Companions on the "lonely path": the Conference of Historic Peace Churches, 1940-1964

Keynote Address to CFHA 2011 Annual General Meeting,
17 September 2011,
Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo

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A crystallizing moment in the history of conscientious objection in Canada occurred on November 22, 1940 in a meeting room in Ottawa. A Conference of Historic Peace Churches (CHPC) delegation struggled to persuade government officials that their request for a program of alternative service was in earnest. One official asked the delegates, "What will you do if we shoot you?" For Mennonite elder Jacob H. Janzen who had survived war and revolution in Russia, the question triggered a response that has become one of the most well-known quotes in Canadian Mennonite history:

> Listen, General, I want to tell you something. You can't scare us like that. I've looked down too many rifle barrels in my time to be scared in that

A CHPC delegation to Ottawa to meet the Prime Minister, February 1951. Pictured (in no particular order) are: Fred Haslam, B.B. Janz, J. B. Martin, David Reimer, E.J. Swalm, C.J. Rempel, David Schultz, Elven Shantz. Credit: Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

> way. This thing [conscientious objection] is in our blood for 400 years and you can't take it away from us like you'd crack a piece of kindling over your knee. I was before a firing squad twice. We believe in this.[1]

Although a courageous statement by an individual, Janzen's words were no doubt influenced by the convictions of other CHPC delegates present that day, including Quaker Fred Haslam and Brethren in Christ leader E. J. Swalm – both of whom had been imprisoned for conscientious objection during World War I. Swalm later wrote of his CHPC partners: "My life has been enriched by the contributing influence of these church leaders. They have left me hopeless[ly] in debt to them."[2]

Historian Arthur Dorland has called the Quaker peace testimony a "lonely path."[3] Other historic peace churches in Canada, such as the Mennonites, Amish and Brethren in Christ have also followed seemingly lonely paths. The crisis of World War II brought these paths to convergence. The result of their efforts, the "Conference of Historic Peace Churches" brought these groups encouragement on the lonely path, inspiring ideas and action during the war and the post-war period that followed.

Relying primarily on CHPC records found in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario (MAO),[4] this paper examines the CHPC from its birth in 1939 to its final meeting in 1964. Since it is based on a talk to a primarily Society of Friends audience well acquainted with their own history, special mention is made of Quaker–Mennonite relationships, and Quaker participation in the CHPC. To set the scene, we begin by tracing the path of the Canadian Mennonite peace tradition.

Origins: Anabaptists and Mennonites

In the sixteenth century, as Christianity, government and culture in Europe began to re-form around two basic identities, Catholic and Protestant, some grew increasingly dissatisfied with either option. These dissenters, often radically different even from one another, were nonetheless categorized together as "Anabaptists" (re-baptizers). While many of these movements were short-lived, groups in Switzerland and south Germany (commonly called "Swiss" Anabaptists) and the Netherlands ("Dutch" Anabaptists) began to coalesce around some commonly held beliefs and practices.

These Anabaptist groups practiced adult baptism, professing that baptism must be a conscious choice by a believer. Baptism represented not only an individual's personal salvation but also a commitment to a life of discipleship and the discipline of the congregation. Practices such as refusing to take oaths (as sometimes required by the state) and nonresistance (neither going to war nor yielding to the temptation to exert violence) were expected of baptized members.[5]

Anabaptists studied the Bible vigorously as a guide to faith and life. One of their debates focused on whether Christians should hold goods in common, following the example of the early church. A few Anabaptist groups, most notably the Hutterites, formed communal societies. Another debate centred on how rigidly to separate from non-Anabaptists. Jakob Ammann, who became the founder of various groups that bear the name "Amish," argued for strict community discipline. For instance, Ammann proposed that men keep their beards as a way to distinguish themselves from military men, who were clean shaven or wore moustaches.[6]

The term "Mennonite" comes from a Dutch ex-priest named Menno Simons who was so well known as an organizer and communicator of the faith that the congregations he served began to be known by his name.

For many Mennonite groups, open persecution was the norm. For Dutch Mennonites, who gained a position of tolerance in the prosperous Netherlands, this period of persecution was shorter. The Dutch were able to extend mutual aid to the Swiss congregations, and help them settle in William Penn's religiously tolerant Pennsylvania beginning in 1683. Many Dutch Mennonites migrated to Prussia (now northern Germany and Poland), and later accepted Catherine the Great's invitation to settle south Russia (now Ukraine). Members of all of these groups would eventually find homes in Canada.

Peace Churches come to Canada

Pennsylvania, with its political structure shaped by the Society of Friends, was somewhat of a safe haven for Swiss Mennonites. However, after the American Revolutionary War, some Mennonites began to feel uneasy about their place in the new republic. Furthermore, land pressures were prompting them to look west, and even north.

