

# NOTES FROM THE ARCHIVES



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*Canadian Moravian Historical Society, Edmonton Chapter  
2304-38 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6L 4K9*

## What Have We Been Up To?

The Canadian Moravian Historical Society Board has held three meetings since the last newsletter. Board President Laurie Ward reported during the September 14<sup>th</sup> meeting that Dr. Paul Peucker, Director and Archivist from the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, had confirmed his visit to the Canadian District. He will arrive on April 18<sup>th</sup> for the six days to include the Annual meeting (AGM) of the Canadian Moravian Historical Society. Dr. Peucker will be the guest speaker.

The Annual Meeting is scheduled for 2:00 PM, April 22, 2017, at the Millwoods Community Church. There will not be a luncheon but coffee and desserts will be served. Anyone interested in Canadian Moravian history and preserving its legacy is invited to attend this free event. Tickets (no charge) are available from the Board members.

At both the September meeting and the November 9<sup>th</sup> meeting on-going conversations were held on the re-write of the Society By-Laws to allow individuals not currently members of a Canadian Moravian Church and non-Moravians to sit on the Board. Several individuals have expressed interest in Board involvement and have a willingness to support the historical preservation efforts but, due to the wording of the by-laws, are allowed only a passive involvement. The Board agreed that the rewrite of the by-laws should go ahead with the board membership changes ready for passage by the general membership on April 22, 2017 at the annual meeting. The current by-laws and proposed amendments will be mailed to the membership one month prior to the AGM, along with a cover letter explaining the proposed changes and advising that the vote will be taken at the AGM. The membership will be asked to provide names, both Moravian and non-Moravian, to volunteer for Board membership.

Several archive workdays were held. Both cleanup and purging of unnecessary materials, currently in the archives, was accomplished. President Ward made several visits to the museum in Bruderheim to begin determination of the disposition of the museum materials, pending its closure. The Board will be looking to Dr. Peucker for guidance in the disposal of museum artifacts.

Dr. Paul Peucker, AGM guest speaker studied history at the Rijksuniversiteit at Utrecht (1988) and received his Ph.D. from the same university in 1991. The topic of his dissertation is the first Moravian settlement outside Herrnhut: Heerendijk in the Netherlands.



He holds a degree in archivistics from the Rijksarchiefschool in The Hague. Paul was archivist at the Unity Archives in Herrnhut, Germany, from 1996-2004. In March 2004 he became the archivist of the Moravian Church in America, Northern Province, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Paul is the founding editor of the Journal of Moravian History and has published on various topics.

## Following is a listing of the Canadian Moravian Historical Society (Edmonton Chapter) Board

President - Laurie Ward, [wornout@telus.net](mailto:wornout@telus.net)  
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Vice President - Esther Vitt-Gonzalez

Secretary - Kerry Bloomer

Treasurer - Ruth Humphreys

Directors - Edith Wilson

Donna Goodwin

BECD Representative - Rev. James Lavoy

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Elaine Bloomer

## Edmonton (Strathcona)

### 100 Years Ago

Until 1914 Edmonton had two Moravian Churches with the Edmonton Church on the north side of the river and the Strathcona Moravian Church on the south side. The north side Church was struggling to maintain membership and with the departure of Rev. Ernest Drebert in December, 1914, it was officially disbanded. However, the shrinking church continued to struggle supported by visits from Rev. Hoyer and Rev. Henkelmann. By 1922, with only 13 members left, it was determined that the congregation should officially combine with the Strathcona Church, becoming the 'Strathcona Edmonton' congregation.



The Edmonton (North Side) Moravian Church, early 1900's.

At the close of 1916 Edmonton had a population of 60,000 and the Strathcona Church had grown in membership from 190 to 204. The Sunday School averaged 53



The Strathcona Moravian Church.

participants or 'scholars' as they were called. Rev. Clement Hoyer was the pastor although he provided support and founding guidance to fledgling congregations across Alberta.

1917 saw another jump in membership to a total of 228 members. All services were in German and attendance averaged 78 in the morning and 88 in the evening. Brother Greenfield, Provincial Evangelist, held a series of well-attended and successful evangelistic meetings in September.

### 75 Years Ago

By the end of 1941 the Edmonton population had grown to 95,000 and church membership to dropped to 58. In 1936 there had been a rift in the church and two thirds of the membership left. In the following years the congregation went through a period of rebuilding and stabilization. Rev. Rudolph Schulze was the pastor.

Sunday morning services were held in German with an average attendance of 49. Sunday evening services were in English. Average Sunday School attendance was 15.

