

CHAPTER 1

THE FIRST GENERATION

FROM PENNSYLVANIA TO UPPER CANADA 1770-1800

Jacob Seider, son-in-law of Christian Wenger, may have grown up on an adjacent farm. We can be sure that growing up in the same community resulted in frequent contacts between the Wengers and Seiders although their religious beliefs may have been different. No doubt there were many times when the two families shared in work at harvest in building new buildings, or in times of sickness and trouble. In addition both families were influenced by the new religious movement, the River Brethren, and their leader, Jacob Engle. The warmth and fervor of these men led at least some of these families to break with their traditional denominations and join the River Brethren.

Perhaps because of the unsettled conditions following the war for independence, three of the children of Christian Wenger followed the example of their father in leaving their home community to settle in a new land, this time in Canada. In 1788, John Wenger and wife, Jacob Seider and wife, John's unmarried sister Anna, and cousin Henry Winger arrived in the British Province of Canada.

Moving from Pennsylvania to Canada in those days was truly a strenuous and hazardous journey. Stories of that trip passed from grandmother to grandchild tell us that it took four months, and that they arrived just before the Canadian winter began. Frequently the trip would be made by horseback by one of the men to determine where good land was available. On several recorded occasions the horse was traded for 100 acres of land and the man walked back to his waiting family in Pennsylvania. Preparations would then be carried out through the winter, and the following spring they would set out with wagon, horses and cows. They had to travel slowly enough for their cows to walk leisurely, while producing milk and butter for the travellers.

Arriving at the Niagara River they were faced with the need to transport all their belongings across a mile-wide river with Niagara Falls only a relatively few miles down stream. Although by 1800 or earlier there were crude ferries to carry people across, tradition says that in the summer of 1788 they spent two weeks building rafts which swimming horses could pull across the river.

When John Wenger, Jacob Seider and their little band of settlers arrived in Canada they entered a land still very primitive, with only a few settlers and relatively few Indians. According to Dr. G. Elmore Reaman, a strip of land west of the Niagara River from the Chippewa River to Lake Erie was purchased from the Indians in 1781