

B. J. J. J.

Telling Our Story At The Brubacher House

- I will take a few minutes to tell you the story of the Brubacher House. (How many of you know anything about the Brubacher House?)
- It is a beautiful old farm house which was built in 1850 by John E. Brubacher.
- The house is located on the north side of Columbia Ave. and is on the north campus of the University Avenue, at the end of an old farm lane, a stone's throw from Laurel Lake..
- Back in 1960's when the University was developing their campus, one of their architects proposed that the University preserve this old stone house as a memorial to the Pennsylvania German Mennonite settlers who pioneered the lands upon which the University complex is built.
- The University called upon Conrad Grebel College to give consideration to this project.
- While plans for funding were being formalized, a fire broke out in the old house which was ignited by a spark from a heap of burning rubbish landing on the tinder dry roof.
- Within minutes the flames roared through the house. The basement which was being used at the time for storage of lawnmowers and fuel tanks.
- The fire gutted the entire interior and the roof. Only the stone walls remained.
- Most of us thought that the preservation project would be completely abandoned.
- But the architect called in a building inspector, who, after examining the structure, declared it structuraaly sound, so the project *was done* in stages , as funds became available.
- On of our society members, Simeon Martin, from St. Jacobs, who had been engaged in construction for many years supervised the construction of the new roof.
- Simeon also gave considerable direction to the plan for the rebuilding of the interior.

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- From the beginning of the project, the University invited Conrad Grebel College, our Mennonite college on the University of Waterloo campus to assume responsibility for house furnishings, personnel and program.
- During reconstruction of the interior it was decided that part of the basement, which has an entrance on the ground level would serve as a seminar room.
- The main floor would be furnished to depict the lifestyle of a typical Pennsylvania German Mennonite family in the 1850 - 1890 period, which is the time period the house was occupied by the first owner, John E. Brubacher and his family.

The top floor was reconstructed to provide a comfortable apartment for personnel.

- Conrad Grebel College enlisted the assistance of the MHSO in procuring and preparing furnishings for the main floor.
- Quite a few artifacts and pieces of furniture were donated by Society members and Brubacher descendants.
- Several necessary items were purchased with funds provided by an interested descendant of pioneer Abraham Stauffer.
- The Brubacher House program is under the direction of a committee composed of 2 members of the CGC Board, 2 members of the MHSO Board, and the College Business Administrator.
- When the house was furnished and ready to receive visitors, a search began for suitable personnel.
- Personnel who would live in the apartment and who could dialogue with the visitors who came to see a Mennonite home.
- Our committee was pleased to have Dorothy Bean, and Ida Habermehl, two natives of this area who had spent 30 years in Chicago, who came back to their native land upon retirement, come and take up residence in the Brubacher House apartment.
- (Would Dorothy & Ida please stand?)
- Their housekeeping skills have transformed the house into a home.
- Their ability to dialogue with visitors in telling the story of our Mennonite heritage has added a significant dimension to our program at the Brubacher House.

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- Between the beginning of May to the end of October last year they entertained 440 guests.
- The commentary for the tour through the Brubacher House provides an excellent vehicle to tell our Mennonite story.
- ie. The location of the Brubacher House on the German Company Tract opens the door to communicate the Mennonite practice of Mutual Aid.
- Most of us know that* - The German Company Tract of 60,000 acres was purchased with funds raised by Mennonite families in Lancaster County Pennsylvania, some of whom never thought of owning land in Canada.
- The Company was organized, and funds raised to help their fellow Mennonites who had come *to Canada* at the turn of the 19th century and purchased land from Richard Beasley *in Waterloo Twp.*
- After these early settlers had paid cash in full for their lands, they discovered that Beasley was unable to produce a clear title to their land, due to an existing mortgage.
- Finally in his desperation to raise money to pay off the mortgage, the landowner, Richard Beasley offered to sell **an additional** tract of 60,000 acres of undeveloped land to the Pennsylvania Germans, at a reasonable price.
- The Mennonites in Pennsylvania formed the German Company in their desire to help *the Mennonites in Canada to obtain clear titles to their land.*
- Their kind deed also* provided opportunities for the subscribers *or for* their sons and daughters to obtain rich fertile lands.
- I had said that ~~some~~ had never thought of coming to Canada and some never did. The Brubacher land was held by a subscriber *in Pa.* until his death in 1840, when it was sold by his estate *executor of*. *It was then* the Brubacher family who had been one of the ~~early~~ pioneers to arrive *soon* after 1805.
- purchased by* - The practical design of the house suggests a simple lifestyle.
- The well built structure of uncut native fieldstone suggests stability and the ability *to* utilize resources found on their property.
- The house furnishings reflect the thriftiness of the Pennsylvania German Mennonite people.
- ie. The furniture is a collection of pieces from various time periods.
- We can all recall that only a few new pieces of furniture would be found in our homes. These would be mingled with pieces handed down from the parents or grandparents or purchased at a neighbour's auction sale. (more)

