That Unknown Island: Sarah A. Rohrer, Anarchist Author and Ancestor

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In his marvelous explorations of local and family history, Joseph Amato demonstrates how professional historians can profitably mine topics that have too often been left to antiquarians and genealogists.[1] A close observation of minor figures omitted from the grand metanarratives that preoccupy most scholarship can humanize history, helping us to understand the complexity of individual responses to large social processes. Indeed, as Constance McLaughlin Green has observed, no understanding of cultural development is possible without careful attention to the particularities of local places and transient social spaces.[2] This essay, an exercise in family folklore and family history, concerns a long-vanished Mennonite community on the outskirts of Canton, Ohio, which during the Gilded Age was absorbed by a growing industrial city, and particularly the family of Sarah A. Rohrer (1843–1935), the daughter of Mennonite saddler, farmer, and bishop "Little Mikey" Rohrer (1816–1894), my great-great grandfather. Nothing remains today of the Rowland Mennonite Church apart from weathered, badly vandalized stones in one small corner of Rowland Cemetery, located on Canton's east side a few miles from the public square.[3] A simple marker bearing the name of Sarah A. Rohrer sits on the edge of a parking lot filled with broken liquor bottles and weeds. My attempt to reconstruct the story of Sarah and her

family has convinced me that small, failed congregations merit the attention of scholars, and that Mennonite history benefits from including the vantage point of marginal figures who have been forgotten.

Figure 1. Sarah A. Rohrer, ca. 1930

Rohrer Family Folklore

I start with family folklore, which must not be confused with family history. Family stories are anecdotes retold within families about other family members, generally based on real incidents but invariably embellished and reshaped over the years. They are relevant to historians because they often convey some factual information, but also because they reflect the distinctive cultural concerns and characteristic attitudes of an era even when they distort factual details. Indeed, family folklore usually tells us more about the cultural mores of the storytellers than the facts of history.[4]

I first heard about my father's great aunt Sarah in November 1970, when I was a child. The extended Rohrer clan had gathered at our family farm in Carroll County, Ohio, for Thanksgiving dinner. While the adults prepared the meal and played euchre in the kitchen, I spent the afternoon picking through crates of family heirlooms in the attic. I was especially drawn to boxes of old books that were inscribed by Sarah A. Rohrer: *Silas Marner*, Hume's *His-*

tory of England, and a particularly intriguing Victorian guide to women's health, inside of which I found a pressed violet and a folded page torn from a magazine called *Mother Earth*. Rejoining the adults in the kitchen, I was startled by their collective response to my innocent query: Who was Sarah A. Rohrer? Their relaxed banter died and all eyes fixed upon me. My Aunt Josephine, basting the turkey at the stove, voiced the question that played in all their minds: "Where on earth did you ever hear the name Sarah A. Rohrer, child?" And to my reply she emphatically snapped, "*don't ever touch Aunt Sarah's books*!"

During the ensuing years, as I peppered my father and aunts with questions, I formed a clear but skewed image of Sarah as an eccentric "old maid," the family black sheep who held scandalous ideas about religion and politics. In the only remaining photograph of her she was already elderly, sporting a long black smock and a bonnet, her gnarled hand grasping a cane. And that is how my informants, her great nephews and nieces, remembered her, for they had been children who knew her only near the end of her long life. My father, the youngest of his family, was only twelve when Sarah died. He recalled her as "a character" who always wore an asafetida bag around her neck, for her rheumatism she said.

Dad was on the roof of the barn with my grandfather when they received news of Sarah's death. There was considerable speculation about the funeral because Sarah was a notorious freethinker who had made it clear that she wanted no mention of God at her send-off. She had passed away at the home of her sister Fannie Hershberger, a Mennonite who wrote her obituary and handled the arrangements. Fannie asked around but could find no Mennonite minister who would agree to preach Sarah's funeral. After several days, cousin Martin Rohrer, a "holy-roller preacher," agreed to say a few words for the occasion. My father did not attend the service, which was held in the Canton Mennonite Mission, but he remembered my grandfather returning home bemused, saying that Martin had "preached a darned fine sermon all things considered."

Sarah's political views were the stuff of legend in the generally conservative Rohrer family. Aunt Josephine, always diffident, invariably tried to deflect my questions, saying only that Sarah "was a strange one" with "queer ideas" and was "a bit communistic." Josie would never say more, usually commenting that I was "too young" to understand the matter. Fortunately, my Aunt Pauline, dad's oldest sibling, was more forthcoming, and most of my mental image of Sarah was formed from her anecdotes. Pauline (b. 1909) had been old enough to remember Sarah clearly, and she also had

picked up intriguing tidbits about her from the preceding generation.

Sarah was a Mennonite farm girl, raised on the Rohrer homestead located in the southeast corner of Canton, who later became a school teacher. Something turned her towards radical ideas, but Pauline didn't know much about it. She had been told that Sarah fell in love and "ran off" to England with an Englishman, but came home after he "jilted her." She had a much clearer picture of Sarah's later years. She recalled some gentlemanly immigrant men, factory workers, who often visited with Sarah at the homestead. By then many of the surrounding farms had been transformed into factories and working-class homes, and Sarah enjoyed sitting on the porch, sipping lemonade and talking politics with these visitors. During World War I, Pauline told me, Sarah would stand on the sidewalk along Sherrick Road in Canton, passing out tracts against the War.

In her last decades Sarah resided with various brothers, nephews, and nieces, mostly on the farm where she had been raised. My father's cousin Miriam, one of the nieces who lived with Sarah during the twenties and early thirties, remembered her as a friendly but quiet woman who spent most of her time reading in her room, a mysterious world filled with books and magazines that Miriam's parents forbade her to enter. "I got the mail every day," Miriam related, "and Sarah got a lot of magazines. One of them was the *Daily Worker*. But papa told me never to read them and I never did."[5] The same message was imparted to my aunts, who sometimes visited with Miriam. Sarah's room and her books and magazines were strictly off-limits to the children. It was a rule born of fear that Sarah's ideas were dangerous, and so thoroughly internalized that more than a generation after her death, Aunt Josephine sternly passed the warning on to me: *don't ever touch Aunt Sarah's books*!

It was Aunt Pauline who first told me that Sarah had written a novel, containing all her ideas, and that Aunt Josephine had a copy of it. For years Josephine insisted that Pauline was mistaken. Then, when I was in the doctoral program at Ohio State University, Aunt Josie passed away, bequeathing to me her box of family mementoes. Among them was a thin red paperback entitled *That Unknown Island*, by Sarah A. Rohrer. Reading Sarah's words, it was obvious that some of the family folklore was accurate, but also that much had been distorted and misunderstood. My great-great Aunt Sarah was an immensely well-read woman acquainted with various schools of radical thought. As a public-school teacher, she must have carefully kept her beliefs hidden away, and to the extent that

she revealed herself to family, they consigned her to the category of "the eccentric relation" that is a universal type in family folklore.[6] The complex, idealistic Sarah A. Rohrer, who studied world politics and political theory, and who critically evaluated the changing face of America, her Mennonite heritage, and her local community with the eyes of a prophetic visionary, was reduced to a stereotype. One senses, reading her novel, that "the unknown island" refers not only to the anarchist utopia that she conjures, but to herself as well.

