

## Mennonites, Family, and Sexuality in Historical Perspective

Papers of this conference were published in the 2008 issue of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*.

On October 12 and 13, 2007, a history conference discussed Mennonites, Family and Sexuality in Historical Perspective. Mennonites have lived in families and as sexual beings, throughout their history. Yet there has been minimal research on or conversation about the meaning, structure, and function of families in Mennonite history. Even less examined is the notion of sexuality as experienced and expressed by Mennonites in the past. Both are at the core of human identity. This conference, without attempting to cover all possible topics, offers a sampling of new research on themes of Family & Sexuality in the Mennonite past.

The planning committee consisted of Marlene Epp (CGUC), Sam Steiner (CGUC), Ed Janzen (CGUC), Royden Loewen (University of Winnipeg), Ken Reddig (Mennonite Historical Society of Canada), Lucille Marr (McGill University), Wander Wagler Martin (Shalom Counselling Services).



**Family & Sexuality in Mennonite History:  
an Academic and Community Education Conference  
October 12-13, 2007, Conrad Grebel University College, at the University of Waterloo**

All sessions in Great Hall, Conrad Grebel University College  
**Friday, October 12, 2007**

8:30 - 8:45 Opening

**Marlene Epp**, Conrad Grebel University College

8:45 - 10:10

*Sexuality & Family in First Person Sources*

Chair: Ted Regehr, Calgary, AB

**Paul Tiessen**, Wilfrid Laurier University

“‘There are certain things Mennonite children are kept from seeing’: Sexuality, Seeing, and  
Saying in memoir and diary of the early twentieth century”

**Katherine Martens**, Winnipeg, MB

“Memoir Explorations of Family Life: The letters of Nic and Tina Martens”

**M.J. Heisey**, State University of New York at Potsdam

“‘What Do I Really Have to Offer These People’: Elsie C. Bechtel’s Writings on Lavercantiere,  
France, 1945-1948”

10:10 - 10:30 – Break

10:30 - 12:00

*Ideals and Realities in Traditionalist / Conservative Groups*

Chair: Sam Steiner, Conrad Grebel University College

**Barb Draper**, Elmira, ON

“Old Order Mennonite Family Life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries”

**Nate Yoder**, Eastern Mennonite Seminary

“Bill Gothard’s Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts and The Conservative Mennonite Conference:  
Evangelical Teaching for Traditionalist Families in Transition”

**Doreen Klassen**, Sir Wilfred Grenfell College (MUN)

“‘I wanted a life of my own’: Creating a Singlewoman Mennonite Identity in Mexico”

12:00-12:45

*Doing Family History*

Chair: Maurice Martin, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario

**Anne Konrad Dyck**, Toronto, ON

“The Russian-Mennonite Saga as Seen in the Life of One Family: *And in Their Silent Beauty  
Speak*”

**M. Lucille Marr**, McGill University

“Reflections on Writing Family History: A Case Study of Frances H. Davidson and her Nieces”

12:45-2:00 Lunch

2:00-3:30

*Homosexuality: Church Positions and Individual Experience*

Chair, Wanda Wagler Martin, Shalom Counselling Services, Waterloo, ON

**Priscilla Reimer**, Woodmore, MB

“‘She sleeps with her girlfriend’: A 20<sup>th</sup> century shunning”

**Jan Braun**, Winnipeg, MB

“From Policy to the Personal: One Queer Mennonite's Journey”

**Ed Janzen**, Conrad Grebel University College

“Numbers Have a Story Too: Exploring the Significance of the Sexual Identity Incidence Statistics in one Mennonite Study”

3:30-3:50 – Break

3:50-5:15

*Marriage Models and Behaviours*

Chair: Jim Pankratz, Conrad Grebel University College

**Michael Driedger**, Brock University

“Mennonites, Marriage, and the Emergency of Civil Society in the Netherlands”

**Lydia Neufeld Harder**, Toronto School of Theology,

“Interpretations of Biblical Teachings on Marriage Within Mennonite Confessions of Faith”

**Jennifer A. Johnson**, University of Toronto

“Religious Endogamy and Exogamy Among the Mennonites of Ontario in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century”

7:30 p.m.

“Mennonite/s Writing on Family & Sexuality”

**Hildi Froese Tiessen**, Conrad Grebel University College

Keynote address:

“Being Mennonite in the Family: A North American Perspective”

**Royden Loewen**, Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg

Reception in John E. Toews Atrium

**Saturday, October 13, 2007**

8:30 - 10:00

*Sexual Beliefs and Practices in the Mennonite Past*

Chair: John K. Rempel, St. Jerome's University

**Brenda Martin Hurst**, Frazer, PA

“Early Twentieth-Century Mennonite Theology of Sexuality: Claiming Strength Over

Weakness”

**Hans Werner**, University of Winnipeg

“‘A mild form of deviancy’: Premarital Sex among early Mennonites in Manitoba”

**Tracy Penny Light**, St. Jerome’s University

“Reproducing Discourses: Mennonite Sexuality in Early Twentieth Century Canada”

10:00 - 10:30 – Break

10:30 - 12:15

*Mennonite Cultural Forms, Family Relations, and Social Control*

Chair: Leonard Enns, Conrad Grebel University College

**Laureen Harder**, Kitchener, ON

“‘What’s she going to do now?’ Ontario Mennonite Conference women debate nonconformity”

**Lynette Plett**, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

“Fashioning Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite Women”

**Roland Sawatzky**, Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, MB

“Ideology, Space, and Social Control: The Russian-Mennonite Family in Historic Manitoban Domestic Architecture”

**Judith Klassen**, Memorial University

“Harmonica Rebellion? Music and Defiance in Old Colony Mennonite Mexico”

12:30 - 1:30 – Lunch

1:30-3:00

*Migrating Families*

Chair: Henry Paetkau, Conrad Grebel University College

**Luann Good Gingrich**, York University

“Redefining and Defending Family in Transnationality”

**Cynthia Jones**, Wilfrid Laurier University

“Family and Gemeinde in the context of Diaspora: Intergenerational tales of connection from Russian Mennonites in Niagara”

**Kerry Fast**, University of Toronto

“Family, Religion and Migration in the Lives of Low German-speaking Mennonite Women”

3:00-3:30 -- Break

3:30 - 5:00

*Violence, Misconduct, and Conflict in Family Relations*

Chair: Marianne Mellinger, Conrad Grebel University College/Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

**Bruce Hiebert**, University College of the Fraser Valley

“A Failure of Masculinity: Mennonites and the Crisis of World War I”

**Ralph Friesen**, Nelson, BC

“Sexual ‘Sin’ and its Consequences Among the Kleine Gemeinde in 19th Century Imperial

Russia"  
**Janis Thiessen**, Winnipeg, MB  
“Gender and Family in Three Mennonite-owned Businesses in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Manitoba”

5:00 - Closing