- As long as a piece of furniture was functional it was not hidden in the attic.
- Plain pieces of furniture intermingled with pieces decorated with painted stencil designs reveals an appreciation for beauty.
- The carpets and rugs on the floors created from strips of cloth cut from discarded worn out clothing, was practicing the art of making something out of nothing.
- Our mothers and grandmothers were masters ~~at~~ recycling.
- In fact the attribute of thriftiness in a woman ranked with godliness in the Pennsylvania German Mennonite culture.
- When a man in the community suffered financial problems, *it was* the ability of his wife to make \$1. do the work of \$2. *that was in question. came into question as much as the husband's ability to provide*
- The Family Bible, containing the records of marriages, births and deaths inscribed in beautiful fraktur, indicates the importance of family heritage, knowing who we are.
- The book "Martyr's Mirror reminds everyone of *the our heritage* ~~times~~ of persecution in Europe during *the following* the Reformation.
- The fact that these books appear in *the* German language in a house of the 1850 - 1890 era indicate *the Mennonite* ~~our~~ determination to uphold *their* ~~our~~ German tradition while living in British territory.
- The document on display, wherein John E. Brubacher is named a trustee for an endowment fund set up in 1828 by pioneer Abraham Erb, *which was* to be used for the education of orphans and children in needy families, suggests that the education of *all* children was a concern in the Mennonite community.
- Abraham Erb lived in the days before the Public School system was ~~in~~ existence.
- The education of children at that time depended on the ability of parents to pay a fee for each child registered in the school.
- Erb was a wealthy man, with no children of his own.
- His concern that all children receive a basic education in the 3 R's prompted him to make *provision* ~~provision~~ for an endowment fund for this purpose.
- He saw a need and recognized his ability to meet that need. *he did it.*
- Interestingly this fund ~~still~~ exists. It was transferred *in the 1960's* to the Waterloo County Board of Education. The interest is applied each year to the purchase of ~~school~~ supplies.

- The tour of the Brubacher House concludes with a slide presentation of a Barn Raising Bee on a Mennonite farm near Conestogo. One of our members, Roy M. Brubacher, provided an interesting and informative commentary for the presentation.
- Sharing the story of our Mennonite Heritage has been challenging and rewarding for some of us. Lorraine Roth and I have assisted in the program as volunteers upon request.
- Lorraine and I worked together in preparing the furnishings for the Brubacher House. Funds for that project were very limited, so we were forced to make \$1. do the work of \$2. I must say that due to Lorraine's resourcefulness and "know-how" we accomplished the impossible. I have said for many years I have believed that "with God all things are possible" but after my experience with Lorraine I feel like saying "with God and Lorraine all things are possible."
- As our program at the Brubacher House progresses, with more tour groups and family groups coming to the House, the need for volunteers increases.
- There are occasions when our hostesses would appreciate receiving assistance and relief in telling our story at the Brubacher House.
- Conrad Grebel College has encouraged the MHSO to develop a volunteer program to fill this need.
- Needless to say, such a program requires volunteers who are willing to direction in the art of telling our story.
- Tonight we are appealing to members of our Society to consider becoming involved in this interesting and rewarding service.
- It is an excellent project for retired seniors who are not ready to sit in their rocking chairs day after day.
- You qualify if you enjoy meeting people and entering into dialogue with them. Most Mennonites enjoy visiting.
- On April 30th, we are holding Session #2 of our Heritage Seminar. We are meeting at the Brubacher House at 7:30 p.m.
- We invite you to attend this meeting where we will discuss the topic "Preparing to Tell Our Story at the Brubacher House".
- Why don't you join us and become involved in the Brubacher House program as a volunteer ?
- Would you please leave your name at the registration table?