

**“Hidden in That Little List:”
Genealogical Pursuits, Outcomes, and Representations in the
Lives of Two Mennonite Women**

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Abstract: Archivists and historians have generally done little critical analysis of genealogical pursuits, outcomes, and representations. Yet genealogy, usually considered an activity that upholds the status quo, can in fact teach us a great deal about the unconventional. Through an examination of archival collections of two Mennonite women genealogists, Lorraine Roth and Lucy Braun, this paper demonstrates how a more attentive exploration of genealogical activities can lead to new lines of inquiry into the lives of Mennonite women. Roth and Braun both used genealogy to construct and reconstruct family and community, and to shape their particular corners of Mennonite identity. This paper draws on the history of genealogy as well as relevant instances in Mennonite history to provide context for their work. It concludes by examining the most common representation of family history, the family tree, and asking whether this model illuminates or obscures the complexity of Mennonite women’s lives.

Sometime in the early 1940s, when Lorraine Roth was a teenager living on a farm in South Easthope Township, Ontario, her mother’s family, the Brennemens, decided to hold a family reunion. “I knew I had a few first cousins and I even had a few second cousins,” Roth recalled,

but beyond that there weren’t many Brennemens that I knew of. I said, “Who will come to such a reunion?” My grandfather had a little yellow piece of paper with a list of 10 names and birthdates. The names were written in an unintelligible gothic script, but my grandfather was familiar enough with them to interpret them. These, he said, were his uncles and aunts, and it would be their descendants who would be invited. . . . This little piece of paper and its contents captured my interest. . . . I recognized that there was a great deal of information hidden in that little list.¹

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Genealogy may seem like a strange lens through which to consider the theme of Mennonite women “crossing borders and boundaries.” After all, genealogy is often perceived as an activity that upholds the status quo, not one that challenges convention. Nevertheless, as this paper argues, there is indeed a great deal these “little lists” can tell us about the unconventional in the lives of Mennonite women.

PLACING GENEALOGY IN THE SPOTLIGHT

As a public historian, I have used genealogy as a tool to understand relationships within church communities.² As an archivist, I have created genealogical resources and led workshops. I have processed and described the archival collections of Mennonite genealogists. I have assisted genealogical researchers, and have witnessed them being profoundly moved by their discoveries.

Through these experiences, I have come to realize a breadth and depth to genealogical activity that most archivists and historians have not yet fully understood or appreciated. In particular, these disciplines have done little critical analysis of the meaning of genealogical pursuits, outcomes, and representations for the historical lives of women. Despite the vitality of genealogical activity in Mennonite circles, Mennonite historians and historical organizations have only scratched the surface in understanding this activity.

In their professional literature, archivists have focused more on the challenges of supporting resource-intensive genealogical research and less on the motivations, information-seeking behaviors, and underlying needs of their genealogical patrons.³ When establishing their discipline in the nineteenth century, historians consciously differentiated themselves from genealogical researchers, who were understood to be engaged in less-serious study. Though the rise of social and public history in the latter part of the twentieth century narrowed this divide, genealogy has not been able to completely shake its image as an obsessive activity—“at least a hobby and, at worst . . . self-aggrandizing egoism.”⁴

College Academic Development and Research Fund, and a stimulating conversation with Conrad Grebel’s Mennonite Studies group.

1. Lorraine Roth, “Genealogy: What is it and where does one begin?” Nov. 21, 1996, Lorraine Roth fonds, MAO HM1.117.4/234. MAO is an abbreviation for Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

2. Laureen Harder, *Risk and Endurance: A History of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church* (Kitchener, Ont.: Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, 2003).

3. Elizabeth Yakel and Deborah A. Torres, “Genealogists as a ‘Community of Records,’” *The American Archivist* 70:1 (2007), 94.

4. Hannah Little, “Archive Fever as Genealogical Fever: Coming Home to Scottish Archives,” *Archivaria* 64 (2007), 93-94; see also Robert M. Taylor and Ralph J. Crandall,

Historian Tanya Evans has observed from her research experience that historians and family researchers “were categorized as different, our needs and requirements dichotomized by the cultural institutions within which we worked on some of the same sources and where we shared space.”⁵ Mennonite institutions have not been immune to this implicit hierarchy. In 2007, for example, historian Theron Schlabach praised the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College for placing their collections so that seekers of genealogical information would have to first walk past the Mennonite history shelves, thus raising their historical awareness.⁶

These attitudes are showing signs of change. Archivists are discussing the concept of “communities of records,” which acknowledges the active role of genealogists and their networks in creating and recontextualizing archival records. In the wake of the popularity of genealogically themed reality television shows, archivists are realizing that the archive has entered the public consciousness as “a place of desire and consumption, a theatre of identification” for the seeker of family history.⁷

Tanya Evans, while studying Australia’s difficult colonial past, makes the case to her fellow historians for shaking off dismissive attitudes towards genealogy:

When it comes to broader questions of historical change and continuity, the techniques and findings of family historians disrupt many of our assumptions about the past. The construction of a family tree, the discovery of manifold secrets and lies, throw into question the solidity not only of the history of the family, class relationships and the power relations between men and women but also the history of nation and empire.⁸

Evans’s appeal to historians is not necessarily new. Already in 1928, Ernst Correll wrote about the potential for genealogy in the study of Swiss and south German Anabaptists. From the beginning of the Anabaptist movement he claimed, families “stood at the very center;” and during times of persecution and the denial of civic privileges the family was the

“Historians and Genealogists: An Emerging Community of Interest,” in *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History*, ed. Robert M. Taylor and Ralph J. Crandall (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1986).

5. Tanya Evans, “Secrets and Lies: The Radical Potential of Family History,” *History Workshop Journal* 71 (2011), 1.

6. Theron F. Schlabach, “The Historiography of Mennonites and Amish in America: Reflections on Past and Future,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 81 (Jan. 2007), 67.

7. Hannah Little, “Identifying the Genealogical Self,” *Archival Science* 11:3-4 (2011), 249-50; Yakel and Torres, “Genealogists,” 97.

8. Evans, “Secrets and Lies,” 51.

place where faith was nurtured and perpetuated.⁹ Correll and Evans, two historians writing in different eras, both make the case that genealogy is a legitimate resource for illuminating the past. While Correll urged genealogists to become more like historians in their methods and attention to accuracy,¹⁰ Evans goes further by describing a way in which genealogy, on its own merits and using its own methods, can illuminate current historical questions.