Who was this fascinating, marginalized ancestor? What led her to reject the Mennonite tradition—and indeed all Christianity—and to embrace anarchism? How does her personal experience reflect the broader social changes transforming her world? Is it possible to move from family folklore to history and reconstruct in any detail her actual story?

Authoress and Lecturer: A Life on the Margins

Reconstructing Sarah's life is difficult. As a young woman reared in a patriarchal community, she was outside the public eye. As an adult who refused to conform to the conventions of either Mennonite or mainstream society, she played no prominent role in church circles, social clubs, or public institutions that might have attracted the notice of newspapermen or local historians. Nor did she bear children who could commemorate her memory. There is scant documentation to chronicle her early years, her turn away from the Mennonite faith, or her embrace of radicalism. Only a few newspaper clippings, census returns, court records, a photograph, and a handful of her books remain as evidence, insufficient to limn a detailed portrait. Her novel, then, which preserves her own unfiltered voice, is by far the most important source for understanding Sarah, although it too raises a host of tantalizing questions that cannot be definitively answered.[7]

Sarah's obituary in the *Canton Repository* identifies her as a public-school teacher, but especially highlights her authorship of *That Unknown Island* as well as her role as a lyceum lecturer in the United States and England. This, the only solid documentary evidence found to date that confirms family stories about Sarah's sojourn in England, fails to mention her radical political commitments. Still, it is intriguing that family members acknowledged, even obliquely, the activities that made her particularly unusual and notorious. Whether or not Sarah had a hand in shaping her

own obituary is unknown, but it seems likely that she was especially proud of her role as "authoress and lecturer."[8]

Two 1931 newspaper articles cast some light upon her youth and later career. At age 89 Sarah was honoured as the oldest student and teacher to attend a homecoming reunion at the Waco School in Canton Township, a reference to a tiny unincorporated village located just outside the city on land that had once belonged to her grandfather John Sherrick. Sarah attended the school as a little girl, when it was a one-room log structure just a short walk from the Rohrer farm. She later returned as a teacher and taught there for "many years."[9] Beyond these scant references, there are only a few hard facts to chart her course between childhood and old age.

That Unknown Island was printed by the Riehl Publishing Company of Cleveland, Ohio, a firm founded in 1917. Internal evidence suggests, however, that Sarah began writing the story much earlier, in the wake of the McKinley assassination, and either continued to work on the manuscript off and on during the intervening years or else waited to publish the book long after she had completed it. A political manifesto in the form of Victorian "tendency novels," it alludes to many world events from the dawn of the twentieth century, such as the first Hague Conference, as contemporary occurrences, and frequently references Leo Tolstoy (1847–1910) as though he is still alive. Significantly, it fails to mention any of the cataclysmic events that followed Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in 1914, a telling omission in a tale that revolves around the international economic order and issues of war and peace.

The plot is a convoluted adventure yarn that begins with an American anarchist named "Fritz" who inherits a fortune from a distant relation. The American newspapers at the time are filled with fulminations against anarchism, and many politicians and journalists are loudly calling for all anarchists to be forcibly deported to one of the islands recently seized in the war against Spain. This inspires Fritz to buy a ship from "Jack," a close friend in Liverpool, in which he and fellow anarchists from several nations journey together in search of an unoccupied island, intending to put anarchist principles into practice. After locating a suitable site, which they carefully conceal from outsiders to avoid being robbed by piratical governments and grasping capitalists, they joyfully construct a peaceful and egalitarian cooperative community free from formal law or hierarchy. Occasionally members of the band sail to England or the Continent for supplies and to recruit more settlers, and much of the action revolves around these excur-

sions into the squalor of working-class districts in London and Liverpool or to the hills of Scotland or Switzerland. Eventually some of the comrades decide to plant a satellite commune in rural Illinois. The story closes with the heroes happily engaged in tilling the soil, confident that despite the persistence of social injustice, the course of history is moving inexorably toward a non-violent future in which states will wither away and people will govern themselves peacefully according to reason and the natural bent of the human spirit toward love and cooperation.

On the first page Sarah suggests the cause for her disaffection from the Mennonite Church when her hero Fritz declares to Jack: "I suffered from tyranny in my childhood and youth. My guardians forced me to pray, they forced me to work, and to learn according to their rules, which is why I ran away and came to England, more than thirty years ago."[10] If this is an autobiographical reference, we can reasonably hypothesize that the visit Sarah made to England, where according to her obituary she lectured at lyceums, was sometime during the 1860s or 1870s. Unfortunately, however, there is no way to verify such speculation. Approximately half of her novel is set in England, where a heroine named Athena, a young sheltered woman who joins Fritz's band of anarchists, is transformed by Sunday lectures at London's Hall of Science and Secular Hall in Liverpool, two of the numerous centres associated with Victorian British freethought. Athena observes that these Sunday lectures are far "more interesting than the services in the church," and the comrades on the unknown "Isle of the Blest" model their own weekly day of rest upon the programs held at these institutions.[11]

The thin plot of the book serves simply as a thread upon which to hang her defense of anarchist principles. All her characters, both male and female, evidently exist as channels for Sarah's own voice. In paragraph upon paragraph she pours out her dissent from Mennonite beliefs and the values of capitalist America, urging readers to look courageously at their preconceptions and recognize the hypocrisy and futility at the heart of both institutional Christianity and the modern industrial state. Her defense of anarchism focused upon a cluster of common accusations: that anarchy is impractical; that it undermines religion and morality; that it is antisocial and violent; and that it contradicts the founding principles of the American republic. The dialogue is a continuous series of exchanges with various interlocutors, more ignorant than hostile, who assail her imaginary comrades with stock objections and thereby provide her an opportunity to set the record straight.

Perhaps her target audience was her own family. Riehl Publishing Company was a small press that specialized in commercial print orders, and there were apparently few copies of the book published. The copy bequeathed to me by Aunt Josephine is the only one that I have been able to locate. It is possible that she published only enough for presentation as gifts. If so, she was probably motivated less by a desire to impact the political arena than by a deep-seated need to gain the acceptance of her relations, who could neither understand nor approve of her unconventional life choices and convictions. Sadly, if this was the case, she failed to receive the understanding that she seemingly craved.

The Rowland Mennonite Community

Sarah's story is inseparable from the history of the community in which she spent the early decades of her life, and from which she never entirely separated despite her intellectual and spiritual struggles. Her parents, Michael and Elizabeth Sherrick Rohrer, were Mennonite farmers who belonged to a small congregation known as the Rowland Church, situated in a grove just beyond the eastern limit of Canton, Ohio. The surrounding township was a German-speaking enclave that included many Lutheran and Reformed as well as Mennonite families. Sarah, the third of eight children, had two older brothers, Benjamin (1840–1885) and John (1842–1905), and two younger brothers named Edwin (1847–1921) and Joseph (1848–1920). In 1857, when Sarah was thirteen, Elizabeth Sherrick Rohrer died after giving birth to a daughter named Martha, who soon followed her mother to the grave. Three years later Michael remarried Mary Wenger, the daughter of Samuel and Susanna Wenger, fellow Mennonites who owned a farm several miles to the northeast of Canton. Soon Fannie (1861–1941) and Daniel (1863–1925) rounded out the Rohrer family.