The path to Upper Canada was made easier by the passing of the Militia Act of 1793. The Act stated that Quakers, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ[7] would be exempt from serving in the militia upon verification of their membership in one of these groups. Instead, all males of military age were obliged to pay twenty shillings a year in peacetime and five pounds per year in time of war.

Mennonite historian Frank H. Epp observes that Mennonites were twice indebted to the English Quakers; first for offering shelter in Pennsylvania, and second in paving the way for militia exemption in Canada:

> In opposing the oath and warfare, the Quakers had opened the door to freedom not only in Pennsylvania; before that they had achieved in British imperial law the recognition of religious scruples and a nonconformist Christian conscience [with the 1781 exemption from militia service in Britain]. In other words, the Militia Act of 1793…had the benefit of English legal precedents which recognized as non-criminal certain forms of religious dissent.[8]

Mennonites and Quakers reacted differently to the Act. Mennonites tended to accept the tax, while Quakers were largely non-compliant. In 1809, a statute

The First Mennonite Church, Vineland, pictured in 1953. This is the oldest Mennonite congregation in Canada, formed in 1801. Credit: David L. Hunsberger/ Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

took effect declaring that the Crown had the power to "impress such horses, carriages, and oxen" required "in case of emergency, by actual invasion or otherwise." During the War of 1812, this statute was tested. Quakers accepted fines and jail time rather than complying with impressment. There is some evidence that Mennonites were the subject of impressment. In his history of Waterloo, Ezra Eby lists thirteen Mennonite men who were compelled to take their wagons, horses and oxen to a battle on the Thames River in September 1813. Eby writes:

> These Waterloo boys acting as teamsters had taken shelter in a swamp near by while the battle was being fought. An officer…seeing that all was lost, gave them warning, said, 'Boys, all is lost, clear out and make the best you can,' upon which some ran, while others unhitched their horses and rode off for their lives.[9]

Following the war, at least twenty-two Mennonite farmers claimed losses amounting to about $5,000.[10]

Although they complied with the requirements of the law, Mennonites in Upper Canada pursued an active lobby to reduce the cost of the militia tax. Their arguments, based on the "many difficulties which poor people, with large families have to labour under in new settlements" were finally answered in 1849 when the payment requirement was removed.[11]

The danger of war returned briefly with the American Civil War. When it was discovered that Confederates had organized on Canadian soil for a raid into Vermont, the United States restricted cross-border travel and trade. The Canadian government responded by creating a volunteer militia to patrol the border. Recruiters drafted Mennonite youth. Alarmed, Mennonite leaders lobbied the government, reminding them of Mennonite military exemption, and urging the government to act "with wisdom and moderation….that our Country may escape the awful scourge of war."[12]

This experience may have been a factor in the formation of the Mennonite Aid Union in 1866.[13] The Union was a mutual aid organization meant to be an alternative to insurance. Mennonite leaders considered insurance ownership to be inconsistent with non-resistance since insurance companies could go to court on the insured's behalf.

The threat of war tended to focus the attention of Mennonite leadership on the general health of Mennonite communities. Leaders felt that if they could strengthen non-resistant practices in all areas of life during peacetime, then non-resistant resolve would be strengthened in wartime. Mennonite Bishop S.F. Coffman counseled:

> The world may lose its respect for the advocates of peace by hearing much of their claims and finding but little of their character. The church will grow stronger in her testimony by living the life of love and the doctrine of non-resistance will speak for itself.[14]

On the eve of World War I, Mennonites had been in Canada for over a century. The early "Swiss" coming from Pennsylvania to Niagara, York County and Waterloo paved the way for other Anabaptist groups to follow. The Amish began to arrive directly from Europe in 1823, and the Mennonites assisted them in settling in Wilmot Township. In the 1870s, Ontario Mennonites assisted Russian Mennonite immigration to Manitoba. This immigration was spurred in part by the imposition of

Menno C. Cressman, head of NRRO Shipping Committee (at right) speaks with Clara (Snyder) Nafziger (back to camera). Mrs. Aaron Weber (left) is also helping with a relief shipment in the basement of the First Mennonite Church in Kitchener in the 1940s.

alternative service by the Russian government.

Two major divisions occurred among the Swiss Mennonites in Ontario, taking their adherents in radically different directions. In 1883 the "New" Mennonites formed under the name "Mennonite Brethren in Christ" (MBIC). Highly influenced by Methodism, this group embraced evangelism and even allowed women in leadership, though this stance later changed. This denomination is now called the Evangelical Missionary Church and has drifted significantly from its Mennonite roots. In 1889, "Old Order" Mennonites, objecting to such changes as the adoption of Sunday Schools and revival meetings, separated from the main conference body. The main and largest conference body, the Ontario Mennonite Conference (OMC), continued to be made up primarily of Mennonites of Swiss/ Pennsylvanian origin. OMC was a member of the General Conference of Mennonites in North America.