Changing views of genealogy in archival and historical literature make this moment ripe for more nuanced explorations. What happens if we lay aside the idea of genealogy as a mere tool, a service, a source of social history data, or a personal obsession, and put genealogy itself in the spotlight? How can genealogy—its pursuit, outcomes, and representations—deepen our understanding of Mennonite women’s lives? As a starting point for this discussion, I turn to the collections of two Mennonite women genealogists whose papers reside in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario: Lucy Braun and Lorraine Roth.¹¹

Braun’s and Roth’s collections have remarkable similarities and stark distinctions. Both women were strong, independent, single Mennonites of the same era who developed a passion for genealogy. Braun, a Russian Mennonite, lived the turbulent life of a refugee and exile before coming to Canada in 1966, settling in New Hamburg, Ontario. Roth, born in 1930, was an Amish Mennonite woman who lived most of her life in the Waterloo region. Her Amish Mennonite ancestors were among the first European-origin settlers to the region, arriving from Germany and Alsace-Lorraine a century before her birth.

Studying the archival collections of genealogists is a different exercise than studying published genealogies. The collections of Braun and Roth provide evidence of the motivations and processes behind their activities. A completed genealogy is the calm on the surface that belies, intentionally or not, the messiness of real, lived lives that roils beneath. Conscientious genealogists track and retain that messiness—the false starts and dead ends, the unresolved and unresolvable—for future reference. Their collections are windows into the ways they have navigated the world and offer a unique perspective on the many communities, physical and virtual, to which their activities bind them.

9. Ernst H. Correll, “The Value of Family History for Mennonite History [1],” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 2:1 (1928), 67.

10. *Ibid.*, 66.

11. Archival descriptions are available online for Lorraine Roth (<https://uwaterloo.ca/mennonite-archives-ontario/personal-collections/lorraine-roth-fonds>) and Lucy Braun (<https://uwaterloo.ca/mennonite-archives-ontario/personal-collections/lucy-braun>).

Since this paper argues that we need to listen more closely to genealogists themselves, I have constrained my analysis to issues raised in direct response to Braun's and Roth's archival collections, as well as to the context needed to understand genealogical pursuits, outcomes, and representations. This means that many additional topics in genealogy—Mennonite collaborative genealogy on the Internet, for example, or Mennonites and genetic testing, Mennonites and racial identity, non-genealogical forms of memory making in families, and non-Western genealogical practices—are not addressed. This paper also leaves out genealogical pursuits by non-Swiss or non-Russian Mennonites. Any of these topics would benefit from exploration. I hope this paper will stimulate further interest and research.

LORRAINE ROTH'S STORY

Intrigued by the prospect of her first family reunion, Lorraine Roth decided to contribute to the event. Somewhere she had "heard about family trees." So she drew up a tree with her great-great-grandparents (Jacob and Magdalena Brennehan) at the trunk and took it to the reunion. By the time the next reunion came around, however, she had discovered that her grandfather was *wrong*—his grandmother's name was not Magdalena, but Lydia Leonard. In other words, Roth had an Irish great-great-grandmother! It was a surprise to most of her Amish Mennonite family, and an excellent lesson in evidence gathering for a budding genealogist.¹²

After graduating from Goshen College in 1954, Roth served for two terms as a teacher with the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions in Honduras. Something of her character is revealed in her recollections of her interview with the board:

One of the problems which an assignment under the Eastern Board posed for me was its strict dress code. My home congregation in Ontario was conservative enough, and I did not really care to submit to something even stricter. Orrie Miller understood that concern . . . and said if anyone came to me and asked [why I wasn't adopting the stricter code] I might reply that I was thinking about it. That down-to-earth advice put me at ease. . . . I am sure the Bishop Board's assessment of their encounter that day was that they were dealing with a somewhat impudent young woman.¹³

12. Roth, "Genealogy: What is it and where does one begin?"

13. Lorraine Roth, "Serving in the Mission Field," *MCC Women's Concerns Report* (May-June 1992), 5.

Roth's quality of being at once practical and unyielding propelled her to a life lived on her own terms. Returning from Honduras, she completed a master's degree in religious education at Goshen Biblical Seminary in 1964. But genealogical interests soon began to lead her in other directions.

Roth took employment at Provident Bookstore in Kitchener while completing the genealogy of her parents' families (Brenneman, Roth, Schwartzentruber, and Oesch) back to the first immigrants to Canada. Along the way, she learned to read census records and old German scripts, and to find her way through registry offices. After she completed the genealogies of four branches of her family her reputation spread, and other families began to ask for assistance. In 1969, she packed her typewriter and headed to France with no specific return date in mind. This would be the first of several intrepid genealogical research trips to Europe.¹⁴ Following her return from the first trip, she worked in the library at Wilfrid Laurier University and later in the German and Romance Languages departments. In 1985 she returned to eastern France and Germany, spending five months in the archives and conferring with historians. She found this trip "immensely fruitful."¹⁵

LORRAINE ROTH AND THE CREST OF A GENEALOGICAL WAVE

In the mid-twentieth century, Lorraine Roth was on the crest of a genealogical wave that had been rising for several centuries. From the fall of the Roman Empire to the early Middle Ages, little evidence exists that genealogy was important for the functioning of Western European society or preservation of memory. Genealogical forms varied greatly across the region, and authenticity meant something different than it does today, evidenced by the inclusion in lineages of mythological or biblical figures. The frequent exclusion of female ancestors is one aspect that earlier and later genealogies would hold in common.¹⁶

In the late Middle Ages the landowning classes became increasingly preoccupied with genealogy as feudal inheritance systems were becoming linked to patrimony. To prove one's illustrious lineage as far back as possible was to establish claims to social status, land, and power. The primary emphasis of genealogy in the late Middle Ages was on vertical continuity—women and relatives of lower social standing were largely

14. Lorraine Roth, "Biography of Lorraine Roth," [199-?], Lorraine Roth fonds, MAO HM1.117.5/1; "Lorraine Roth," Mennonite Historical Society of Canada award citation, 2010. Accessed from: <http://www.mhsc.ca/>

15. Roth, "Biography of Lorraine Roth."

16. Walter Pohl, "Genealogy: A Comparative Perspective from the Early Modern West," in *Meanings of Community Across Medieval Eurasia: Comparative Approaches*, ed. Eirik Hovden, Christina Lutter and Walter Pohl (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 258.—<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76w6c>.

superfluous to these new genealogical endeavors unless they added to a claim's authority and legitimacy.¹⁷

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, the rising middle-class in Europe began to take an interest in genealogy.¹⁸ Historians have attributed this to changes in inheritance laws as well as growing access to the Bible, with all its attendant genealogy, following the Reformation. In the eighteenth century, "genealogical literacy" experienced particularly vigorous growth in colonial America. The abolition of the feudal practices of primogeniture and the entail in the United States after the American Revolution meant that a wider swath of relatives could claim inheritance. Understanding the web of one's extended family relationships thus became more important.¹⁹

Pennsylvania Germans demonstrated their genealogical literacy through entries of family records on the flyleaves of Bibles or other available books. But their most colorful contribution to genealogy was the fraktur family register, drawn freehand or entered into preprinted broadsheets. These celebrations of the family record, meant to be displayed in the home, could be seen as an expression of the religious freedom that Mennonites, Amish, and other small sects found in the new world. Far from persecution and the corresponding need for secrecy that had been their lot in Europe, families could proudly display their relationships and hopes for the future as represented by their growing progeny.²⁰ Sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel has described this attempt by immigrants to establish new family identities apart from unpleasant old country pasts as "genealogical myopia."²¹

In the broader society, even as genealogical literacy was becoming more widespread the desire to find links to power and status remained. Thus, when genealogy came into broader fashion in late-Victorian Britain,

17. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "The Genesis of the Family Tree," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 4 (1991), 107-108. See also Eric Ketelaar, "The Genealogical Gaze: Family Identities and Family Archives in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries," *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 44:1 (2009), 9-28, regarding the creation of family archives.

