

Interesting Sidelights on Villagers of Gormley - Sect Keeps Old Customs



Wearing cap indicating she belongs to Dunkers religious sect, Mrs. Joseph Heise of

Gormley holds four-months-old granddaughter Lucille, seventh generation to live in 150-year

old Heise House on the Hill, landmark of the Dunkers and Mennonite community.



Examining field stones early settlers used for gravestones in Heise Hill graveyard because cut stone was not available, are Merle Heise, whose ancestors gave land for the cemetery, and Luella Winger.

In a hamlet 23 miles from Toronto you cannot buy so much as a grain of tobacco. In fact in one of the two stores there is a "No Smoking" sign, though it is there mostly for the stranger because the residents do not smoke. For Gormley, Old and New, with its few dozen houses is a Dunker and Mennonite settlement.

Neither sect today regards tobacco as particularly evil. The Dunkers, or Tunkers, whose church is "Brethren in Christ" put it this way—"the use of tobacco is a filthy habit and its expense a misuse of the Lord's money."

But one look around the countryside with its solid brick farmhouses, its big barns, well-stocked machine sheds and wide fields show there is so much misuse of money here. A visit to a shining farm kitchen proves how easily cigarette ash on the clean linoleum could be considered abhorrent.

Besides, the smoke would rather ruin the lush odor of apple butter, frying fritters and side pork and freshly baked pies.

Eighty-three-year-old George Hilts has never tasted the weed, has never used a swear word and can only recognize the ace in a deck of cards—but he does not feel he has missed much. He has retired from his farm to live in a big comfortable brick house with all conveniences. He sold his car only recently, because he can no longer get a license to drive, and his hobby during summer is gardening, particularly gladioli.

Mr. Hilts wears no tie, his wife no wedding ring, and her dress is a simple one with no trimming. Personal adornment does not interest them. Non-conformity to the world in dress is part of their creed.

It is also a creed of live and let live. Mr. Hilts, his neighbors, his church, and his friends have no desire to force their beliefs on others. The church door stands open to anyone who sincerely

wishes to enter. When anyone is ill in the stranger's house the neighbors are there with fresh cooking and offers of help. When there is trouble, there is no criticism. "They've never locked the freight sheds since the railroad came through and there's never been anything missing."

Mr. and Mrs. Hilts, who live in New Gormley where the railroad is, can remember some of the earlier times, before electric stoves and motor cars and store goods took over. "You can still get the real apple butter at North York market," says Mrs. Hilts. "I remember when we used to make it, we used to have schnitzing parties—to peel and quarter the apples to make the butter."

Twelve to 15 people would gather one night, prepare five bushels of apples, while they talked, laughed, played games and ate doughnuts and coffee. The next day gallons of sweet cider went into the copper kettle, was boiled down, the apples added and boiled again until the whole was a thick, dark, rich mixture.

"We'd use 25 gallons of apple butter in a year," said Mrs. Hilts. "Keep it upstairs in big crocks and it would be on the table three times a day."

Mr. Hilts remembers the cradling bees, when at harvest time the men would come for miles around to operate the cumbersome "cradle" that cut the grain. "I heard my father tell how he used to get up at four o'clock in the morning before sun-up, and walk 11 miles to another farm, cradle all day and walk home that night. I was never any good at the cradle. Takes quite a knack you know, but it went out when I was a boy."

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Heise in Old Gormley can still recall bread and pies being baked in the outdoor ovens. There is still one of these ovens standing on the Empringham farm; a square brick structure with an iron door, and a rounded plastered roof with a frame structure over that again.

"They didn't have thermometers in those days," said Mrs. Heise. "I can remember my mother-in-law waiting until the coals from the wood were red, then holding her hand in the oven and counting to find out if it was just right. Then you put the bread in and it baked in about three-quarters of an hour."

Yeast or "starter" was kept from baking to baking. "It still wonders me how my grandmother got it," said Mrs. Hilts up in the town. "I think she did it with hops she grew in the garden, and potatoes."

The Heises live in a 150-year-old house on Heise's Hill, so named after Christian Heise who came to the district in 1804 from Pennsylvania. Christian took the deed from King George III of England and built his house of logs, with a big front double door, hand-hammered latch and hinges—and a strong oak crossbar. He was the first deacon of the Dunker church in the district and the "love feasts" or communion services were held first in his barn. The house has been covered with clapboard since then.

Not until 1877 was the church built next door because the Dunkers believed meeting together in small groups in homes was the better way to worship.

The Dunkers also believe that "war, duelling, suicide and pre-natal destruction of human life is murder, as well as all other forms of human life-taking." Still their boys have gone to war not bearing arms, but as members of the medical corps.

