus Hostetler was moved to a farm near Mason City, Iowa, where he worked until the farmer's own son could return from France.

Certainly Hostetler's experiences were easier than those of some Mennonite men, who were physically and verbally abused to the point of near-death or death; or who were placed under arrest and sent to Fort Leavenworth for lengthy prison sentences; or who returned home to their Mennonite communities as outcasts, because they chose to accept some forms of military duty, like working in hospitals or as cooks. In many ways, though, Hostetler's experience is similar to that of most Mennonite men during that era, who went into the war naïve, innocent, and unable to explain why they believed what they did—even though they were steadfast in believing it.

For, throughout the war, Hostetler was assured that God would favorably judge those who stood firm in their nonresistant convictions. In his Great War diary, Hostetler reminded himself to remain thankful for the generous providence of God, who brought objectors to Camp Funston "for a purpose." The objectors' time in camp was, to be sure, an opportunity to "draw closer to [God]," Hostetler wrote, " . . . espicialy (sic) because of the persecution some of us have to go thru." More significantly, though, the Mennonite objectors' presence in military camps seemingly provided, in Hostetler's thinking, the perfect chance to be peaceful witnesses amidst men who "practice killing devices." The camp became a mission field which he was to "harvest," by refusing any form of military service, by remaining true to his nonresistant convictions, and by passing that nonresistance on to

soldiers and officers, if only by including that which "will do the [censors] good" in the letters he wrote home. As a "soldier of the cross," he wrote, his was a cause he "would dare die for."

By the war's end, it was certain that many Mennonite men clearly understood why they were to be soldiers of the cross: not only why the Bible demanded it, but also why Mennonites felt called, century after bloodied century, to practice peace. They took this new knowledge back with them to their communities; they also carried this new knowledge with them into other enterprises, including wartime reconstruction in France. Hostetler himself believed that Mennonite objectors in the Great War changed the course of the church's 20th century nonresistant witness; he said in a 1968 interview that the Civilian Public Service of World War II, war relief, the I-W alternative service during Vietnam, and even the Peace Corps were all a direct "outgrowth" of the struggle and persecution endured by Great War objectors, and by what they learned through that persecution.

Hostetler was not an extraordinary man by any lights. He lived a fairly anonymous existence, never straying far from the West Liberty Mennonite Church or from Harper, Kan., where he farmed for most of his life. Neither did Hostetler do anything we might consider awe-inspiring: he made grain silos as a youngster, married young, had four children, farmed, attended church, died. In the year 1918, he kept a record of his trials as a conscientious objector, hoping—one imagines—to trace his own brush with history, to provide for himself and perhaps for his family a chronicle of his remarkable encounter with the United States military.

However, like the other autobiographical texts by Great War Mennonite objectors, Hostetler's diary provides a story for us now: a story about what it meant to be called by the government to serve; a story about what it meant to choose serving conscience instead; a story about what it meant to be transformed in making that choice. In studying Hostetler's story, and the stories of other Mennonite objectors, I personally came to a new understanding of my Mennonite faith and its heritage of peace: a faith and a heritage I had been immersed in my entire life, without wholly knowing why. My enhanced understanding has carried me well through the last few months especially, as our country has again entered a war that many other Christians see as just, even holy. I don't think Hostetler could have imagined that he would witness peace not only to the military men around him in 1918, something he longed to do, but also to a Mennonite woman teaching college in Oregon nearly 100 years later.

Many of my students argue, though, that these pacifists' vision was idyllic, that the narratives of Great War objectors I have studied are anachronistic, and that these narratives have little to say to a country immersed in war with a tyrant, and with terrorists, and with an evil axis. Perhaps they are right.

Yet I find these narratives of Great War objection to be a certain comfort in this time of war: after all, in a war that left nine million dead, these objectors were convinced that a small army of unknown pacifists, resisting the call to arms, might bring about Christ's peaceable kingdom to a suffering world. The steadfastness of this vision, however idyllic, could well provide for many a sense of hope in the midst of a burning Baghdad, and violent

A Note About the Editors

This newsletter, the effort of Ron Diener and Melanie Springer Mock, brings to a close Ron's editorship. Ron has served in the capacity of editor for nine years, but tendered his resignation at our April Executive Committee meeting, effective at the end of this year, due to a major health problem which escalated much more rapidly than anticipated.

Melanie was accepted as a member-at-large at the same Executive Committee meeting, and has since consented to be our newsletter editor. We want to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to Ron for his excellent work these past nine years, as we also welcome Melanie, who comes to us as an experienced writer. We request your prayers for both these folks: for Ron and his family as he continues to deal with aggressive gastrointenstinal cancer, and Melanie as she adds another role to her professional duties.

Margaret Shelter