18. Klapisch-Zuber, "The Genesis of the Family Tree," 107.

19. Karin Wulf, "Bible, King and Common Law: Genealogical Literacies and Family History Practices in British America," *Early American Studies* (Fall 2012), 484-485.

20. Corinne P. Earnest and Russell D. Earnest, *To the Latest Posterity: Pennsylvania-German Family Registers in the Fraktur Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), xvii, 22.

21. Eviatar Zerubavel, *Ancestors and Relatives: Genealogy, Identity and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 83. Genealogical myopia may not have been the case for all Pennsylvania German families. Konersmann describes a rise of genealogical literacy among the rural Mennonite middle class in Germany, which included correspondence with relatives in America. Frank Konersmann, "Middle-class Formation in Rural Society: Mennonite Peasant Merchants in the Palatinate, Rhine Hesse, and the Northern Rhine Valley," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 86 (April 2012), 251-252.

it was still mostly a pursuit of the aristocracy or the upwardly mobile classes in which the real goal was to discover “an ancestor of distinction.”²² The United States followed a similar pattern, but with an emphasis on finding an ancestral link to the founders of the republic. Groups such as the Society of Mayflower Descendants and Daughters of the American Revolution were among the many such societies based on patriotic lineage founded in the late nineteenth century.²³

Following this trend, Pennsylvania Germans founded the Pennsylvania German Society in 1891. Membership in this social and educational society was restricted to descendants of German settlers. Although many of the early members were educated and professional, their geographically limited activities and anti-German sentiment in the years around World War I marked them as parochial and liminal.²⁴ Mennonite genealogy publication in America followed the national rise generally with a surge in publication from the 1870s to 1890s.²⁵ This time period also saw the emergence of the genre known as “mug books” — local or county histories that included family histories of prominent citizens.²⁶

Despite their relative newness to the region, Ontario Mennonites expressed similar interest in genealogical activity, as evidenced by the work of Waterloo County schoolteacher and printer Ezra Eby. In the late nineteenth century Eby interviewed descendants of Mennonite settlers— who had first arrived to the region in the early 1800s— seeking information from the records of his grandfather, Bishop Benjamin Eby, as well as contacts in Pennsylvania and elsewhere. His monumental two-volume community genealogy published in 1895 and 1896, *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township*, specifically credited men of influence such as P. E. W. Moyer (local newspaper publisher), Simon P. Bowman (teacher and insurance agent in California), and Bishop J. N. Brubacher of Pennsylvania.²⁷ Eby’s work concentrated on the descendants of the first

22. Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: Shame and Privacy in Modern Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 260.

23. George B. Everton, *The How-To Book for Genealogists* (Logan, Utah: Everton Publishers, 1971), 50.

24. Simon J. Bronner and Joshua R. Brown, “Introduction,” in *Pennsylvania Germans: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, ed. Simon J. Bronner and Joshua R. Brown (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2017), 9-10.

25. Nelson P. Springer and David J. Rempel Smucker, “Genealogy,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (1989).—<http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Genealogy&oldid=143580>. The growth of American genealogy publication in general is reflected in the holdings of the Library of Congress, which held 203 genealogies in 1860 and 3,795 in 1909. Taylor and Crandall, “Historians and Genealogists,” 7.

26. Jerry Rohde, “Spin Doctoring a Century Ago: Mug Books and the Historical Record,” *Humboldt Historian* (Spring 2012), 24.

27. Ezra E. Eby, *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township* (Berlin, Ont.: s.n., 1895-1896), iii.

settlers of the region, who were predominantly Mennonite. Some families were able to provide information about their Pennsylvania ancestors and, occasionally, the original immigrant from Europe. A biographer wrote that Eby

seemed to be urged to his [genealogical] work by an irresistible impulse. His wife would sometimes remonstrate with him and say: "Ezra, the children and I should get the attention and time you are giving to this history." His reply would be: "This work must be done, it must be done."²⁸

Eby had little remaining time to enjoy the fruits of his labors with his wife, Mary Ann, and five children as he died in 1901, at age 50.

Eby's work captures and codifies a community's relationships at a specific time in its development. Produced a century after the arrival of the first settlers, it described a community persisting in a specific place where kinship ties had time to become deep and complex. It also documented the movement over the course of the century of several individuals and families out of the area. Perhaps it was this combination of a growing, stable, and intertwined community, with simultaneous movements away from the community, that fueled Eby's conviction at this particular moment that the work "must be done."²⁹

Amish genealogical publishing in North America began around the same time, with the first Amish genealogy published in the United States in 1885. In Ontario, publishing of Amish genealogy got off to a slower start with the exception of two Bender family genealogies published in 1897 and 1925. David Luthy, an Amish historian, has noted the growth in North America of genealogies produced by Amish women, either together with their husbands or as single women. By 1985, just as many Amish women as men were compiling genealogies.³⁰

LORRAINE ROTH'S GENEALOGICAL NETWORKS

To publish a genealogy in Ezra Eby's day required education, technical knowledge, and connections not readily available to women in the 1890s. By the time Lorraine Roth began her genealogical work in earnest in the 1960s she, like a growing number of women, had a university-level

28. A. B. Sherk, "Ezra E. Eby the Historian and His Work," *The Pennsylvania German* IX (June 1908), 273, 274.

29. For a discussion on place and persistence as motivation for community genealogical activities, see Samuel P. Hays, "History and Genealogy: Patterns of Change and Prospects for Cooperation," in ed. Taylor and Crandall, *Generations and Change*, 41.

30. David Luthy, "One Hundred Years of Amish Genealogies, 1885-1985," *Pennsylvania Mennonite History* (Oct. 1985), 28-29, 30. Copies of the two Bender genealogies are located in the Milton Good Library at Conrad Grebel University College.

education, and the technical barriers to publishing were lower. In addition, Roth had the advantage of being able to travel to research destinations in Europe. Her status as a single woman afforded her the time to focus on her research. Roth's genealogical work in the 1960s and onward almost singlehandedly ignited Amish Mennonite genealogical activity in the Waterloo region. Her work was particularly exemplary for the professionalism with which she approached her craft, but also for the way in which she broke through a significant genealogical barrier by extending genealogical research back beyond the immigrant ancestor to ancestors and relatives in the Old Country.