World War I brought these different groups into co-operation. Led by the OMC Mennonites, exemption to conscription under the 1917 Military Service Act was secured, although these exemptions would be tested (as we shall see, below). In response to these privileges, representatives from the OMC Mennonites, Old Order Mennonites, MBIC, Brethren in Christ and Amish came together to establish the Non-Resistant Relief Organization (NRRO). The purpose of the NRRO was to "raise a generous fund…as a memorial of appreciation for religious liberty, to be presented to the Government for relief or charitable uses in accord with the principles of our faith." The fund raised approximately $75,000 for relief of war suffering by war's end.[15] In a parallel effort, Mennonite women formed the Ontario Branch of the Mennonite Woman's Missionary Society, and contributed clothing for the relief of war sufferers and victims of the Halifax explosion. The NRRO would go dormant following the war, but would later be reactivated and placed under the administration of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches.

Further co-operation was on the horizon. In 1920, North American Mennonites formed Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) as a relief organization to assist Russian Mennonites affected by war and famine. Ontario Mennonites again showed hospitality to a group of co-religionist immigrants, this time Russian Mennonites who arrived in the 1920s. With all these divisions and immigrations, Ontario was becoming home to one of the most diverse Mennonite populations in the world.

It is worth noting that the generation of men who would form the CHPC was influenced by the experience of World War I. The man who would be chairman of the CHPC for twenty-four years, E.J. Swalm, was a twenty-one year old Brethren in Christ farm boy from the Collingwood area when he was called in 1918 to report for duty in Hamilton. (There were probably

some over-zealous recruiting efforts at work, for he had been assured of an exemption.) Here, in excerpts from his testimonial *Nonresistance under test*, Swalm describes his experiences with authorities in the Central Ontario Regiment:

> [Captain Marshall] told me I had better take service or else I would be put in chains, taken oversees and placed in the front lines as a barricade and would be shot down first thing, with all the other cowards and despicable characters who would stop bullets to save better men who were coming up behind.
>
> I replied, 'Be that as it may. By the grace of God I am determined in my stand, and I will not take service because I intend to be a conscientious objector.' To this he replied, 'We won't force you to put on the uniform, but we'll just make you so glad to do it that you'll put it on….
>
> One day when Sergeant Hartley was taking us up to headquarters to give a summary of evidence [in advance of Swalm's court-martial], the boys were joking about shooting me, to which Sergeant Hartley replied, 'What's this joke about the shooting?' …He said, 'This is nothing to joke about. I'll see that it is stopped,' and we were never again threatened with anything like it. We mention this merely to show that Sergeant Hartley, with some other officers of the army, were the finest gentlemen we have ever met. Indeed, not all army men were corrupt. Some of the biggest and finest men we have ever met wore military uniform.[16]

Swalm and his compatriots were sentenced to two years of hard labour, but after four weeks were granted an indefinite leave without pay by the Minister of Justice.[17] Swalm told his story many times, influencing a generation of young men.

War on the horizon: the CHPC is born

The first meeting of what would become the CHPC took place in the home of MBIC minister Samuel Goudie in Vineland, Ontario in April 1939. Also present were representatives from the Brethren in Christ and OMC Mennonites. At this meeting, the other groups learned that the OMC Mennonites had already sent a "Statement of Position or Peace, War and Military Service" to Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Commonly called the "Turner Statement," this is a document that OMC's larger denominational body, the General Conference of Mennonites in North America, had agreed on in Turner, Oregon in 1937. The MBIC and Brethren in Christ then worked out a joint statement to send to the Canadian government.[18]

The first formal session of the CHPC was convened on 22 July 1940 at Erb Street Mennonite Church in Waterloo. E. J. Swalm recalled:

> All present were people of deep conviction on this subject of war and a mutual spirit of harmony was most graciously in evidence that warm summer afternoon… Immediately everyone felt a spirit of brotherhood even though many were seeing each other for the first time.[19]

Representatives from seven peace

church groups elected Swalm chairman.[20] The group then formed the Military Problems Committee. Throughout its life, this working group would, on behalf of CHPC, contend directly with both the cases of individual conscientious objectors and the finer points of peace witness in a changing society. Finally at the meeting, a communication was read from the Society of Friends expressing an interest in joint alternative service projects.

Subsequently, three delegates from CHPC met with Society of Friends representatives A.G. Dorland, G. Raymond Booth and Fred Haslam in Toronto on July 30. The delegates reported:

> The interview with the Friends has impressed us with the similarity of our problems and the way in which we are seeking to solve them. Our positions appear to be identical on all major points. We are all concerned about keeping out of participation in the war in every form – non-combatant as well as combatant service. The main consideration in engaging in other forms of service is to give a definite Christian testimony to the world.[21]

The three Friends, Dortland, Haslam and Booth, attended the next CHPC meeting on 3 September 1940. Booth outlined the Friends' work camp program in the United States, and the Friends appointed Fred Haslam to the Military Problems Committee.[22] Haslam would serve on the MPC or executive committee throughout much of the CHPC's existence.