Rev. Samuel A. Wedman became the pastor in 1942. He purchased his own home in Edmonton so the Church was able to rent out the parsonage. The Edmonton population had grown to 103,000 but the Church membership dropped to 50. However, participation improved with an average of 55 attendees at the Sunday morning German service and 36 attendees at the evening English service. Sunday School participation was also up with an average of 18 participants.

1943 saw modest growth and financial stability. The mortgage on the parsonage was paid off and the church was debt free.

## New Sarepta

### 100 Years Ago

1917 was a year of growth for the New Sarepta Church. Rev. Herbert Kant was pastor. In addition to New Sarepta he held occasional services in East Leduc/Rosenthal, South Cooking Lake and the Maple Hill District.

Church membership grew from 111 to 130 with an average attendance of 70. This began to cause problems in that the Church building had a maximum capacity of 75. The Sunday School had a membership to 50 with 25 regular students. Times were hard and the funding wasn't immediately available to construct a new building. There were also several preachers trying to start work in the New Sarepta area. To quote the Annual Report by Rev. Kant; "Whenever these sects held special meetings our members would show their loyalty by attending our church in full force and not going over to those sectarian meetings."

During this period of time the Moravians were able to obtain an exemption from military service as conscious



Original New Sarepta Moravian Church

objectors. Rev. Kant helped several of the young male congregants with their paperwork and the needed documentation for their exemptions.

In 1918 the issue of a larger church building was resolved. The Church Council pledged \$9500 toward the building project. With generous assistance from the Bruderfeld and Bruederheim congregations, the structure was started in the spring of 1918 and with mostly volunteer help it was completed by fall.

### 75 year ago

1942 saw no significant growth or activity in the New Sarepta Church. Membership was stable at 203. Average Sunday morning attendance was 80 with a Sunday School attendance of 50. Rev. Fred Schimke was the pastor holding a morning service in German and an evening service in English. He also held two services a month at Hay Lakes with an average attendance of 65 and reported that the prospects for the founding of a Hay Lakes Moravian Church were good.

### 50 Years Ago

By 1967 the New Sarepta Moravian Church was in decline. The previous pastor had accepted a call to the Calgary Moravian Church and New Sarepta endured



New Sarepta Moravian Church in 1979

almost a year without a pastor. Membership dropped to less than 50 with many becoming involved in neighboring churches. A small core of members took heart and along with the Heimtal congregation called Rev. Kurt Vitt to serve as pastor. By the end of 1968 attendance of worship services had increased by over 30% and Sunday school attendance had quadrupled. A new and innovative church school program was attempted. This involved church school being held on a midweek afternoon instead of on Sundays. On their way home from school in New Sarepta, the school bus dropped children interested in attending Church school off at the Moravian Church. A few others were brought to Church school privately. This allowed all Moravian children to become involved in this Christian education program regardless of the parents involvement or non-involvement on Sunday mornings. This novel approach to Church school was quite successful. (from: *In Celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the New Sarepta Moravian Church, 1904-1979*)

## Rosedale

Rosedale is a farming-based community located east of Chilliwack, British Columbia. This small community is based alongside the Fraser River.

Moravian efforts to develop a fellowship were started in the late 1930s. By 1938 a core of 40 Moravians met regularly. The group grew to a membership of 55 by 1939.

### 75 Years Ago

In 1941 the congregation dropped from 55 members to 35. The annual report stated that the congregation was suffering from 'denominational competition.' Several other congregations began churches in the area and without a full time pastor and church building the Moravian congregation had trouble competing. The small remaining group was 'still hoping for the best'.

By 1942 the congregation size had dropped to 29 and 12 in 1943. At a church council meeting in September 1943 it was decided to attempt to continue services through the end of the year. Rev. Sam Marx attended the service the last Sunday in December by which time the average attendance was 12 to 15. No decision was made to discontinue services but no further Annual Reports are available. In a brief letter to Dr. Stocker of the PEC in mid-January 1944 Rev. Marx stated that the church was dissolved but that the Vancouver work was ongoing.

## Fairfield

The Fairfield, Ontario community was the first Moravian community in Canada and predates the Western Canadian Moravians by 100 years. The following narrative, [The Story of Fairfield](#) was written by Elma E. Gray, Historian. It is printed here in full with the permission of Chris Aldred, Curator, Fairfield Museum and National Historic Site. More information can be found at: [www.londonconference.ca/content/fairfield-museum](http://www.londonconference.ca/content/fairfield-museum)

On this park-site stood Old Fairfield, a refuge for Indians persecuted because of their acceptance of Christianity. For 21 years the town was a centre of hospitable and cultural influence, but was destroyed by American forces in 1813.