As we have seen in both the Pennsylvania German family registers and Ezra Eby's biographical history, North American representations of family almost always began with the immigrant ancestor. Genealogical standards formulated in the United States at the turn of the last century reinforced the activity of documenting descending family lines from a single immigrant ancestor. For example, under both the Register System and *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* System, the (male) first immigrant is given the number "1," his children are numbered "1-1, 1-2" and so on. The immigrant's father, who had remained in the Old Country, was given the letter "A," his father was "B," and so on. The emphasis of these standards was clearly on documenting the immigrant and *his* descendants. The systems did not provide much flexibility for those who wanted to research relatives who had remained in Europe, nor did it regard immigrant women as meriting equal consideration.³¹

By traveling to Europe, navigating the quirks of French and German archives, learning how local laws affected Anabaptist vital records, and deciphering the complicated politics of regions like Alsace-Lorraine, Roth was able to provide her clients with a detailed context for the pre-immigrant experience and archival proof to confirm, question, or contradict family lore about ancestors from the Old Country.

Her work also serves as a helpful qualification to the assumption that Mennonites have always been highly literate of their own genealogy. In 1928, Ernst Correll complained that Mennonite genealogists confined themselves to the North American experience, eschewing such resources as *Martyrs Mirror* and *Ausbund* stories, reprinted European archival records, and the reference assistance available in large American libraries.³² It was the exacting work of genealogists like Roth in the second

31. Joan Ferris Curran, Madilyn Coen Crane, and John H. Wray, *Numbering Your Genealogy: Basic Systems, Complex Families and International Kin* (Arlington, Va.: National Genealogical Society, 2008), 1, 26.

32. Correll, "Value," 69.

half of the twentieth century that gave Mennonites their depth of knowledge about their family pasts.

One example of Roth's careful work was her pursuit of the parentage of Peter Zehr. In the early 1950s, she was asked to contribute to a Roth genealogy being compiled by Ruth Roth of Elkhart, Indiana.³³ Lorraine's research consisted of talking "to the oldest people I could find" about her ancestors Barbara (Roth) Zehr and her husband, Peter Zehr. The Zehrs had immigrated to Wilmot, Ontario, by 1839; this part of the story was the primary focus of her research. At the time she did not pursue the question of the Zehrs' European ancestors. On trips to Europe in 1985 and 1992, Roth picked up this dropped thread, but was unable to find a Peter Zehr born on the date listed in his obituary—May 2, 1808.

When a French researcher later found an official birth record for "Pierre Zehr" born on August 20, 1809, in Gros-Rederching in the Lorraine region, she was initially skeptical. Roth explained her hesitation:

I think the reason my first reaction to an easy acceptance of a Peter Zehr with a wrong birth date was due to the fact that for 30 years we had been up the wrong tree on the Roth side. Delbert Gratz . . . who knew how to do research already back in the 1950s had suggested that Barbara [Roth Zehr]'s father, Nicolaus might have been the son of Hans Roth of Montbeliard, France. Ruth Roth made this tentative statement in the genealogy, but ever after it was quoted as fact. I kept saying "probably" and kept looking for evidence. . . . In 1985, Steve Roth from Ohio was also snooping around France and discovered that Nicholas, the son of Hans . . . was definitively not our ancestor. . . . I wasn't about to accept lightly another case of poor or improper research after the Roth experience.³⁴

The civic documents provided by the French researcher proved informative. The birth of Pierre was registered by the declared father, Michel Zehr, while the mother's name was listed as Madeleine Farni. The register noted that the child was *naturel* (illegitimate). Lorraine knew from her research that this could mean one of several things: the child was the result of a causal encounter; the couple were co-habiting but not married; or they had been "married" by their Anabaptist congregation, which held no legitimacy in the eyes of the state. Reading further in the municipal records, Roth was able to determine that the couple had declared their intention to be married by the publication of banns the previous year, and

33. Ruth Caroline Roth and Roy D. Roth, *A Genealogical Study of the Nicolaus and Veronica (Zimmerman) Roth Family 1834-1954* (Elkhart, Ind.: R.C. Roth under Auspices of Daniel Roth Family Reunion, 1955).

34. Lorraine Roth, "Zehr themes for discussion," 2003, Lorraine Roth fonds, MAO Hist.Mss.1.117.1/234.

were finally legally married in a civil wedding two weeks after Peter's birth.³⁵

Roth felt still more proof was needed. She found it by locating Peter and Barbara in ships passenger lists to America from 1835 (listed under "Yer" instead of "Zehr") along with Peter's mother and stepfather (his father Michel having died in 1813). With this cross referencing, Roth felt confident to link the three immigrant children of Michel Zehr (with three different wives) in her 2009 Zehr genealogy. While Peter and Barbara Zehr's Ontario descendants had no oral family tradition of a linkage, the Oregon Zehrs, descended from Michel's son Michael, had always maintained there was a relationship. Roth's meticulous work, in conversation with her virtual genealogical community, confirmed the linkage between the Ontario and American Zehrs, thereby enlarging the family circle.³⁶

Roth's archival collection contains many such stories. Not only does it consist of genealogical charts and copies of primary source documents, but it also includes many files of correspondence with families and fellow genealogists as well as documentation of her travels. Her collection illustrates the observation by Catherine Nash that "diasporic genealogy is about significant places . . . and complex global networks of travel, desire and imagination." Genealogical activity creates new cultural networks and relationships.³⁷

The Canadian centennial of Confederation in 1967 and Canada's multiculturalism policies helped fuel interest among Canadian Mennonites in their own past. Roth was heavily involved in the 1972 celebration of the Amish sesquicentennial of settlement in Canada. With this experience, her genealogical work became more entwined with community history. In 1992 she wrote *Willing Service*, a compilation of biographies of Ontario Mennonite women designed to "make visible" their stories. Noting the dramatic rise in church leadership roles achieved by Mennonite women in the 1970s, Roth used *Willing Service* to create a kind of genealogy of the origins of Ontario Mennonite women's leadership.³⁸ Her status as an expert in the Amish Mennonite experience in Ontario was solidified with *The Amish and their Neighbours* (1998), which

35. Lorraine Roth, "Observations on the question of illegitimate births among Anabaptists in Europe," April 2003, Lorraine Roth fonds, MAO HM1.117.4/127.

36. Lorraine Roth, *Introduction: Zehr Immigrants from France to Canada and Lewis County, New York* (Tavistock, Ont.: Lorraine Roth, 2009), 8.

37. Catherine Nash, *Of Irish Descent: Origin Stories, Genealogy, and the Politics of Belonging* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 15-16.

38. Lorraine Roth, *Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women* (Waterloo, Ont.: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, Women's Missionary and Service Commission of Eastern Canada, 1992), ix,xii.

focused on the settlement of the Amish in Wilmot Township. In this thorough yet readable local history, Roth's genealogical training served her well as she carefully pored over newly discovered archival records and drew on a network of scholarly contacts cultivated over the years.³⁹ The narrative includes an entire chapter on the stories of individual families of the township and acknowledges the often hidden contributions of settler women.