The Rowland congregation was named for Jacob Rowland, a farmer from Washington County, Maryland, who in 1810 was the first Mennonite to take up land in the vicinity. Rowland purchased a nearby grist and sawmill and became prosperous enough to buy farms for all eleven of his children.[12] In 1823 he constructed a log church for the use of the growing Mennonite congregation, which until then had been worshipping in homes. On the lot immediately adjacent to the church was a family burial plot which in time evolved into a large public cemetery, with one section reserved for Mennonite burials. In 1861 Rowland's son Jacob, no longer a Mennonite, formally deeded the church building to the Mennonite con-

gregation, with the stipulation that other denominations could use the structure for funerals as well as worship services whenever the Mennonites were not using it. In 1875, when Michael Rohrer was minister and bishop, this log structure was replaced by a brick building that continued to be used by different Mennonite groups until 1917, when another building was erected that continues to serve a small Mennonite congregation. None of the families that comprised the original Rowland Church remain. The Old Mennonite congregation that rests in the adjacent burial ground ceased as a living entity by the turn of the twentieth century.[13]

Like many other nineteenth-century Mennonite communities, the Rowland congregation faced daunting challenges. The Lutheran and Reformed neighbours far outnumbered the Mennonite families. Unlike the Rowland circle, these other groups met in comfortable brick churches; enjoyed Sunday Schools, picnics, and church bazaars; held revivals; and had wider opportunities to network with local business and civic leaders. Canton's newspaper, *The Ohio Repository*, richly documented the many events sponsored throughout the year by the various other Canton churches. But the Rowland Mennonites went unnoticed by outsiders, their occasional meetings unadvertised and the people opposed to the sort of evangelistic tactics that animated the local Reformed folk, who during the 1830s and 1840s engaged in emotionally charged camp meetings.[14] Mennonite children mingled with non-Mennonite youth in the local schools, however, and had ample opportunity to encounter a range of enticing activities that clashed with Mennonite tradition. The challenge of holding its youth, shared by most nineteenth-century Mennonite communities, seems to have proven insurmountable for the Rowland congregation. Virtually all the children of the early Mennonite families that remained in Canton affiliated with other city churches as adults.[15]

The rapid economic development of Canton and the accompanying steady expansion of the city brought other challenges. When Jacob Rowland first arrived, Canton had only a few hundred residents. Excellent farmland at reasonable prices was readily available in the surrounding hinterland, and soon numerous other Mennonite families from Maryland and Pennsylvania settled nearby. Many became prosperous not only farming but also engaging in land speculation, milling, distilling, and various small commercial enterprises. But real estate prices quickly escalated as the population grew, gradually but steadily at first and then exponentially after the Civil War. When Sarah Rohrer was born in 1843, the population of Canton stood at roughly 2000, and the Rohrer farm was still comfortably outside the city. By 1860 the town had grown to

more than 4000, and then in the next decade jumped by 114 percent to over 8000. A county history published in 1881 noted that in Canton Township, where most of the Rowland Mennonites resided, "the days of large farms and much unremunerative labor" were past as farmers sold off acreage and turned to working smaller units more intensively or to commercial activities like coal mining and brick-making.[16]

By the 1890s Canton had swelled to more than 26,000 and had engulfed most of the farms on the city's southeast side. The few farm families that retained their land now were surrounded by brickyards, factories, and working-class residential neighbourhoods, and new busy highways and railroads bisected their once quiet fields. By the time that Sarah Rohrer died in 1935, Canton had become an industrial city of more than 105,000, and the working-class neighbourhood surrounding the Rohrer farm was filled with immigrant labourers. Like other industrial cities, Canton exhibited marked economic disparities and environmental degradation, with the worst poverty and squalor associated with the southeast ward, where the Rohrer homestead was located. As early as 1880, local Christians organized an interdenominational association to address the growing problem of poverty. By 1907 the problem had grown much worse, and one east side missionary noted the pool of invisible poor "who seldom if ever" entered the well-groomed churches of Canton.[17]

The transformation was poignantly captured in the memoirs of Rev. Emil P. Herbruck (1855–1940), the son and successor of Rev. Peter Herbruck (1813–1895), the pioneer German Reformed dominie of Canton whose church captured many of the Mennonite youth. Emil, who grew up in a parsonage that stood not far from the Rowland Church, later nostalgically recollected the bucolic woods, streams, and fields in which he played as a child, just beyond the city in the area farmed by the Mennonite families. The Nimishillen Creek and its tributary streams, including the one that ran through Michael Rohrer's farm, teemed with fish, and Herbruck spent countless hours catching bluegill, wandering through clover pastures, and playing in the millstream that powered Jacob Rowland's mill. Herbruck, who was a decade younger than Sarah Rohrer, mourned the transformation that Sarah and her family also witnessed:

> It was my good fortune to be born and to spend my childhood in the East End of Canton, at a time when this little town was as yet untouched by the grimy hand of material progress, before tall chimneys and belching furnaces covered it with soot and smudge, creating the ugly "black belt" which stretches across its eastern and southern sec-

> tions. In that early day nature was still unsoiled by the murky tide of civilization, the streams were unpolluted, and the field untrampled by the hot foot of greedy industry.[18]

Michael Rohrer, a saddler by trade, opened a shop on East Tuscarawas Street in Canton in 1834. He advertised regularly in the local newspaper that he could make or repair saddles, bridles, martingales, and harnesses as well as travelling trunks, valises, and portmanteaus on short notice and with the highest craftsmanship.[19] In 1839 he married Elizabeth Sherrick, the only daughter of Mennonite farmer and distiller John Sherrick, who had migrated from Hagerstown, Maryland, in 1816 and owned one of the largest farms in Canton township. In 1843, the same year that Sarah was born, Michael purchased a farm from his father-in-law, and a few years later sold his saddle shop. For the rest of his life he devoted himself to farming, first on the land he purchased from Sherrick, and later on a new larger farm several miles northeast of the city, that he purchased from his second father-in-law Samuel Wenger in 1868.[20] Michael left the "Rohrer homestead" on Sherrick Road to his sons Edwin and Joseph and resided with Mary and their two children, Fannie and Daniel, on the new farm. This meant a considerably longer ride to the Rowland Church, but placed him in the midst of numerous Mennonite and River Brethren farmers who were farther removed from the fast spreading city.