The urgency of these meetings was brought about by the need to respond to government actions. In June of 1940, the National Resources Mobilization Act was passed, authorizing the federal government to "conscript or expropriate all necessary national resources" for the war effort.[23] The act authorized the compulsory national registration of all Canadians over the age of sixteen, a requirement in place until 1946. The questionnaire asked for such specific information as nationality and racial origin, languages, education, general health, and occupation.[24]

Mennonite reaction to the national registration requirement varied. A few Mennonites in the west refused to register altogether; some registered but marked their cards "Mennonite." In Ontario, the CHPC set up a parallel registration, encouraging peace church members and adherents who were men between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-eight to register with the government and CHPC.[25]

As the mobilization boards reviewed the registrations to see if postponement of military training for reasons of occupation or religious affiliation were appropriate, this dual registration made the process of confirming exemption easier in Ontario than other provinces.[26] It probably helped that the CHPC took the pro-active step of arranging meetings with the divisional registrars; MBIC leader J. Harold Sherk in London and the Friends' Fred Haslam in Toronto. Delegations were also sent to the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph and the Department of National War Services in Ottawa.[27]

Achieving registration and exemption was only the first step. The real test of peace church unity and acumen in government negotiations was yet to come. The National War Services Regulations (1940) stated that men granted postponement of military training could still be compelled to perform some form of non-combatant service. Nationally, Mennonites were not in agreement on this issue. Some refused to offer any form of

alternative service, others thought non-combatant service (such as firefighting or ambulance driving) was acceptable. The OMC in Ontario, encouraged by their American counterparts, were adamant that even non-combatant service under military control was unacceptable.

On 8 October 1940, over one hundred people, including representation from some smaller Mennonite and Amish groups and even a delegation of Old Order Dunkards (who share common roots with the current Church of the Brethren) met to consider a proposal for the "Canadian Fellowship Service." Drafted by the Military Problems Committee, the Service was a proposed program of alternative service for young men of military age to be administered under the direction of the CHPC. The proposal was tentatively accepted.

Comments by OMC Mennonite bishop J.B. Martin reveal the nature of the sensitive public climate in which Conference members were making their decisions. Martin suggested that given the current climate, members of peace churches "refrain from unnecessary discussion with the general public about our present status," that "young men and parents avoid referring to our privileges of exemption unless called for by authorities"; that "'lead a quiet and peaceable life' be our watchword that will control our thinking, conversation and manner of conduct" and "that the ministry endeavor to instill a conviction into our people to be very careful not to arouse the public to hostile agitations." The upcoming national day of thanksgiving (14 October) presented a particular challenge. Martin suggested that peace churches observe this as a day of prayer "for the spiritual and national welfare of our nation" to be accompanied by a thank you offering to relieve the suffering of war.[28]

Detailed accounts of the many meetings, late night writing and re-writing of documents, prayer sessions, and delegations to Ottawa required for the creation of the Alternative Service program can be found elsewhere.[29] It will suffice to say here that the CHPC and representatives from Mennonites in western Canada encountered considerable resistance from the Canadian government to the formation of an alternative service program under CHPC control, or even under the control of a non-military branch of government. Some officials tried to exploit disagreements between Mennonites on the acceptability of non-combatant service. The exchange between Major-General LaFleche and J. H. Janzen which opened this paper was one particularly dramatic example of this attempt.

J.B. Martin later described that meeting as a kind of turning point:

> The delegation returned to the hotel and laid the matter before the Lord in definite prayer, and waited for the Holy Spirit to guide us in the next move. All sensed the seriousness of the situation that such a move [forcing them to provide service under military direction] would mean many of our young men would go to jail for conscience sake. God definitely led us to bypass the Major-General and to interview the Honourable J.T. Gardiner, Minister of War.[30]

Gardiner received the delegation cordially and "seemed to be sympathetic towards the idea of civilian service, mentioning one or two possibilities of which he had himself been thinking."[31]

In May 1941, the government created an alternative service program under the

civilian Department of Mines and Resources. Young men were to serve four month terms in remote camps building roads and doing firefighting and reforestation work. In 1943, due to critical labour shortages, a program of Selective Service began to replace the camps. Selective Service workers were paid regular wages in agriculture and industry, but were required to donate most of their income to the Red Cross.

The CHPC did not administer these programs, as it had initially proposed. Its role became one of providing chaplains or "spiritual advisors" and helping to smooth out the inevitable individual complications experienced by the young men. It also tried to lend support to the dependants of alternative service workers, though the results of these efforts remain unclear.