Roth's later work as an expert genealogist and respected local historian dovetailed with a growing interest in the genealogical community in making women more visible. In the 1990s, she advised budding genealogists not to be satisfied only with names and dates, but to "go after the stories." She expressed her frustration that genealogical software was too limiting and patriarchal.⁴⁰

At the time, a growing interest in social history and feminist approaches to history was influencing the genealogical world. Beginning in the late 1980s, manuals on strategies for finding female ancestors began to proliferate. For too long, women in genealogy were *feme covert*—married women whose lives were covered or hidden by their lack of appearance in official records.⁴¹ One manual advised, perhaps only half in jest: "If you find murderers, lunatics, criminals and victims among your female ancestry, you are lucky. They are the ones who generated more and unusual records." The book then proceeded to offer strategies for uncovering the telling details of all types of women, including those who led quieter lives.⁴² By uncovering their female ancestors, groups of genealogists in the 1990s were doing "feminist work" even if they may not have considered themselves "feminist communities."⁴³

Lorraine Roth's passion for genealogy shaped her life. It connected her deeply to her own extended family and shaped her role within it. It spurred her to travel and form new communities of interest with her many correspondents and clients. Genealogy gave her the skills and opportunities to gain authority and to contribute to historical knowledge, including illuminating the lives of Ontario Mennonite women.

39. Lorraine Roth, *The Amish and Their Neighbours: The German Block, Wilmot Township, 1822-1860* (Waterloo, Ont.: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1998), iv.

40. Roth, "Genealogy: What is it and where does one begin?"

41. Christina Kassabian Schaeffer, *The Hidden Half of the Family: A Sourcebook for Women's Genealogy* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1999), ix.

42. Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Female Ancestors* (Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 1998), 1.

43. Amy M. Smith, "Family Webs: the Impact of Women's Genealogy Research on Family Communication" (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 2008), 46.

Roth's work centered on the local and particular. If "history implies distance and memory implies intimacy,"⁴⁴ she found ways to bring the two together. She once uncovered a small story of an Amish Mennonite family who settled, unusually, in Woolwich Township, outside of the major Amish settlement in neighboring Wilmot. Mennonite historian Marlene Epp writes,

This particular discovery is a localized one, and perhaps of seeming insignificance to any major re-interpretation of either the Amish or Mennonite experience in southwest Ontario. However for the Amish . . . this may be an important contribution to self-understanding.

Epp commented further, "I'm increasingly convinced that Mennonite identit(ies) are quite localized, and committed only in principle to large notions of 'peoplehood.'"⁴⁵ If this is the case, then Lorraine Roth's meticulous work of reconnecting diasporic localities, reforming particular family relationships, and reconstructing stories of ordinary women is the kind of work that goes to the heart of Mennonite identity.

LUCY BRAUN'S STORY

When Lucy Braun was 15 her family fled from Wernersdorf, Ukraine, to Germany on the Great Trek of 1943, following the retreating German army. The westward evacuation of ethnic Germans included over 15,000 Mennonites. Braun's father and brothers were conscripted into the German army near the end of the war. Unable to locate their mother and sister, they would join roughly 12,000 Mennonites who would immigrate to Canada from 1947-1954.

Thousands of Mennonites fleeing westward at the close of the war were overtaken by the Soviet army and repatriated to the Soviet Union. Until 1951 the USSR pursued a policy of forcible repatriation of Soviet citizens from occupied Germany. Lucy Braun and her mother were captured and deported to Kazakhstan, where they struggled for survival not knowing what had become of their male family members. Eventually, with the help of Mennonite Central Committee, they were able to locate them in Ontario.

The Cold War essentially ended hopes for mass emigration. Instead, Mennonites in the West focused their efforts on reuniting families. In the late 1950s, Mennonite Central Committee established an East-West office in an effort to communicate with Mennonites in the Soviet Union and to

44. Hannah Little, "Identifying the Genealogical Self," 249.

45. Marlene Epp, "Purple Clematis and Yellow Pine: On Cemeteries, Irony and Difference," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74 (Jan. 2000), 186, 187.

reunite families. Family members began to trickle into Canada in 1960. In 1966 Braun and her mother were allowed to leave the Soviet Union.

In her new country, Braun worked at a hardware store in St. Jacob's, Ontario. During this time she was inspired by a relative who gave her a copy of his research on Wernersdorf to pursue a community genealogy of her now vanished birthplace. Although Lucy Braun also pursued the genealogy of her relatives who had immigrated to Manitoba in the 1920s, she devoted an intense amount of work into reconstituting the genealogies of Wernersdorf. For three decades she worked on the project, documenting every family of the village, house by house—Mennonite and non-Mennonite, alike—as they existed in 1942 before the Great Trek ended the Mennonite presence there. Her files include correspondence and photographs received from former Wernersdorf residents and their descendants in response to her requests for information. Responses came from the diaspora of Wernersdorf in North America, South America, Germany, and the Soviet Union.

LUCY BRAUN'S GENEALOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

The genealogical motivations and literacies of twentieth-century Russian Mennonite immigrants to Canada were varied and complex, worthy of a fuller study in their own right. Clearly, however, the Russian Mennonite experience of genealogical pursuits differed from those of the Pennsylvania German and Amish Mennonites in one key respect. As described above, Pennsylvania German and Amish Mennonites in North America were content for several decades to compile their genealogies beginning with an immigrant ancestor and moving forward in time. Genealogical interest in what became of relatives in the Old Country only began to be expressed later.

By contrast, twentieth-century Russian Mennonite immigrants to Canada wasted little time in reaching back across the immigrant divide. In Ontario, genealogy was institutionalized in the family register sheets meticulously filled out by the scattered United Mennonite immigrant congregations beginning in the 1920s. These custom printed sheets, organized by the familial head (usually male), included vital statistics, dates of baptism, and the family's former congregation in Russia. They also meticulously record the family's passage to Canada through such details as the location and date of their departure from their home, the date and location where they crossed the Soviet border, and the location and date of their landing in Canada.⁴⁶

46. *Familienverzeichnis* forms in the fonds of the Vineland United Mennonite Church (XIII-2-2.3/5) and Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church (XIII-2-1.1/8), MAO.

The separation of Lucy Braun's extended family between the wars was typical of many families. Her grandfather and other relatives immigrated to Canada in the 1920s, while Braun's parents and others stayed behind. While struggling to establish themselves in Canada, the 1920s immigrants became increasingly alarmed over the safety and security of their loved ones in the Soviet Union. Any connection across the immigrant divide became valued. As a child in Ontario, writer Sarah Dyck remembers that letters from Soviet relatives "were as much a part of the first decade of my life as were the bowl of porridge in the morning. . . ."