The same year that he purchased his second farm, Michael was ordained as preacher at the Rowland Church, and two years later he became bishop. Until then the congregation had used German for worship, using a Mennonite devotional, *Kleines Hand-Büchlein*, that they reprinted in 1835, as well as a selection of 102 hymns taken from a Lancaster County Mennonite hymnal, *Ein Unpartheyisches Gesangbuch*, which was published in Osnaburg (East Canton) in 1839.[21] As minister, Michael switched to English services, although notices in the *Herald of Truth* clearly indicate that he was able to preach in either language. During the 1870s and 1880s he was frequently away from home, helping struggling congregations in Wayne, Columbiana, and Mahoning Counties, and was still travelling to assist with communions and funerals as late as 1891, when he was growing physically weak and nearing his own imminent death. Throughout these years the Rowland Congregation steadily declined in numbers and vitality. At its peak in the 1830s, during the ministry of Michael's cousin Joseph Rohrer, it had perhaps eighty members, but by 1881 a local history recorded that only twenty remained.[22] Letters in the *Herald of Truth* penned by visiting ministers throughout the 1880s and 1890s invariably described

the Rowland Church as struggling for survival. M.S. Steiner, who would briefly attempt to rejuvenate the congregation after Michael's death, wrote in 1890 that the Canton brethren gathered once every three weeks in a good brick building, but that no Sunday School had been organized and only a few people attended the meetings. "Bro. Rohrer says he has done all in his power to build up the church and now he is getting too old to do much more himself, but he would be glad to see others turn out and *help him*."[23]

When Michael Rohrer died in 1894, his funeral was surely the biggest gathering that the Rowland Church had seen for many years. Two ministers from Mahoning County and two from Wayne County addressed the crowd, preaching in both English and German, in a service that decisively marked the end of an era of local Mennonite history. It was clear that the Rowland congregation, now numbering only six members, was dying too. An obituary, penned by his close friend Adam H. Brenneman of Orrville, Ohio, revealed that Michael had been "much troubled" knowing that his "little flock" would soon be left without a shepherd, and that it must seemingly perish.[24] For a few years the handful of remaining members, led by Michael's son Edwin and Eli Yoder, one of Canton's oldest residents, tried to keep the church open, but by the end of the decade it had become a defunct congregation, the meetings so small, Yoder reflected, that they could not pay for the coal to heat the church.[25]

Sarah's Siblings

From its first issue the deflection of children to "the world" was a constant theme in the *Herald of Truth*, a problem that generated untold anxiety and grief in Mennonite congregations throughout the United States. One Holmes County, Ohio, woman remarked to a visiting preacher in 1890, "if only one of my children belonged to my church, how happy would I be!"[26] By this standard Michael Rohrer had cause to rejoice, for his son Edwin was a committed Mennonite from cradle to grave. His daughter Fannie did not attend church at the time of his death, but in 1904 she experienced conversion at a revival meeting and after wrestling with the question of what denomination to join, "heard a voice" that said "why not father's church?" It was Fannie's desire for baptism which led the Mennonite Ohio Conference in 1904 to open a new Canton mission.[27] None of the other Rohrer siblings remained Mennonite, however, and in the case of Sarah, the repudiation seemed to be especially egregious and all-encompassing.

Writing about the varied responses of Mennonites to the modern industrial city, Cornelius Dyck noted that while some "gave up any pretensions of having a unique faith and left the Mennonite Church," others became "marginal Mennonites" who retained a degree of "nostalgic love" for the tradition that nurtured them, but who shed "most of its claims upon them as outmoded and narrow limitations upon their freedom." A third group embraced their heritage and took up the challenge of relating it "in a meaningful way" to the new social environment.[28] Although Dyck was writing about the mid-twentieth century, the same three options presented themselves to Mennonite youth in the Gilded Age, and all three responses can be observed in the lives of bishop Michael Rohrer's children. Although Rohrer family folklore assigned to Sarah the role of the "black sheep" who most completely rejected her heritage, her novel suggests that her anarchism was perhaps driven by a profound commitment to Mennonite values she imbibed as a child. Indeed, she probably retained more "nostalgic love" for the Anabaptist tradition than her more conventional siblings who effortlessly embraced American Protestantism and mainstream society.

By the standards of Victorian America, Michael Rohrer's firstborn child, Benjamin Franklin Rohrer, was the most successful member of the family. Born in his father's saddle shop in 1840, his youth was spent on the Rohrer homestead. In 1868 he married Sarah Rohn, the daughter of a wealthy German Reformed farmer, and purchased a grocery store near the centre of Canton. He left the farm and moved into town, buying a home not far from his business, and for the rest of his short life operated "BF Rohrer's Cheap Grocery Store," advertising "provisions of all kinds" and offering cash for "country produce."[29] Benjamin and Sarah joined the fashionable "English Reformed" congregation, a spin-off of the German Reformed Church, and soon Benjamin became a prominent leader in the local Democratic Party, which drew much of its support from the city's German populace. During the 1870s he served in various party offices, and in 1877 was elected to the first of three terms on the Canton City Council, where he actively supported many initiatives to attract industry and to modernize the infrastructure of the growing city.

When Benjamin Rohrer died suddenly after a short illness in 1885, he received a grand public funeral officiated by both the English and German Reformed pastors. Afterwards, hundreds of people viewed his remains, displayed on the sidewalk in front of his home and attended by an honour guard. As the long funeral procession slowly made its way to Westlawn Cemetery, the beauti-

fully landscaped burial park preferred by the city's elite, the city hall bell rang out forty-five times, once for each year of Benjamin Rohrer's life. The City Marshal and police force led the way, followed by the Grand Army Band playing a dirge. Four carriages conveyed the mayor, the city council, and other civic and business leaders, with the street department employees and six fire brigades trailing along on foot or riding on the impressive modern steamers that the deceased councilman had helped to procure. The arrangements, which had been planned by the City Council, clearly testified to the "progressiveness" of the growing city and honoured "an exemplary businessman and citizen" who embodied the Spirit of Progress.[30]

Benjamin's death undoubtedly caused Michael Rohrer deep grief, but the knowledge that he had abandoned the Mennonite Church and had so thoroughly embraced the values of Gilded Age America likely added a profound dimension of spiritual pain that would have been lost upon those fellow citizens who honoured "B.F. Rohrer" in death. A decade earlier, in a letter to Jacob Funk of the *Herald of Truth*, Michael had contrasted the humble demeanour of his small charge, poor in all the things of this world but rich in faith, with the prideful worldliness of those who flocked to large churches: "What do we see, where eloquence is and a polished speaker, you will find crowds of hearers, and with that is attended pride and style and all the things that attain to the enjoyment of the world." Far better, Michael believed, to tread the path of self-denial, seeking wisdom rooted in the fear of the Lord, and quietly pursue "work that is needful" until the day that Christ at last reveals his true followers.[31] It is not likely that Michael Rohrer felt much pride in the public honours accorded to his son.

Michael officiated at numerous burials in 1885, the most poignant one for a seventeen-year-old wife in Holmes County who had contracted "malarial fever." During her final illness she "felt the need of a Savior" and wished to make peace with God before she left the world. She warned a group of young friends who came to visit her to avoid her example of worldliness and to "live for Jesus," not merely hearing the gospel but trusting it. The young woman requested baptism, but slipped into unconsciousness before a minister could arrive, and so died outside the church. Nonetheless, her obituary in the *Herald of Truth* noted, "we have reason to believe that she died in peace and went to Jesus."[32] Similar language appeared in the obituary of Maria Horst, wife of Bishop Michael Horst of North Lawrence, Ohio, a close friend of Michael's. Maria left her grieving family but "not without hope, for we have reason to believe that their loss was her eternal gain, having been a

faithful member of the Mennonite Church for many years."[33] How different in tenor was the brief obituary penned for Benjamin Rohrer, which appeared in the *Herald* a few weeks after his death. In stark contrast to the typical obituaries written for Mennonite Church members of the time, which almost invariably expressed confidence in their triumphant victory over death, Benjamin's was a terse two-sentence notice to readers that he was "son of preacher Michael Rohrer, aged 45 years," and had left a wife and two children: "May their loss be his gain. Peace to his ashes!"[34] Although Benjamin Rohrer was a member of the Reformed Church and was honoured by the City of Canton as a model citizen, the coded language of the Mennonite obituaries suggests doubt about his eternal salvation.