At the start of the program in 1941, J.B. Martin sketched out the expectations for alternative service:

> We expect the boys to demonstrate the practical side of non-resistance and doing good as we have never had an opportunity like this before….We expect the boys to return to our groups and be more loyal—If you are a Mennonite now we expect you to come back and be a Mennonite. …If you are a Friend we expect you to come back and be a Friend. …Our conference represents fourteen groups. In general we have many things in common but every group has its distinctives [*sic*] characteristics. Will we be able to love each other? We must or we are not Christian. … This is a momentous hour for the Historic Peace Churches in Ontario and Canada. Never before did we

Conscientious objectors arrive at the Montreal River alternative service camp. Credit: Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church.

> have to make decisions like to day. …To every group represented, in the name of Christ 'Let us earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.'"[32]

Meeting the challenge: Alternative Service experiences

The young men who were given these expectations experienced many personal challenges. Kitchener Mennonite Doug Millar exemplified many aspects of the Alternative Service experience. Looking back on his four-month stint in the camps, he gave an honest evaluation: "It was an adventure…a vacation." He wondered if their energy could have been put to better use than cutting a road through the wilderness of northern Ontario. Millar has felt "ill prepared" for his experience, and had not thought deeply about his peace testimony. "I hadn't really sorted it out," he remembered, "It was just taken for granted in our church and in our family." However, his four months would prove to be transformative. Doug got to know many people in the wider peace church community – something that encouraged him to remain active in the church after the war. "The older I get," he said in an interview thirty years later, "the more I think that war is an absolute crime against humanity and I've got that all sorted out."[33]

Many of these young men were away from rural communities for the first time, and were confronted with the need to explain and defend their peace positions. Conscientious objector Harold Schmidt recalled:

> [They would ask me] what is your philosophy? And this is where I… would have liked to have had a little more depth in theology to be able to explain my belief in acceptable terms to others who have had an altogether different background… The questions that they would ask made me dig….[They would] quote Scripture too, to the contrary to refute what I had [said]. I found this challenging…[34]

No definitive list of Alternative Service workers is available, but figures compiled by John A. Toews from mobilization records for Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina and Edmonton districts, presents a sense of the numbers of young men involved and their religious affiliations. Of the 6,158 men identified in the records surveyed, 4,425 were Mennonite, 482 Hutterites, 406 Doukhobors, 172 Jehovah's Witnesses, 79 Brethren in Christ and 8 Society of Friends. The remaining 586 identified with one of at least seventeen religious/philosophical groups or no religion.[35]

Victory bonds: a CHPC alternative

Another important wartime occupation for the CHPC was countering the intense public pressure to purchase war savings stamps and Victory Bonds. Negotiations with the Ministry of Finance ensured that Series "B" non-interest bearing loans would be "regarded as a satisfactory way of contributing to the needs of the country by those who for conscientious reasons were unable to buy war savings stamps." The Ministry also arranged for Victory Bonds to be sold with a special sticker indicating that the proceeds were to be used for the alleviation of war suffering.

By 1945, approximately $822,000 in "B" certificates had been purchased, and $3.8 million in special Victory Bonds.[36] These special arrangements were recognition by the CHPC of the implication of a society

engaged in "total war." As J.B. Martin addressed the CHPC:

> In that set up of labour, industry, finance and trade and commerce [that make up the war economy] you and I have to live and work. …With the Christian it is a concern to be industrious and to wisely spend and invest money so that we will not sell our Lord for thirty pieces of silver.[37]

Postwar: "Plan while there is peace"

Beginning in 1944, the annual CHPC conference sessions focused on preparing for life in a post-war world. Chairman E.J. Swalm argued that the CHPC should continue, for "if we are to receive a hearing and express to the world the doctrine of peace, we *must live it*."[38] In 1945, he stated that the war had been merely a "probationary test" and that "people will be watching us more than ever before and that our present actions will tell who we really are."[39]

The October 1945 meeting was a time of inspirational talks that looked to the tasks ahead. Also included that day was a resolution about the loss of men in service:

> The global war which has recently come to a close has affected our country as well as some of the homes of members of Peace Churches feeling the loss on the battle field of some loved one who did not see his way clear to accept the testimony of our Peace Churches. We as a Conference body wish to extend our sympathy to members of any home represented here which may have been visited by such a tragedy.[40]

Group discussion on alternative service experiences at a 1963 CHPC retreat, led by panel at front: J.B. Swalm, H.H. Epp, Cornelius Baerg, Enos Bearinger, Pete Neufeld, Fred Cressman. Credit: Henry Epp/Mennonite Archives of Ontario