They were the reason my sister and I were sent on our daily walk to Kreitz's General Store and Post Office in the village of St. Agatha, and the cause of many anguished nights of haunting memories and renewed fears for my parents in the decade of the 1930s."⁴⁷

For refugees of the 1940s, genealogical literacy was a requirement. When Mennonites arrived in German territory after the Great Trek in 1943, they applied for naturalization through the government's *Einwandererzentralstelle* (EWZ or Immigration Center). The naturalization of Soviet Mennonite refugees as German citizens often required them to complete brief life stories and genealogical charts that established their German ethnicity—and, not incidentally, their non-Jewishness. Captured by the United States Army the EWZ records, which contained the files of some 2.9 million ethnic Germans, were placed in the Berlin Document Center.

Difficulties arose for Mennonite resettlement efforts in 1949 when International Refugee Organization (IRO) officials, consulting the EWZ files, made the case that Mennonite refugees had embraced German naturalization willingly and were thus ineligible for IRO support. Due to the efforts of the Mennonite Central Committee and the American State Department, the IRO decided to maintain Mennonite eligibility. Both the 1920s migrants and 1940s refugees practiced a kind of genealogical fluidity by occasionally emphasizing their Dutch ancestry as a strategy to expedite their flights from the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

47. Sarah Dick Dyck, *Dearly Beloved Children: Letters to Canada from my Grandfather Isaak B. Peters and Family* (Waterloo, Ont.: Sarah Dick Dyck, 1996), xii.

48. Astrid M Eckert, *The Struggle for the Files: The Western Allies and the Return of German Archives after the Second World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, Man.: D.W. Friesen, 1962); T. D. Regehr, "Of Dutch or German ancestry? Mennonite Refugees, MCC, and the International Refugee Organization," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 13 (1995), 9-10; Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). The EWZ documents remained under the control of the United States until 1994, when transfer of the files to the unified German government was completed.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Russian Mennonite immigrants to Canada and their descendants joined in the broader society's growing genealogical activity. For Russian Mennonites, genealogical compilations along with personal and family memoirs did triple duty: they recorded family data and stories; they reestablished lost transnational connections; and they helped to heal individual and community traumas brought about by war and dislocation.⁴⁹

Russian Mennonites have actively participated in the common genealogical pursuit of transforming institutional and state records into personal ones. The large and ongoing project to extract and digitize Mennonite family records from the EWZ naturalization files is one of the most notable examples of this effort.⁵⁰ Here again, Mennonite genealogical pursuits are about more than gleaning dates and names. State records created for a violent purpose are repurposed for the restoration of family. Archivist Hannah Little suggests that for genealogists, experiences of violence add additional urgency to the task of telling the stories of family members.⁵¹ The indelible and all too common violent experience of being undocumented and "adrift in a world of organized others" has also likely been a motivator for Russian Mennonite refugee genealogy.⁵²

LUCY BRAUN AND THE PURSUIT OF A FAMILY SECRET

In 2001, Braun was contacted by Tina Bergen, a woman previously unknown to her, with a request to help find Bergen's birth parents. Thus began a lengthy correspondence, with Bergen's daughter writing on her mother's behalf. Tina Bergen was born in Russia in 1909 and adopted by a Mennonite family. In a brief autobiography, she recalled seeing her birth mother once:

A nice lady came to our house and especially wanted to visit with me, though I did not know who she was. My [adoptive] mother told me afterwards that she had been my "real" mother, and that they had

49. Elizabeth Krahn, "Lifespan and Intergenerational Legacies of Soviet Oppression: An Autoethnography of Mennonite Women and their Adult Children," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 29 (2011), 40. Krahn mentions the proliferation of memoir among these women as a "contribution of the narrative approach to the healing process." I suggest that the creation of family histories and genealogies should similarly be considered healing activities.

50. Hays, "History and Genealogy," 46; See also "Mennonite Extractions for the EWZ Files." —<http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/ewz/ewz.htm>.

51. Little, "Identifying the Genealogical Self," 249.

52. Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 2, quoted in Little, "Archive Fever," 109.

promised she could see me at least once before we moved to Canada.⁵³

Her adoptive parents offered to reveal the identity of her birth parents to her, but Bergen asked them not to. Bergen immigrated with her adoptive parents to Manitoba in 1923, where she grew up and married. The couple moved to British Columbia after World War II where her husband died suddenly, leaving Bergen a widow with young children.

In 1969, Bergen received a letter from her friend Vera in Manitoba. Vera wrote that after many years of hesitation she had decided to tell Bergen the name of her birth father. He was, she wrote, Johannes Schoenfeld, a Lutheran German wheelwright, furniture maker, and landowner. Schoenfeld and his wife, Maria, had six children before Maria's death in 1906. Vera, who was about 10 years old at the time of Tina Bergen's birth in 1909, had a close family connection to the Schoenfelds, which made her certain of the facts.⁵⁴

Bergen did not act on this information until thirty years later when she decided to ask her daughter to help her find the Schoenfeld descendants living in Canada. Upon hearing Bergen's story, the Canadian Schoenfeld family surmised that after his wife's death, their 37-year-old newly-widowed father had taken up with a companion who became Bergen's mother in 1909.⁵⁵ The Canadian Schoenfelds joyfully accepted and welcomed their unexpected half-sister into the fold.

But who was that companion? Vera was no longer alive, so Tina Bergen could not question her further. Bergen then contacted Lucy Braun, a relative of Vera's, to see if Vera had shared information with any other family members. Braun had no concrete information, but she did have a theory based on a story that had circulated in her own family. In 1916 Braun's grandfather, a teacher, became a widower. Lonely and disconsolate, he would take his students from the Wernersdorf school to visit Felsenthal, an estate and tree nursery. Felsenthal had been founded by David P. Reimer and was later owned by his granddaughter, Gertruda. On his visits to the estate Braun's grandfather met a woman, "Edith," who worked for Gertruda Reimer. Gertruda lived with a small band of women in a house on the estate called Kleinfelsenthal, surrounded by gardens. The women had taken vows never to marry so as to focus on spiritual matters, and were known locally as the "Trudchen."

53. Tina Bergen, "Autobiography," Lucy Braun fonds, MAO HM1.293.5/1.

54. Vera to Tina Bergen, Dec. 10, 1969, Lucy Braun fonds, MAO HM1.293.5/1.

55. Johannes Schoenfeld had died in 1923 before some of his children immigrated to Canada.

The family story relates that Lucy Braun's grandfather and Edith became secretly engaged in Russia, but delayed marriage until both had immigrated to Manitoba separately in the 1920s, a delay of several years. According to this story, the reason for the long engagement was that Edith felt a duty to care for the aging "Trudchen" women who had "been kind to her at . . . a difficult time in her life." Lucy Braun believes she knows what that "difficult time" was:

[The Trudchen] did many good deeds, took in (privately and secretly), unmarried pregnant young women. Rich parents paid them well, in order to prevent shame for the family; the children . . . were given for adoption. . . . Girls from poor households were also accepted; they stayed on there and worked in the household as gardeners until someone would marry them. This is where my Grandfather . . . learned to know his second wife, [Edith]. . . .⁵⁶

Lucy Braun's grandfather and step-grandmother Edith had both died decades ago. In their search for information, Braun and Bergen began to strategize, drawing their relatives into a growing web of correspondence. They asked a woman who was related to both the Schoenfelds and Edith to broach the subject with Edith's remaining extended family. While some family members were willing to entertain the possible truth of the story, others flatly refused to believe that Edith could have been a part of such a "scandal." Braun and Bergen's search had come to an inconclusive end.