Michael's second child must also have caused him great anxiety and sorrow. In 1861 the nineteen-year-old John Rohrer left the farm and headed west to Kankakee, Illinois, where on June 13, 1861, he enlisted with nearly a hundred other men to form Company G of the 20th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. By the time he was discharged in June 1864, he had seen hard fighting at Fort Henry, Shiloh, and the Vicksburg Campaign, and was mustered out as a Sergeant.[35] Apparently camp life appealed to John more than farming, for he spent the next twenty-five years moving about the American West, pursuing "varied careers" that included prospecting for gold in Montana, Idaho, and British Columbia.[36] Shortly before his father's death, he returned to Canton, a bachelor with broken health, and spent the last decade of his life living with his sister Sarah, doing hired farm labour until he was unable to work. He died in 1905, having never joined any church.

Sarah's other siblings all stayed in the Canton vicinity and continued to pursue farming, but not necessarily as Mennonites. Joseph married Susan Shirk, a farm girl from nearby Osnaburg Township of Mennonite descent, but who had been raised in the German Baptist Church by apparently devout parents.[37] Married at the nearby German Reformed parsonage by Peter Herbruck in 1873, it is not clear whether or not Joseph and Susan affiliated with any denomination before the early twentieth century. They then joined the rapidly growing First Christian Church in Canton, whose charismatic minister P.H. Welshimer led intense revival campaigns between 1902 and 1910 that transformed a small congregation into one of the nation's first mega-churches.[38]

Daniel, who inherited Michael's farm, in 1885 married Joanna Hartman, the daughter of John Anthony Hartman and Julia Ann Trump, farmers who resided several miles north of Canton. John Hartman had died in 1870, when Joanna was only seven, and ac-

cording to probate records his estate was insufficient to support his minor children. It is not clear who raised Joanna after her father's death, how she became acquainted with Daniel, nor what religious affiliation, if any, she had at the time of her marriage. Clearly, however, Daniel and Joanna were never active Mennonites. Federal census and probate court records show that between 1900 and 1905 the couple moved with their eight children to a farm near Malvern, a brick-making centre in Carroll County to the south of Canton. There Daniel engaged in farming while his sons took jobs in the brickyards. It is not clear whether Daniel and his wife affiliated with any church; their youngest son Martin, who became a holiness preacher, officiated at Sarah A. Rohrer's funeral.[39]

Sarah's *Unknown Island*

All but two of her siblings rejected Mennonite tradition just as surely as Sarah, but unlike her they readily assimilated into mainstream society. Sarah, however, could neither affirm her Mennonite heritage nor embrace conventional American social, political, or religious views, leaving her out of step with the values and beliefs of both sides of her family. Her embrace of freethought and anarchism branded her as particularly eccentric and even dangerous in the wake of President William McKinley's assassination in 1901, which triggered a national wave of anti-anarchist hysteria. It seems to have been the tragic death of this local son of Canton which prompted her to write *That Unknown Island*, her personal spiritual manifesto as well as her defense of anarchism against the misconceptions of her family and the broader public.

Throughout her book Sarah appeals to the authority of various authors, an eclectic mix of thinkers that defies any consistent ideological position. She often cites Tolstoy, and especially his introduction to the writings of the Russian peasant Timothy Bondareff, whose emphasis upon the redemptive nature of manual farm work seems to provide the conceptual thread that holds her plot together: "If these 'better classes' believe in Christ, let them cast aside their feathers and war paint and do the bread work, as Tolstoi puts it."[40] She caustically derides the creeds and confessions of Christianity, claiming Jesus as an anarchist whose teachings have been buried by centuries of deliberate misrepresentation and ignorant misunderstanding. The modern Church, she concludes, is supremely blind to the very things about which Jesus cared most deeply:

> Athena had never seen . . . such a cold-blooded disregard for helpless poverty, as she saw within sight of Christian temples and Courts of Justice, while the Pharisee with his glaring philanthropy collects pennies, even from those who can ill spare them, to use in converting naked savages to clothes and . . . obedience to task-masters, who love to make money so that they and theirs can live in luxury. And all in the name of an outlaw Anarchist, who nearly two thousand years ago denounced the hypocrites and tools of Authority, who wept with the poor and drove the money-changers out of the Temple.[41]

Although Sarah did not regard Menno Simons as an anarchist, she did claim him as a kindred spirit whose rejection of arbitrary authority strikingly contrasted with the attitude of his modern-day followers. One of her heroes, a Norwegian sailor named Thorwald, journeys to New York to purchase some machinery needed by the community, and decides to make a side trip to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to observe the Mennonite farmers. A remarkably liberal-minded Mennonite invites him to dinner, and they fall into a lengthy discussion about religion and politics. Thorwald sees many parallels between the hard-working Mennonites and the comrades on his utopian island and asks about the origins of their community. The farmer's reply offers a version of Anabaptist history that closely resembles Tolstoy's Christian anarchism:

> They were the followers of Menno Simons, a monk and an independent thinker in his day. He must have felt for the oppressed toilers, who scraped together money to pay the priest for saying mass to save their souls from the wrath of a loving Creator, and who paid taxes to save themselves from the wrath of the State. Wisdom comes to those who search earnestly after Truth. This monk took a wise plan to free helpless ignorance from the tyranny of the Church and State. He read to his flock from the scriptures, that the gospel was given freely without money and without price. He with his followers obeyed the first commandment: "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread!" They settled disputes among themselves, thus boycotting lawyers and magistrates; they prayed to God for forgiveness of sins, thus boycotting the priests. They dressed plainly in homespun, thus avoiding paying tariff taxes on imported finery. Menno Simons cared little for form and ceremony and his followers built no temples to the Lord. They said: "The Lord dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Instead they helped one another build comfortable homes for themselves.[42]

To Thorwald's query about modern Mennonites, the farmer sadly acknowledges that much has changed, and the people now imitate too many customs of the world. Moreover, they have lost their radical commitment to seeking truth: "There is among the Mennonites little of the spirit of investigation, which led their

founder to criticize and rebel against the mother church." The farmer agrees to study a copy of Bakunin's *God and the State* which Thorwald gives him, but observes: "I believe that I am the only Mennonite in this neighbourhood who will read both sides of any question impartially. Should I give this book to any of my friends, they would throw it in the stove."[43]

Despite her recommendation of Bakunin's essay, Sarah shows greater affinity with such American individualist libertarians as Josiah Warren (1798–1874) and especially Benjamin R. Tucker (1854–1939), whose *Liberty* Magazine (1881–1908) she references approvingly. To the charge that anarchists are wild-eyed revolutionaries, her comrades retort that they are simply peaceable philosophical egoists championing the rights of the individual in the spirit of the immortal Jefferson. The comrades on the "Isle of the Blest" decide after considerable discussion to dub their island "Egoland" because of their commitment to the principles of individualist anarchism set forth by Max Stirner and Americanized by Tucker.[44]

Running throughout her tale is an unresolved tension between the fiercely anticlerical freethought of the major anarchist theorists of the nineteenth century, and the Christian anarchism espoused by Tolstoy. Sarah would be remembered in family folklore as a confirmed atheist, and her book launches many barbs at the creeds of the Church, drawing upon Max Stirner's term "spooks" to describe the way they haunt the human imagination. Yet she sometimes cites scripture and one of her heroes immerses himself in the Bible. She condemns "hireling preachers" and priests as Pharisees, yet praises a social gospel missionary who humbly sacrifices for the poor. Individuals, she concludes, are often better than their creeds.