The story of Old Fairfield begins in Pennsylvania and is the outcome of a noble experiment by Protestant Moravian missionaries who came to America in 1735 seeking a safe home. The Moravians were members of the Episcopal Church of the Unity of the Brethren



(Unitas Fratrum) from Bohemia and Moravia. They lived simple, pious lives impelled by missionary zeal toward all neglected peoples of the world. In America their philanthropic aspiration was to love the Indians as brothers and to bring them the gospel of the Cross.

By 1742 the Delaware Indians inhabiting the Delaware River Valley near the Moravian towns of Nazareth and Bethlehem were almost reduced to starvation by the loss of their ancient hunting grounds to the relentless advance of white settlements. The Delawares accepted the Moravians' offer to form Indian mission towns where they could live without fear and learn enough European skills to enable them to live successfully as Indians in the white man's world. They would also learn to know and to love God. Many able Moravian men and women devoted their lives to this work. Brother David Zeisberger, the best known, spent 62 years in remote Indian outposts as their teacher and leader, accepting no salary from his church.

The flood of European immigration into Pennsylvania and the relentless white advance westward pushed the Indian mission towns every few years farther into interior wildernesses. By 1772 they had built what they hoped would be permanent sanctuaries on the Muskingum River in Ohio. Their three prosperous towns were the first in Ohio and their church ordinances are considered to be Ohio's first civil code.

When the repercussions of the Revolutionary War were felt in Ohio, the warpaths of the Indians and the British, from Detroit to Pittsburg, ran through the Moravian missions. To remain neutral and at peace surrounded by warring tribes incited by British scouts, was impossible. As atrocities against them increased and their lives were threatened, the Christians were forced to abandon their town and unharvested fields, valued at \$17,000, and were led as captives by the non-Christian Wyandots toward Lake Erie where they applied to the British at Detroit for protection. Meanwhile, starvation drove some of the Christian Indians back to their fields to gather grain. Here, 90 of them, men, women and children were ruthlessly murdered by American militia.

In the next nine years the Indian converts moved, built, settled and moved again six times. Near present day Mount Clemens, Michigan, after a stay outside Detroit, they live for a time but returned to Ohio in 1786. However, they were not able to return to the Muskingum due to Indian unrest and war threats in the Ohio country. Finally after giving up their towns near Bedford and on the Pettquotting River, close to present Milan, they sought the aid of the British and returned again to their protection, living for a period near present Amherstburg. But the Moravians

wished a home for their converts more removed from the evils of the white man's world and so were granted, by the Upper Canada Government, 51,000 acres on the Thames River. In 1792, the mission town was built at Fairfield, Upper Canada.

Through all their trials and wanderings Brother David Zwisberger had remained the Indians constant friend and inspiration. Fairfield's predominance, her peaceful, prosperous Indians and the important town they built and maintained in the following years were due to the gospel workers who devoted their talents to the Indians and white neighbors and cast the mold of early Protestant religion in western Upper Canada.

Fairfield became a town of 50 homes with a two story church, two schools, carpenter's shop and barns. The Indians cultivated many acres and sold annually in Detroit 5,000 bushels of corn and 5,000 pounds of maple sugar. They were said to write better than many Detroit mercantile clerks. Their Easter dawn services of song and prayer and their Christmas Eve love-feast attracted all settlers and Indians to their doors and were the first of their kind in Canada.

Across from Fairfield in a clump of trees was the cemetery they called "Hutberg" (Little hill under the Watch of the Lord) where, by 1813, had been buried 126 of Fairfield's residents. The bodies of Moravian missionaries were later removed to Bothwell Cemetery, Highway No. 2.

When the war-paths of the 1812-14 conflict brought victorious American soldiers to Fairfield's door, after the battle of the Thames, in which Tecumseh was killed October 1813, the Indians fled eastward in terror. Their town was pillaged and burnt to the ground. Seventeen raft-loads of plunder were taken by river to Detroit and the loss to the Indians was estimated to be \$12,000. Brother C.F. Denke and his wife followed the Indian refugees to Burlington where they lived until hostilities ceased. In 1815 they brought the Indians back to build New Fairfield, across the Thames, where some old mission buildings still stand on the Moravian town reservation.

The work so well begun by the Moravians was entrusted to the Methodist Church in 1902 and is now the responsibility of the United Church of Canada.

Old Fairfield, long forgotten, was excavated by Dr. Wilfrid Jury in the 1940's and purchased by a Christian philanthropist, the late W.A. McGeachy. In 1959 the Museum was built by the Home Missions Board of the United Church. It is now maintained by visitors admission fees and by income from a Fairfield Museum Trust established jointly by the McGeachy Executors and the United Church of Canada. The Museum is operated by the Fairfield Committee of London Conference.