Mr. Heise remembers his father telling the story of how one of the family was called up to serve in an early war, he doesn't remember which one. The boy was drawing war supplies with his horse down Yonge St. when the horse fell and broke his leg. "The fellow came home and they never called him up again," said Mr. Heise, who



The school teacher, Lois Heise, also wears a similar cap as she instructs pupils how to

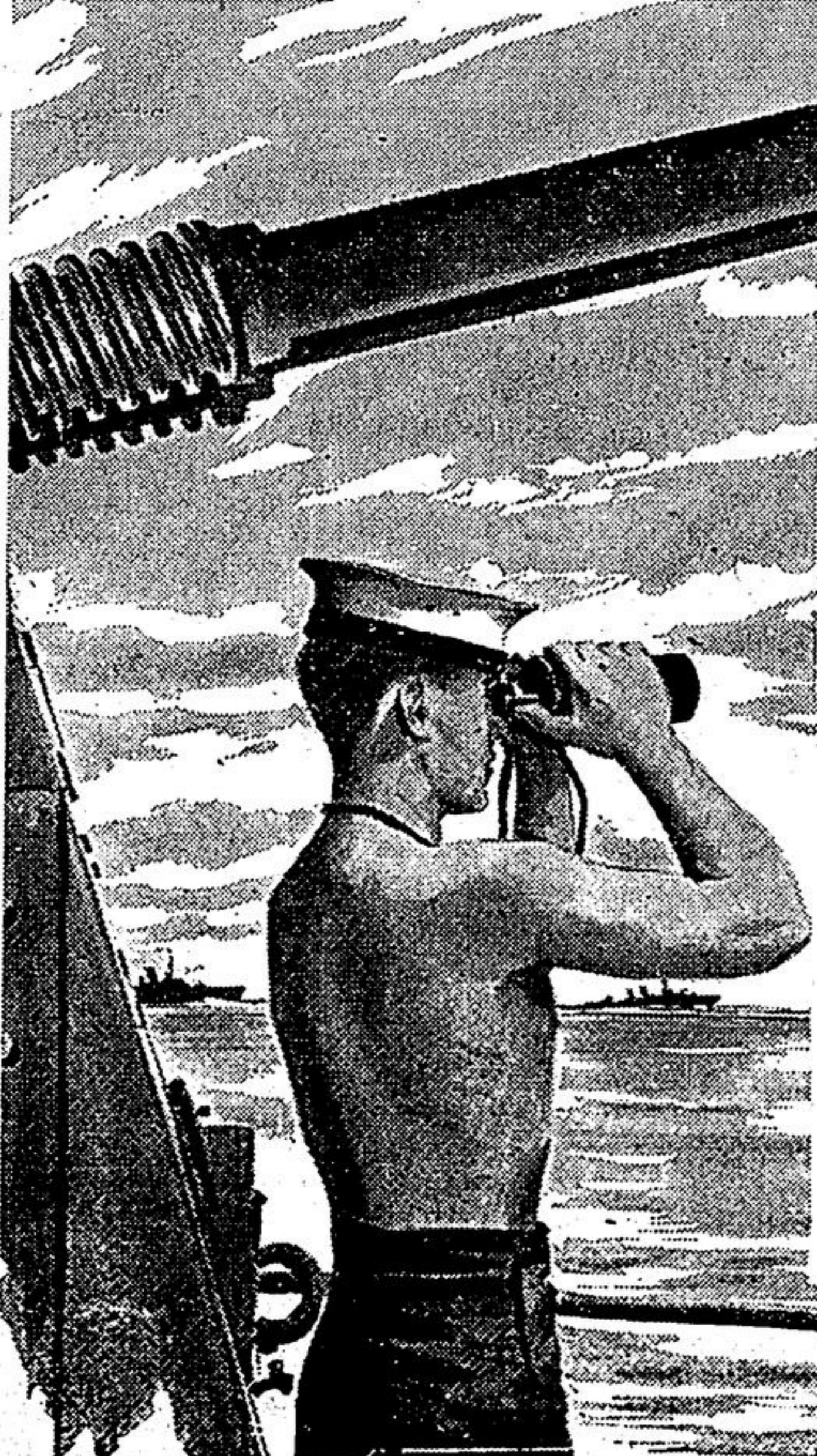
write name of their village. Gloria Tatton, Betty Dennie and Joan Cober watch as

Sheila Wilcox writes on the blackboard.



Sign in J. T. Johnson's store tells both sects' attitude in tobacco.

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