Among the homes represented was that of Elven Shantz, secretary of the Military Problems Committee, whose son Frederick was killed over Munster in March 1945. Elven Shantz was a tireless worker for the cause of non-resistance, but felt that his sons should make their own choices, and both chose to enlist.[41]

The post-war annual CHPC meetings featured programs of missions and service workers, mostly Mennonite, from places of suffering around the world. Typical was the report of Orie Miller of Mennonite Central Committee who reported in October 1945 on conditions in Europe. His talk is summed up in the meeting minutes: "He painted vivid pictures of the hopeless conditions in the war-torn countries. He told of the sufferings of millions who have lost their homes, their husbands, their sons." He concluded "ours is the task to heal the wounds and cheer the broken hearted."[42]

Speaking in 1946, Fred Haslam felt it is our "duty to help others uplift what the war has torn down and that non-resistance is not enough, we need a positive programme to make the enemy into friends and bring God down to this earth."[43] Quaker Francis Starr, speaking in 1950 echoed the call of many other speakers to "plan while there is peace." Learning from the experience of the recent war, the CHPC should improve the quality of alternative service: "Instead of building useless roads and roads which are to be used for war purposes, we should look for more positive programs, such as mental hospital work where Pacifism can really be put into action."[44]

Powerful sermons were also a hallmark of these meetings. In 1945, J.H. Janzen spoke from his experience:

> As most of you know, I served as a Field Chaplain in the White Army during the Civil War in Russia, and as such I was equaled in rank to the corresponding commissioned officers….When I took sick with Spotted Typhoid fever…I demanded not to be put in the better hospitals with the high ranking officers but to be left with the privates in their lowly field hospital. I felt I…wanted to be near to them[,] sharing their plight and their sufferings with them. My request was granted, and those privates never forgot that and were a great comfort and help to me later when I needed their friendship. … Therefore let us be concerned with Love and Love only. Let us not seek any privileges above other citizens of our homeland. Let us be their equals and love them as ourselves.[45]

At times the annual meetings resembled mission conferences; mission and non-resistance were closely linked in the minds of a number of post-war Mennonite speakers. John A. Toews spoke in 1953 on "Participation in war and our missionary task" in which he argued that participation in war is a barrier to missions. People see "destruction and corruption, but not love and forgiveness," he said, "The world is sick of the inconsistent testimony."[46] Toews also spoke of the pressure of state educational institutions wanting to turn all people into "patriotic citizens," and also the pressure from "prominent evangelical school leaders who attack the peace position, and promote participation in war by Christians."[47]

No doubt the post-war CHPC meetings were designed to be events of information, encouragement and inspiration for peace churches on the "lonely path." Attendance at the annual meetings increased; one remarkable conference in Vigil in 1950

boasted 443 registrants, with fifty per cent of the audience being under thirty years of age.[48]

In addition to inspirational conferences, the CHPC undertook numerous service and educational tasks. In a sense, it became a clearing house for issues faced by Ontario peace churches in the new and complex post war environment. Should non-resistant Christians join unions? What about jury duty? What are peace principles in business? How do we teach non-resistance in the home? Will governments continue to honour our conscientious objector status? Will our young people take up the cause of peace? What are the alternatives to supporting nuclear weapons manufacture through income tax? What is wrong with the purchase of military toys? Can we continue to give a "clear Christian testimony" while participating with those who oppose war on a humanitarian basis only?[49]

Art Dyck puts a head bandage on Menno Braun during a Mennonite Disaster Service sponsored first aid course held in Altona, Manitoba in 1959. Credit: The Canadian Mennonite/ Mennonite Archives of Ontario

CHPC helped arrange reunions of alternative service workers, and arranged for peace speakers to be available for peace church pulpits. As an effort in local peacemaking, they provided administrative support to Mennonite Central Committee's new Ailsa Craig Boys' Home.[50] The Military Problems Committee lobbied government on behalf of conscientious objectors who were denied citizenship.[51]

Perhaps the CHPC's largest task in the post-war period was responding to the Civil Defense program. Civil Defense came to the attention of the CHPC in 1956 when local units were organized in Kitchener and Baden. Should non-resistant Christians participate in civil defense?

To determine the answer to this question, two CHPC delegates visited with officials "to work out some feasible plan by which we could cooperate without violating Scriptural principles as interpreted by our churches."

The delegates were assured that civil defense was not part of the Canadian military, but administered under the Department of National Health and Welfare. Its purpose was "organized self-help in case of disaster brought about by a nuclear war" not to train people to fight. Civil Defense participants rendered service in five areas: policing, fire fighting, public utilities, medical and welfare (emergency food, housing, etc.).

The CHPC delegates proposed the possibility of congregations forming their own distinct units; officials were open to the idea. Federal and provincial officials later confirmed this idea, with the suggestion that congregational leaders train at the Civil Defense College at Arnprior.