Sarah's detailed depictions of London and Liverpool street life, as well as her descriptions of the freethought programs at Secular Hall, suggest that she had first-hand exposure to working-class England and the British Secular Movement. But her main inspiration seems to be the vanished rural community that she knew as a child. Her heroes are hard-working labourers from many nations who freely unite to till the land and draw from the fruitful earth the food and resources necessary to sustain a healthy life of simple freedom. Her pages reflect her deep love of nature, of flowers and crops, the changing seasons, livestock, and the soil itself. In one passage Athena asks why the urban poor cannot be released from their debts and given farm land to tend; this would not only end their poverty but would help them to discover the joy that comes from agricultural labour and learning to feed oneself.

In another passage, a ship filled with wealthy tourists sails close enough to discover the "unknown island." Coming ashore, the unwanted visitors are astounded by the natural abundance seemingly going to waste. An industrialist voices the argument that Sarah undoubtedly heard often on the lips of Canton boosters: "you have coal and other minerals. What you want is capital and captains of industry to develop the resources of your island. If your people would wake up, your village would soon grow into a city, and you would become wealthy." The businessman offers to pay them handsomely if they will sell him a thousand acres of their land, but Fritz replies on behalf of all the comrades: "We do not want large cities nor great wealth. What we want is more time, more leisure to do the work we love to do. It makes me tired just to think of making money and caring for it."[45] The novel ends with one of the comrades, reflecting upon history, warning that their community will eventually grow too large to support their rural existence: "In time the farming land of Egoland will all be taken up and our towns will grow and become crowded. Luxury and vice, with poverty and crime, followed by tyranny, will come to stay." Fritz has the last word, retorting that they must not worry about the future but trust that reason, science, and the doctrine of liberty will inspire the "men of tomorrow" to do "tomorrow's work."[46]

Sarah envisioned a world in which men and women alike possessed autonomy and voluntarily entered communal relations based solely on individual choice. Gender roles on the "Isle of the Blest" seem to be relatively traditional, with the women often engaged in gardening, baking, and making homespun clothes for their children. But they also read political theory, play musical instruments, paint and write, travel the world unaccompanied by men, and actively participate in the Sunday lectures and debates. She warmly advocates free love as the only ethical basis for sexual union, the comrades pair-bonding according to mutual attraction and living together without benefit of clergy as married couples so long as both parties choose to maintain the relationship. When a visitor worries about the shame their offspring will experience, the comrades derisively reject concerns about "legitimacy" as another irrational spook from which humanity needs to be liberated. Individuals ought to be judged purely on the content of their character, a matter wholly unrelated to the marital status of their parents.

It is not surprising that Sarah's relations rejected her beliefs. Yet for all her unconventional ideas, her thinking at many points deeply resonated with traditional Anabaptist values. In her desire to live close to the land, her joy in manual labour, her condemnation of pride and fashion, and her belief that humans must live co-

operatively in community without violence or coercion, Sarah and Michael Rohrer were surely kindred spirits. Perhaps she recognized this truth and came to regret the rupture between them. One of her heroes, a Scotsman, had been raised in a devout Highland home in the Hebrides. One night he dreams that he is a child again, going to church with "his pious father and mother," and this dream leads him to reflect upon the biblical rule that people reap what they sow. As a child he had longed to be free from "sham and hypocrisy," but as an adult he regrets the rashness of his youthful actions: "Often he had pained his father by his plain speech and cruel arguments. Now he longed to ask for forgiveness, which could never be."[47]

Sarah's novel, as well as her obituary, suggest that she had spent time in England, which dovetails with family folklore. Unfortunately, the scant documentation makes it impossible to ascertain any historical details. The story that she "ran off" with an Englishman who "jilted her" almost certainly refers to her relationship with John R. Miller, an English coal miner who settled in Canton Township with his family in 1869. However, although Miller probably played a key role in Sarah's ideological turn, the known facts of the case do not fit comfortably with a journey together to England.

During the late 1860s numerous commercial coal mines opened in Canton Township, which was beginning to attract interest as an attractive site for industry. Several of these "coal banks" were located less than a mile from the Rohrer homestead. The availability of nearby coal reserves led local boosters to enthuse about their future economic prospects. Canton, an 1868 editorial in the *Repository* predicted, "shall, in a short time, occupy a prominent place in the list of coal fields famous for manufacturing."[48] The 1870 census shows that more than a dozen English coal miners moved to Canton Township during the previous decade, including the recently arrived John R. Miller from Durham, who rented a house near the Waco school where Sarah was likely teaching at the time. Miller, who at thirty-seven was a decade older than Sarah, was married with five children, ranging from two to thirteen years old. Matthew Miller, the oldest, was already employed in the "coal bank" with his father, but two younger siblings were scholars who almost certainly attended Sarah's school and were possibly her students. Over the next six years Miller and his wife had three more children; then, in October 1877, Mary Sarah Miller died in childbirth, leaving her husband to care for the family alone.

On August 10, 1878, Rev. Peter Herbruck united Sarah Rohrer and John Miller in matrimony at the German Reformed parsonage.

The new couple soon moved with the six youngest Miller children to Des Moines, Iowa, where the 1880 census lists John working as a shipbuilder and Sarah keeping house. By 1885, however, they had returned to Canton, and in February and March of that year John Miller penned a series of inflammatory letters that appeared in the *Stark County Democrat*, critiquing the American economic system and the political parties as tools of capital. Both thematically and rhetorically these letters resembled many of the arguments that Sarah later wove into her novel, at places so similar that they could have been produced by the same pen. Yet Miller did not advance anarchist arguments. Instead he called for workers and famers to unite politically to wrest power from the hands of the "Scribes, Pharisees and Hypocrites," in order to build a Christian socialist commonwealth based upon the teachings of Jesus: the "true followers" of the "carpenter's son" don't "monopolize markets to aggrandize themselves," but instead seek to build "a community where all sing for joy, being free from oppression, a community where workingmen bless and praise their employers and legislators for their fairness and the just and equal laws they make."[49]