The veracity of Lucy Braun's assertions about the Trudchen of Felsenthal is not easily verified. Pregnancy outside of marriage was not unknown in Russian Mennonite communities, but it was regarded as a serious issue. Not only did it trespass religious boundaries; it also disrupted social and economic networks. Cases of pregnancy where there was no possibility of marriage posed particular problems. The diary of minister Jacob D. Epp suggests that such cases were dealt with on an ad hoc basis. Implications were harsher for the women, who, judging from the cases in Epp's diary, had to leave their home communities, either temporarily or permanently.⁵⁷

Of the activities on the Felsenthal estate, P. M. Friesen's history reported only "Much quiet doing of good has been practiced here." Friesen described Felsenthal as a paradise, comparing it to the biblical village of Bethany, home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.⁵⁸ *Diese Steine, a*

56. Lucy Braun, Jan. 13 and 20, 2001, Lucy Braun fonds, MAO HM1.293.5/1.

57. Hans Werner, "'A Mild Form of Deviancy': Premarital Sex Among Early Manitoba Mennonites," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 26 (2008), 148, 150-151.

58. Peter M. Friesen, et al., *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, 1789-1910* (Fresno, Calif.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), 995-996.

collection of Russian Mennonite history and biographies, offers more detail. Magdalene Frantz related that her grandfather, Kornelius Wolf, worked at Kleinfelsenthal for Gertruda Reimer and her band of women. Wolf, who was born in the same village as Edith, married Pauline Schoenfeld, sister to Johannes, and moved to Wernersdorf. Their daughter Luise, born in 1905, told Magdalene the first names of the women who had been the last to live at Kleinfelsenthal. One of these names is a possible match for "Edith." Luise also recalled one of the Trudchen women being distressed because another had broken her vow and married. Again, this could be Edith. But all these recollections do is place Edith at Kleinfelsenthal and verify that she would have known the Schoenfeld family.⁵⁹

Tina Bergen's story is an example of a family secret that transited not only four generations, but also two continents. When given the choice, she kept the secret even from herself for most of her life, participating in a kind of genealogical myopia. In her study of illegitimate children in Ireland, Delyth Edwards describes a state of "absent memory" that "widens over time and future generations" for children who do not know their birth parents. The child herself is also the absent memory of an illicit relationship, embodying a secret of a family she may never know.⁶⁰ The keepers of Tina Bergen's secret in Russia and Canada were members of several bewilderingly interconnected families. For Bergen and those who enabled her search, it seems that the prospect of perpetuating absent memory had become almost unbearable.

While they could not completely close the gap around absent memory, Tina Bergen's genealogical community tried to narrow it. Vera, for example, was a close friend of Johannes Schoenfeld's niece Luise Wolf in Wernersdorf. She also remembers that as a teenager, Johannes had lived in Edith's parents' home. In the same letter where she revealed the identity of her birth father to Tina Bergen, Vera wrote:

When [Luise] married it was I who sewed her bride's dress and put together her bouquet and bridal train. When you, Tina Bergen, got married I also helped you prepare your bridal wardrobe. So it was two cousins with whom I had the honour to be present at this "once

59. Adina Reger and Delbert F. Plett, *Diese Steine: die Russlandmennoniten* (Steinbach, Man.: Crossway Publications, 2001), 322-323.

60. Delyth Edwards, "The Intricate Effects of Narrative Inheritance and Absent Memory on the Biographical Construction of Orphanhood," in *Peripheral Memories: Public and Private Forms of Experiencing and Narrating the Past*, ed. Elisabeth Boesen, et al. (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript, 2012), 161, 173.

in a lifetime" occasion. . . . I hope you will not hold it against me – in my mind I always connected you and Luise and loved you both.⁶¹

Vera went on to relate to Tina Bergen the story of her newly-revealed cousin Luise: how she and her family suffered through internal exile in the Soviet Union. In her effusive letter, Vera reveled in the significance of the deep bonds of family, friendship, and Mennonite village life—bonds weakened by a family secret, immigration, war, and exile. In revealing the secret, she acted to restore one small connection and recover a piece of absent memory.

Today it is common to think of secrets, especially family secrets, as malevolent and unhealthy. But perhaps this attitude is a hindrance to considering one of the historical roles of the family secret. In her book *Family Secrets: Shame and Privacy in Modern Britain*, Deborah Cohen has described how families, faced with situations of which the larger society would not approve, practiced not only shaming, but also “defiant acts of loyalty” and “quiet acts of protection.” Family secrets subverted society’s rules, so much so that family secrets “worked the levers of social change” in the twentieth century.⁶² The open embrace of Tina Bergen by her birth father’s family decades later, an act that would have seemed all but impossible at the time of her birth, exemplifies this.

Bergen’s story, along with many others of the lost and undocumented, were preserved and told through the persistent work of Lucy Braun in gathering her personal archive of family and community. Like the female correspondent at the center of Penny L. Richards’s study of immigrant family letters, Braun “managed information for a family full of tangled, loose, and cut threads” scattered over great distances.⁶³

REPRESENTING COMPLEXITY: THE FAMILY TREE AND MENNONITE WOMEN’S LIVES

Tina Bergen’s story confounds the classic image of the family tree. The tree as a metaphor for knowledge and growth is so ubiquitous today that adapting other models seems almost impossible to envision. Yet, like any model, it should be periodically tested. Specifically, does the family tree illustrate or obscure the complexities of Mennonite women’s lives?