Two members of the CHPC executive then visited the College, formerly an Air

Force training base about forty miles west of Ottawa. The delegates were impressed with the course and students, reporting that

"the only objectionable element we found was a wet canteen." The concluded that:

> We were made to feel anew that Civil Defense is, in all probability, here to stay for quite some time and we will have to face it and do something about it. By co-operating now as much as we conscientiously are able to, we believe we will have more bargaining power when we have to say no [to military service], and we will also enhance our opportunity to give an effective peace testimony. We believe Civil Defense provides an opportunity to 'overcome evil with good.'[52]

"After considerable discussion" CHPC accepted the proposal to send several people to train as instructors who would then be available to the constituency. The constituency was also encouraged to take St. John's Ambulance courses and participate in blood donor clinics.

The Military Problems Committee, tasked with carrying out this decision, sent two brethren to participate in an Arnprior course in "emergency feeding." Two other representatives attended a "Conference of Clergy," an ecumenical Civil Defense sponsored conference. These experiences convince the Committee that "affiliation with Civil Defense is not wise" though peace churches should always be prepared to provide disaster service.[53] As the years passed, Mennonite openness to the civil defense program cooled even further. At a CHPC discussion one member, a "Brother Neufeld", expressed the opposing reservations succinctly, urging "great caution [in civil defense participation] since our testimony is to present Christ, not to dig in for survival."[54] In 1958, following the lead of Mennonites in the United States and elsewhere in Canada in establishing an alternative to civil defense, CHPC took steps to organize a Mennonite Disaster Service for Ontario "to give prompt assistance in relief and rehabilitation of disaster victims" and added "This service is to be rendered in the Name of Christ."[55]

Ralph Eames, a Quaker (left), and David Groh, Mennonite, at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto in 1962. The booth, sponsored by a group that would soon become Mennonite Central Committee of Canada, had as its theme "The Church in the Nuclear Age." Credit: The Canadian Mennonite/Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

By the close of the 1950s, the CHPC had been meeting for nearly twenty-five years. A generational change was afoot. In 1957, the first peacetime gathering of Canadian Mennonite representatives met to discuss matters of mutual concern. This led to the creation of Mennonite Central Committee Canada in 1964. Its provincial branch in Ontario, MCC Ontario, was also formed, bringing together the work of MCC and the CHPC in one organization.

Conclusion

Today, we often hear the term "incubator" to describe organizations set up to nurture new businesses and technologies. The Conference of Historic Peace Churches was a kind of peace incubator. It broke new ground in Canada by shaping the Alternative Service program. It supported the relief and service work of Mennonite Central Committee and the Non-resistant Relief Organization. It educated peace church members on their conscientious objector status, and kept before them the needs of a suffering post-war world. It helped groups and individuals understand what living out non-resistance meant at work, home and in school. It fostered community among Alternative Service alumni through reunions; and encouraged young people to pursue peace. It built the Ontario arm of Mennonite Disaster Service. Most significantly, it brought historic peace church leaders out of their enclaves and grew a spirit of trust and mutual encouragement, bringing companionship to the "lonely path."

It would be amiss to conclude without remarking that this essay was based on a close reading of the CHPC annual meeting records and contextualized using common Canadian Mennonite secondary sources. It does not touch on the extensive Military Problems Committee records, the Non-Resistant Relief Organization records, or the personal records of key CHPC leaders, all found at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. Further exploration of these and Society of Friends records would probably reveal more interesting convergences on the "lonely path."

Notes

[1] T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada* vol. 3, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1996), 48.

[2] E.J. Swalm, quoted in Marr, Lucille, "Ontario's Conference of Historic Peace Church families and the 'joy of service'" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75 no. 2 (2001): 261.

[3] Arthur Dorland, *The Quakers in Canada : a history* (Ryerson Press: Toronto, 1968), 313.

[4] A description of CHPC archival holdings in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario is found at: uwaterloo.ca/mennonite-archives-ontario/mennonite-organizations-and-institutions/conference-historic-peace-churches

[5] Harold S. Bender, Robert Friedmann and Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptism." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1990. Accessed 24 May 2012. http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A533ME.html.

[6] Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada,* v.1, (Macmillan: Toronto, 1974), 40.

[7] The Brethren in Christ (also known as "Tunkers") originated in Lancaster County Pennsylvania in about 1780.The founders, largely of Anabaptist background, were also heavily influenced by pietism.

[8] Epp, *Mennonites in Canada,* v.1, 97.

[9] Ezra Eby, *A biographical history of early settlers and their descendants in Waterloo Township* (Eldon D. Weber: Kitchener, 1971), 9

[10] Epp, *Mennonites in Canada,* v.1, 104. See also Harold S. Bender, "New source material for the history of the Mennonites in Ontario" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 3, no. 1 (1929): 42-53. A small collection in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario of interest to a Quaker audience is that of a Jacob Oberholtzer of Bertie Township who was arrested during the War of 1812 and sentenced to death for High Treason. The collection contains letters of support, including one from a Quaker named Thomas Moore (Hist.Mss.1.125 MAO).