It is impossible to know with any confidence much about Sarah's relationship with John Miller. Was he, perhaps, the "Jack" of her later novel, the "first friend" who helped young "Fritz" upon his escape to England?[50] Perhaps she found in matrimony a way to decisively break away from the influence of her family, although as a thirty-five-year-old school teacher she was long past childhood and was no longer living at home with her father. Had she possibly already traveled to England before she met John Miller, and there was another yet unidentified Englishman in her life? Had she, in fact, taught the Miller children in school and formed a friendship with John Miller and his wife, so that her decision to marry the widowed coal miner was a natural development? Was her relationship with Miller based upon mutual affection, or purely a marriage of convenience? It is impossible to answer any of these questions with certainty, although her novel offers tantalizing clues that might point toward answers. One of her characters, the childless "Aunt Jane," explains how she became the guardian of a "little daughter" at the behest of a grieving father whose wife had died. And "Ebenezer," another comrade who dislikes his family name, makes the odd observation that "If I were a woman and not too poor and old and ugly, I might persuade some man to give me his name. I might pay for my obliteration by working for my keep enough and over, and perhaps some little kindness thrown in, for love and bondage do not harmonize."[51]

In April 1885, just a few weeks after the last of Miller's polemical letters appeared in the local newspaper, Sarah filed for divorce, citing "cruelty and extreme neglect" as the grounds for her petition. Miller did not contest and failed to appear in court, which the judge considered *prima facie* proof that the charge was true.[52] Although always known to family and other acquaintances as Sarah Rohrer, for the next twenty years she retained Miller as her legal name, petitioning to have her maiden name restored only in 1905 when she was appointed executor of her brother John's estate.[53]

From the extant documentation it is impossible to know exactly how her marriage to John Miller may have influenced Sarah's developing political and religious beliefs. Perhaps Miller treated her cruelly, and she came to regret her choice of marriage as well as the legal system that bound her to a loveless union. Perhaps, however, they shared a common libertarian ideology and agreed to end a legal relationship that no longer served their purposes. In Victorian America "cruelty and neglect" were the most common grounds for seeking divorce, and it is entirely possible that Miller's failure to contest Sarah's petition reflected their agreement that it was time to part ways. There are many possible scenarios, and too little factual evidence to substantiate any of them.

Conclusion

Our search for the Sarah A. Rohrer of history runs into many dead ends. Unless additional sources come to light, we cannot know exactly when and how she first embraced freethought and anarchism, when she was in England, or the exact nature of her relationship with John R. Miller. Yet despite the silence of the sources, some aspects of her story emerge with clarity. Sarah A. Rohrer rebelled against the authority of her father Michael and perhaps, too, her step-mother Susanna Wenger, and turned away from the Mennonite Church just as most of her siblings and the other children of the Rowland congregation had done. But Sarah could not embrace the social and political values of capitalist America or reconcile herself to any form of religion that sanctioned a manifestly unjust economic order. Her ideal remained a community of true believers, in but not of the world, who nonviolently tilled the soil, lived simply and frugally, and sought harmony with nature and with neighbours. These commitments, deep-seated in the Mennonite tradition, were not far from the ideals of Michael Rohrer.[54] Having rejected Christianity, she found in her reading of various anarchist authors a compelling worldview that

satisfied her need for intellectual coherence and a foundation for the many Anabaptist values that she retained.

In her turn toward anarchism she joined, probably unknowingly, a long line of other Mennonite dissenters who have rebelled against the constraints of church and community and have sought in radical political theory and social action both personal liberation as well as a more tangible witness to peace and justice. It is possible that she recognized that her contemporary Abraham Isaak, a Russian Mennonite who immigrated to the United States in 1890, was an associate of Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman, and who edited the American anarchist weeklies the *Firebrand* (1895–1897) and *Free Society* (1897–1904). It is less likely that she knew of Abraham Thiessen, another contemporary Russian Mennonite with socialist leanings. Thiessen, of Kleine Gemeinde descent, championed land reform in Russia during the 1860s and 1870s, and migrated to Nebraska in 1876 following his escape from Siberian imprisonment. Of course, she could not know of those who came after her, such as the American communist writer and activist Gordon Friesen, whose novel *Flamethrower* (1936) poignantly critiqued the Mennonite community of his childhood. Friesen turned away from Christianity as Sarah had done, but acknowledged in his old age that his entire lifetime of work on behalf of the oppressed had flowed from his Mennonite roots. Likewise, during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s numerous impassioned North American Mennonite youth challenged the hidebound traditionalism of their conservative church communities and sought to forge new Mennonite approaches to social and political change. Among these was John Braun, whose Radical Mennonite Union at Simon Fraser University issued in 1968 a burning indictment of the modern church, state, and society that aimed at nothing less than a complete transformation in the Mennonite tradition. Braun charged modern Mennonites with abandoning the radicalism of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, voicing a frustration that Sarah Rohrer expressed in *That Unknown Island* six decades earlier. One suspects that Sarah would have found kindred spirits in all of these Mennonite dissidents.[55]

Sarah believed that the Mennonites of her generation had devolved from the passionate commitment of their Anabaptist forebears and that non-violent anarchists in fact stood closer to the first followers of Menno Simons. Her conviction may have had some historical merit. Hans-Jürgen Goertz has richly documented the fierce anticlericalism of the early Anabaptist laity and the remarkable breadth of sources they drew upon, including humanistic tracts, in formulating their arguments against both church and

state. The first Anabaptists, Goertz concludes, were a remarkably variegated constellation of dissidents, who despite their intellectual differences shared a unifying hostility to existing Christian structures: an "almost ritualized anticlericalism" was "their *Sitz im Leben*." Goertz especially highlights the activist role of early Anabaptist women, who found in their movement the inspiration and social cohesion to challenge traditional patriarchal structures of church and society and to engage in open defiance of clerical authority, sometimes employing language and behavior that was far more provocative than anything in Sarah Rohrer's novel.[56]

Despite her intellectual rebellion and apparently modest acts of civil dissent, Sarah A. Rohrer never fully separated from the Mennonite community. Unlike her brother John, who spent most of his life wandering far from home, and Benjamin, who abandoned the farm in favour of city life and became an instrument for the industrial development of Canton, Sarah spent most of her long life on the old Rohrer homestead, teaching at the small school where she had studied as a child, and living quietly with family. Canton City directories show that she resided for most of the last three decades of her life with her Mennonite brother Edwin, a farmer, and she died in the home of her Mennonite sister Fannie, who nursed her in her final days. At her funeral, held at the Mennonite mission, her family acknowledged her as its own, and she was buried in the old Rowland Cemetery, not far from her father and mother. It is fitting that her marker is located just beyond the boundary of the Mennonite section, surrounded by outsiders but close, very close, to the Rowland Mennonite congregation that she could never fully embrace nor ever completely reject.

Notes

1 See Joseph A. Amato, *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Amato, *Jacob's Well: A Case for Rethinking Family History* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008).

2 Constance McLaughlin Green, "The Value of Local History," in *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice*, ed. Carol Kammen (Walnut Creek, CA: American Association for State and Local History, 1996), 90–91.

3 Ed Balint, "Time Takes Its Toll on Historic City Cemetery," *Canton Repository*, 22 April 2007.

4 Steven J. Zeitlin, Amy J. Kotkin, and Holly Cutting Baker, *A Celebration of American Family Folklore: Tales and Traditions from the Smithsonian Collection* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 10.

[5] Miriam related this to me during a visit at her residence, the Canton Christian Home, in 2011.

[6] Zeitlin et al., *A Celebration of American Family Folklore*, 15, 28.

[7] On the challenges of writing the history of Mennonite women, and the ways that historians confront and interpret the silence of the sources, I have found the following works especially valuable: Kimberley D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly, eds., *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), esp. 1–13, and Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), esp. 3–21.