The difficulties of using a tree to represent family ties have long been acknowledged. The family tree took centuries to become the genealogical

61. Vera to Tina Bergen, Dec. 10, 1969, Lucy Braun fonds. Translated by Lucy Braun.

62. Cohen, *Family Secrets*, 266.

63. Penny L. Richards, “Knitting the Transatlantic Bond: One Woman’s Letters to America, 1860-1910,” in *Geography and Genealogy: Locating Personal Pasts*, ed. Dallen J. Timothy and Jeanne Kay Guelke (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2008), 87.

representation of choice in Western society. Representations from the later Middle Ages followed the Roman tradition of placing the illustrious ancestors at the top of a chart or illustration, the place of most reverence and chronological distance, to which their descendants below were connected by lines, vines, or garlands. In order for the tree to flourish as a genealogical image, the placing of the illustrious ancestors had to be reversed. One of the images that encouraged this shift in representation was the Jesse Tree, which grew in popularity in the twelfth century. Jesse Tree representations featured Jesse, the father of King David, at the bottom of the tree and Christ at the top.⁶⁴

It took several more centuries for this sacred representation to be applied consistently to the lay family. Placing descendants at the top of an image was “equivalent to giving greater weight to future hopes than to some myth of origins.”⁶⁵ By the end of the sixteenth century, the aristocracy and even the emerging middle class were using the tree to represent the upward progress and verdant flourishing of their families.⁶⁶ Notably, Pennsylvania German family registers retained the older tradition of placing the ancestor at the top of the register. Trees appeared infrequently in Pennsylvania German registers though they are to be found in the contemporary registers of English-speaking American families.⁶⁷

By the twentieth century, Mennonite genealogists had embraced the family tree. Beautiful representations such as the *Familien Stammbaum* by D. D. Epp, published in Manitoba in 1958, features sixteen pages of hand-drawn family trees. Freehand folk paintings of Swiss Mennonite family trees located in the Mennonite Archives of Ontario show affection for this appealing, though imperfect, form of family representation.

Traditional genealogical models also encouraged typical stories. Unique or marginal stories tended to be omitted.⁶⁸ A mid-twentieth-century genealogical manual advised: “Although it may be unsavory, record the truth, but avoid making it prominent. Don’t go into detail about such matters; you will find plenty of [other] things to record of which you will be proud.”⁶⁹ The genealogical world today is recognizing that societal

64. The genealogy of Jesus may have inspired the family tree, but it harbors many inconsistencies. The two ancestral lines of Jesus in the New Testament (Mt. 1:1-17 and Lk. 3:23-28) do not agree on the genealogy of Joseph. Alternative extra-biblical genealogies, through the line of Mary, have subsequently been constructed.—Pohl, “A Comparative Perspective,” 236.

65. Klapisch-Zuber, “The Genesis of the Family Tree,” 127.

66. *Ibid.*, 128.

67. Earnest and Earnest, *To the Latest Posterity*, 31.

68. Amy M. Smith, “Family Webs,” 10.

69. Everton, *The How To Book for Genealogists*, 17.

expectations of genealogy are changing. A more recent manual noted “as family historians become more diverse in their research and more inclusive in their publications, they are struggling to organize families far more complex than the basic model traditional genealogies have favored.”⁷⁰ The same manual acknowledges that modern genealogies are increasingly more akin to family histories—narratives, not just a recitation of dates and names—and encourages genealogists to portray families as authentically as possible in all their complexity.

The versatility of trees to represent relationships of ancestors and descendants over time (lineal ties) as well as living relatives (collateral ties) can be an effective way of visualizing family.⁷¹ However, trees can also be compressed or expanded to give a false sense of symmetry and perfection. For example, a bough fashioned to accommodate one sibling with a number of descendants may be bent to cover a gap left by a childless sibling.⁷² In the early twentieth century, the tree metaphor was challenged by the increasing popularity of the *Ahnentafel* (fan chart ancestor table), which, unlike the family tree, can represent an individual’s every known ancestor. Despite its unfortunate but relatively brief association with eugenics and Nazi requirements for proof of ancestry,⁷³ the *Ahnentafel* has survived as an effective and inclusive way of representing all known ancestors.⁷⁴

Some philosophers have also suggested the rhizome as an alternative knowledge representation that could also describe family relationships. While a tree grows upwards in a structure that is essentially set, a rhizome can grow haphazardly from any point. As gardeners well know, rhizomes will decompose and recombine, and they can regenerate when separated from the main plant. Rhizomatic structures are “always in a state of becoming,” and can exist on their own or be entwined with other models.⁷⁵

Rhizomatic representations are already present in many published Mennonite genealogies. Coexisting discreetly with family trees, they acknowledge the complexity of Mennonite women’s lives. A birthdate of

70. Curran, Coen Crane, and Wray, *Numbering Your Genealogy*, 1, 25, 26.

71. Zerubavel, *Ancestors and Relatives*, 32.

72. Mary Bouquet, “Family Trees and their Affinities: The Visual Imperative of the Genealogical Diagram,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2:1 (1996), 60.

73. Jason Tebbe, “From Memory to Research: German Popular Genealogy in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Central European History* 41:2 (2008), 217.

74. See chapter 4 in Zerubavel, *Ancestors and Relatives*.

75. Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 143, 145. Mansfield is summarizing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s critique of hierarchical systems of meaning in their work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. See also Nash, *Of Irish Descent*, 11-13.

a child may appear before the marriage date of the parents, without comment. An unobtrusive note may acknowledge that an adopted baby was actually the child of a maiden aunt. Rhizomes grow, discreetly but truthfully, in quiet corners of Mennonite family trees; it takes attentive readers to spot them. The degree to which they are omitted, obscured, or highlighted is a choice made by the genealogical compiler.

Writing on the prospects for research into the Mennonite family, M. J. Heisey predicted that delving deeply into family histories would change our view of Mennonite history and reveal that Mennonite families for the most part are not "typical" but made up of "a bewildering mix of particularities."⁷⁶ A wide array of relational models may be required to represent them.

CONCLUSION

The questions generated by exploring Lorraine Roth's and Lucy Braun's archival collections have led from Easthope Township to Kazakhstan, from biblical genealogies to postmodern theories of knowledge representation. Rather than being regarded as the poor cousin of history, genealogy deserves greater attention for what it can contribute, including to our understanding of Mennonite women's lives.

The archival acquisition of, and research in, collections of genealogists is a crucial part of this narrative. These collections are remarkable "communities of records" that have been painstakingly captured and formed by their creators.

Genealogies and genealogists cross borders and boundaries. Lorraine Roth crossed boundaries through her unconventional life, which she shaped around genealogy and community; Lucy Braun crossed borders through subversive family storytelling. In pursuit of genealogy, both women were connectors, forming networks of shared interest and of scattered families and diasporic communities. They documented the lives of other women. They did not simply uncover the past; they had a hand in shaping its interpretation and a voice in telling it. They were intrigued by unexpected outcomes, like an Irish great-great-grandmother or unidentifiable birth mother. In a way they were like traditional Mennonite midwives, women who were trusted enough to be allowed into the private, and sometimes secret, lives of families.

The works of Braun and Roth illustrate the complexities of Mennonite women's lives. Can traditional genealogical representations, the family tree most prominent among them, adequately reflect women's

76. M. J. Heisey, "'Mennonite Religion was a Family Religion': A Historiography," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005), 12.

experiences? Genealogical representations of the past have reflected power, authority, purity, immigrant and class aspirations, and, more recently, personal identity. Is the tree robust enough to reflect more complex relationships, such as illegitimacy, that are a part of women's lives? Perhaps this is a question that moves beyond genealogy and history and into the realms of art and imagination. If we shift our perspectives, we can see that there is still much more to discover "hidden in that little list."