[11] Epp, *Mennonites in Canada,* v. 1, 107.

[12] E. Reginald Good, "War as a factor in Mennonite economic policy: a case study of insurance institutions sponsored by the Ontario Conference, 1864-1954." (MA thesis, University of Waterloo, 1984), 35-6.

[13] Good, "War as a factor in Mennonite economic policy," 33-34.

[14] Quoted in Larueen Harder, *We bear the loss together*, (Pandora Press: Kitchener, 2007), 70-71.

[15] L.J. Burkholder, A *brief history of the Mennonites in Ontario* (Mennonite Conference of Ontario: Toronto, 1935), 274-5.

[16] E.J. Swalm, *Nonresistance under test* (E.V. Publishing House: Nappanee, Ind.), 34,38.

[17] Swalm, *Nonresistance under test,* 44,50

[18] Swalm, **"**The organization of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches" XV-11.1.3/3 MAO, 2; Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada* v. 2, (Macmillan: Toronto, 1982), 566-7.
[19] **"**The organization of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches" XV-11.1.3/3 MAO; "Committee to prepare a history of the war experiences…", 3, XV-11.1.3/3 MAO.
[20] The seven groups were: Brethren in Christ, Mennonite Brethren in Christ, OMC Mennonite, Old Order Mennonite, Amish Mennonite, and the two "Russian Mennonite" conferences, the United Mennonite Churches of Ontario and the Ontario District Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.
[21] XV-11.1/1 MAO, 3 Sept 1940.
[22] XV-11.1/1 MAO, 3 Sept 1940.
[23] Regehr, , *Mennonites in Canada,* 41.
[24] *See* Genealogy and Family History: 1940 National Registration. Library and Archives Canada, 2010. Accessed 10 Sept 2011 from http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/genealogy/022-911.007-e.html.
[25] CHPC registration cards are located in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, XV-11.1.4. The age of CHPC registration was later extended to include those 18-21 (XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 20 Jan 1941).
[26] Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada,* 46.
[27] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 8 Oct 1940, 20 Jan 1941.
[28] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 8 Oct 1940.
[29] In particular, see Regehr, , *Mennonites in Canada* , chapter 4.
[30] The churches and official contacts with the government" XV-11.1.3/3 "Committee to prepare a history of the war experiences…", 4.
[31] 22 Nov 1940 report, quoted in XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 20 Jan 1941.
[32] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 3 Jul 1941.
[33] Interview with Donald and Douglas Millar by David Fransen, Hist.Mss.22.1.5 MAO, 31 Oct 1974
[34] Interview, Harold Schmidt with David Fransen, Hist.Mss.22.1.16, MAO, 2 March 1975
[35] John A. Toews, *Alternative service in Canada during World War II* (Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Winnipeg, 1959), 99. For further discussion of some of the other groups in Alternative Service, see the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* vol. 25 (2007).
[36] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 23 Oct 1945. The sticker read: "The proceeds received from the sale of this bond will be used by the Government of Canada to finance expenditures to alleviate distress or human suffering due to War."
[37] XV-11.1.1/1 1 MAO, Oct 1942.
[38] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 11 Oct 1944.
[39] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 11 Oct 1944; 23 Oct 1945.
[40] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 23 Oct 1945.
[41] Laureen Harder, *Risk and Endurance*: *a history of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church*, ([the Church]: Kitchener, 2003), 105.
[42] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 23 Oct 1945.
[43] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 15 Oct 1946.
[44] XV-11.1.1/1 15 MAO, Oct 1950.
[45] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 23 Oct 1945, 9.
[46] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 20 Oct 1953.
[47] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 16 Oct 1950.
[48] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 16 Oct 1950.
[49] On the last question, the sense from the minutes of 28 October 1961 was that this is not possible. Chairman E.J. Swalm discussed this question in his testimonial *Nonresistance under test*: "Nonresistance will never be promulgated by the signing of petitions on college campuses, nor by the popularizing of pacifism in times of peace, nor by the circulation of propaganda against war. These are not born of deep enough conviction," 14.
[50] Established in 1955, Ailsa Craig Boy's Farm (later Craigwood Youth Services) offered rehabilitative programs for young offenders. Records are located in XV-11.3.1 MAO and XIV-3.6 MAO.
[51] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 29 Oct 1960
[52] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 17 Nov 1956.
[53] XV-11.1.1/1 MAO, 17 Oct 1957.
[54] XV-11.1.1/1 28 MAO, Oct 1961.
[55] XV-11.1.1/1 22 MAO, Nov 1958.