[8] *Canton Repository*, 5 November 1935, 29.

[9] *Canton Repository*, 17 May 1931, 9; 24 May 1931, 23.

[10] Sarah A. Rohrer, *That Unknown Island* (Cleveland: Riehl Printing Co, n.d.), 1.

[11] On organized British secularism see the following works by Edward Royle: *Radical Politics 1790-1900: Religion and Unbelief* (London: Longman, 1971); *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791-1866* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974); and *The Infidel Tradition: From Paine to Bradlaugh* (London: Macmillan, 1976).

[12] See article on the Rowland family in *Canton Repository*, 10 November 1929, 10, as well as Edsel Burdge Jr. and Samuel L. Horst, *Building on the Gospel Foundation: The Mennonites of Franklin County, Pennsylvania and Washington County, Maryland, 1730-1970* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004), 169.

[13] Elmer S. Yoder, "The Canton Mission: First Mennonite Church, 1904-1963," *Heritage: A Quarterly Publication of Stark County Mennonite and Amish Historical Society* 15 (January 1998), 1–2. For a complete list of Mennonite family burials at Rowland Cemetery, see Stark County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society, *Cemetery Inscriptions, Stark County, Ohio Volume V* (October 1, 1984), 321–334.

[14] For an illuminating account of German Reformed religious life in Canton during the 1840s and 1850s see Emil P. Herbruck, *Early Years and Late Reflections* (Cleveland: Central Publishing House, 1923).

[15] Wilmer D. Swope, "Rowland Mennonite Church," *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* 28:2 (April 1967), 2, rightly notes that the congregation "did not hold the young people very well and they joined other denominations." That this was a common problem throughout the United States is clear. See Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1967), 298–99, and John Sylvanus Umble, *Ohio Mennonite Sunday Schools* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1941), 35–47.

[16] William Henry Perrin, ed., *History of Stark County, Ohio* (Chicago, 1881), 294.

[17] *Stark County Democrat*, 24 May 1907, 5.

[18] Herbruck, *Early Years and Late Reflections*, 8.

[19] *Canton Repository*, 29 July 1841, 1.

[20] *Stark County Democrat*, 1 July 1868, 4.

[21] "A Nonpartisan Hymnbook for Universal Use in True Worship." A copy of the title page of this book is reproduced in Elmer S. Yoder, *The Amish and Mennonites of Northern Stark County* (Hartville, OH: Stark County Mennonite and Amish Historical Society, 2005), 93.

[22] Perrin, *History of Stark County*, 372.
[23] *Herald of Truth*, 1 June 1890, 170. See, also, letters by Samuel Yoder of Elkhart, Indiana, and D.H. Bender of Somerset County, Pennsylvania, in *Herald of Truth*, 1 November 1890, 331; and 15 June 1891, 190.
[24] *Herald of Truth*, 1 July 1894, 206.
[25] Yoder, "The Canton Mission," 1.
[26] *Herald of Truth*, 1 November 1890, 331.
[27] Yoder, "The Canton Mission," 1.
[28] Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, 293.
[29] *Stark County Democrat*, 21 October 1870, 2.
[30] *Stark County Democrat*, 27 August 1885, 5; *Canton Repository*, 26 August 1885, 1; 27 August 1885, 2.
[31] Michael Rohrer to Jacob Funk, 20 June 1874, Jacob Funk Correspondence, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen College, Indiana.
[32] *Herald of Truth*, 1 June 1885, 173.
[33] *Herald of Truth*, 1 December 1885, 365.
[34] *Herald of Truth*, 15 September 1885, 287.
[35] *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois, Volume II: 1861-1866* (Springfield, IL, 1900), 169. The daily life of Rohrer's regiment is described in Nancy Mattingly, ed., *I Marched with Sherman: Ira Blanchard's Civil War Memoirs of the 20th Illinois Infantry* (Lincoln, NE, 1992), and official battle reports can be found in *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 October, 1861, 3; *Joliet Signal*, 4 March 1862, 3; *Ottawa Free Trader*, 15 March 1862, 3. Published letters penned by soldiers of the 20th Illinois provide a glimpse of camp life: *Cass County Republican*, 30 April 1863, 3; and *The Daily Green Mountain Freeman*, 11 April 1863, 1. On the complex impact of the Civil War upon American Mennonite communities, see James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War* (Baltimore, 2007).
[36] *Canton Repository*, 19 August 1905, 6.
[37] See the obituary of Susan Shirk's mother in *Stark County Democrat*, 22 January 1891, 3.
[38] On Welshimer see *Canton Repository*, 6 January 1902, 5; 14 December 1944, 44; and *Grand Rapids Press*, 2 February 1916, 15.
[39] *Canton Repository*, 12 December 1935, reports Martin leading a revival meeting at a rural school near Malvern.
[40] The term "bread work" is drawn from Leo Tolstoy and Timothy Bondareff, *Toil* (Chicago: Charles H. Sergel, 1890), 29–38. On Tolstoy's anarchism see George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1962), 222–35; and Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 362–83.
[41] Rohrer, *That Unknown Island*, 37.
[42] Rohrer, 38.
[43] Rohrer, 39.
[44] On American individualist libertarianism and its relationship to other schools of Anarchist thought see especially Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible,* 220–33 and 384–95; and William O. Reichert, *Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1976), pp. 141–70.
[45] Rohrer, *That Unknown Island*, 68.

[46] Rohrer, 96.
[47] Rohrer, 24–25.
[48] *Canton Repository*, 4 November 1868, 4.
[49] *Stark County Democrat*, 12 February 1885, 7. See, also, his letters of 5 February 1885, 6; 19 February 1885, 4–5; 12 March 1885, 8; and 19 March 1885, 4.
[50] Rohrer, *That Unknown Island*, 1.
[51] Rohrer, 88.
[52] The divorce, which was granted 30 October 1885, is recorded in Appearance Docket 57, Journal Entry R2, 40, Stark County Common Pleas Court. A public announcement appeared in the *Canton Repository*, 5 November 1885, 6
[53] Stark County Probate Court Case File 235,17, Doc. L, 15.
[54] For a broad view of Mennonite attitudes toward the land, see Royden Loewen, "The Quiet on the Land: The Environment in Mennonite Historiography," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22 (2005): 151–164, and Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2012), 81–106.
[55] Steven Kent Smith, "Abraham Isaak: The History of a Mennonite Radical," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 65:4 (October 1991): 449–55; *Global Anabaptist Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. "Thiessen, Abraham (1838-1889)," by Richard D. Thiessen, October 2010, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Thiessen,_Abraham_(1838-1889)&oldid=146290; Allan Teichroew, "Gordon Friesen: Writer, Radical and Ex-Mennonite," *Mennonite Life* 38:2 (June 1983): 4–17; Janis Thiessen, "Religious Borderlands and Transnational Networks: The North American Mennonite Underground Press in the 1960s," in *Entangling Migration History: Borderlands and Transnationalism in the United States and Canada*, ed. Benjamin Bryce and Alexander Freund (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015), 181–206.
[56] Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, trans. Trevor Johnson (London: Routledge, 1996), 36–67, 98–117, 132–35. Quote is on 133.