

# HOW DID NEW GERMANY BECOME MARYHILL?

by Diane Strickler

Diane Strickler has lived her whole life in Maryhill. She is one of the founding members of the Historical Society of St. Boniface and Maryhill Community which originated in 1977 when the present St Boniface Church became 100 years old. Upon researching her family history, she realized that the Blessed Virgin Mary in the grotto on the Rectory lawn was donated by one of her ancestors. Further research showed just how important that grotto is to the name change from New Germany to Maryhill.

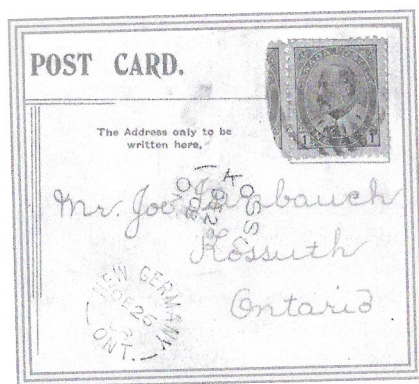
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Maryhill is centrally located in the upper reaches of Waterloo Region (formerly Waterloo County), eight to ten miles from Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph and Cambridge.

In 1826, the first Catholic settlers in the area of the future village were Felix Scharbach, his stepson Christian Rich, and Matthias Fehrenbach. They were joined two years later by Gottlieb Brohman, Joseph Lauber, Theobald Waechter, Joseph Wendling and Andreas Weiler along with his three brothers.<sup>1</sup> They all bought land just beyond a swamp south of the growing settlement which, after several earlier nicknames, became known as New Germany. Lucas Zettel, from Württemberg, arrived in 1830. By 1832 more and more families from France and Germany were arriving and settling in the northeast corner of what would become Waterloo County.<sup>2</sup>

Until the end of the 1800s, New Germany was a “distant” site, a full day’s trip by horse and wagon from Berlin (present day Kitchener) which had become the county seat and the largest community in the northern portion of the county. As a result, these early settlers, living somewhat isolated from modern society, maintained the customs, manners, traditions and language of their homeland and passed these on to their descendants. In those early years, and even into mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, perceptive listeners could detect hints of Low German drawl of the Alsatian-speaking descendants.

According to the earliest records in St Jerome’s University archives, the village was colloquially known for approximately five years in the mid-1800s as Little Germany. Community tradition claims it had also previously been called Rottenburg or Rattenburg, meaning “rat village” because of the large number of muskrats found in the swamps around the area. The official plan for the village of New Germany was dated June 19, 1888 and the village was registered in January 1889.<sup>3</sup>



A nice clear postmark from the New Germany post office highlights a 1908 postcard. This detail shows the originating postmark (New Germany, on Saturday December 26) and the destination mark (Kossuth, Monday December 28). Also on the card were two other postmarks, from Breslau and Preston (both on December 26) thus indicating its postal route.

Leigh Hogg

Fast forward a half-century and the world had changed. In 1940, according to present day residents' understanding, the New Germany postmaster was notified that since there was another New Germany near St Catharines, letters from soldiers serving overseas sent to homes in either village were often arriving at the wrong destination. The postal authorities in Ottawa recommended a change.<sup>4</sup> That is the generally understood modern-day interpretation.

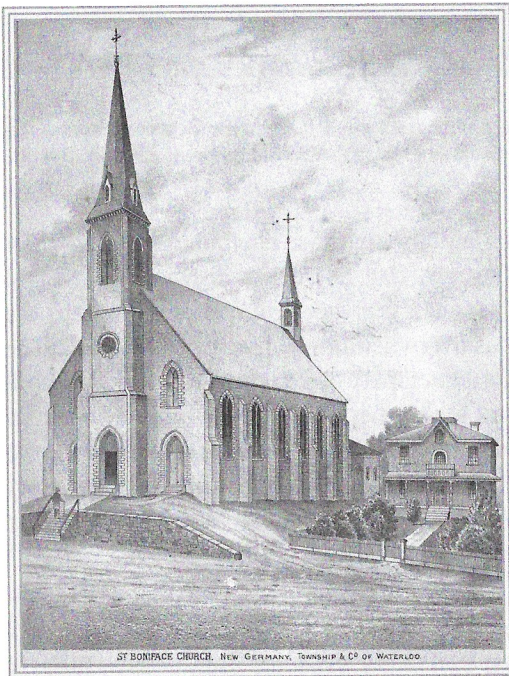
But it doesn't stand up to documentary scrutiny. Both newspaper reports and post office records point to the movement having had community roots.<sup>5</sup>

North Waterloo's Member of Parliament, Louis O. Breithaupt was the middleman between the villagers and the government agency. He got the post office's word that it was governed "by the feeling of the majority of the people in the community."<sup>6</sup> As noted in a *Kitchener Daily Record* article of January 13, 1941, that "feeling" was "general in the New Germany district that the village should be renamed in view of Hitler's boasts to create a 'new Germany' and a 'new order' in Europe."<sup>7</sup> Reverend Joseph Diemert, then priest of St Boniface church in the village, strongly favored a change. As he looked over the lengthy list of locally-proposed names he felt most would be turned down because of similarity to other Canadian centres. Diemert himself proposed St Boniface but both Manitoba and Quebec had such locations. Other suggestions included St Stephen (after Father Stephen Foerster, parish priest for 46 years), St Charles, St Joseph and St Matthias. In those cases, Quebec again had such villages. Several non-St suggestions were also offered up, among them:

- **Hopewell** - the name of the creek which passes through the village;
- **Maryhill** - because of the special connection of the church to the Virgin Mary;
- **Crinnon** - after the Catholic bishop who blessed the church;
- **Lyon** - a popular suggestion because it was part of the prime minister's name and New Germany was a strongly Liberal area; and

- **Valleydale** - because the village is located in a dale.<sup>8</sup>

Originally nine alternate names, of the ten listed above, were sent from New Germany to the federal post office department – seven were rejected but the department had two other suggestions which it said the villagers would not have to accept.



Just three years old when this delightful engraving was printed in Parsell's 1881 atlas, St Boniface Roman Catholic Church has been a landmark in Waterloo and Woolwich townships ever since. It was centre stage for the name changing process in early 1941.

*Parsell's Illustrated Atlas of the Dominion of Canada, 1881*

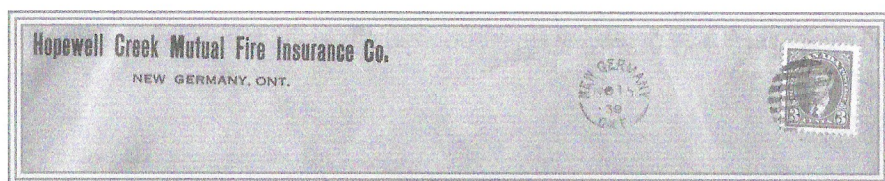
Only patrons using the New Germany, Waterloo County, post office were given the opportunity to vote. Out of the approximately 90 people eligible, just two who were not members of St Boniface church

were able to vote.<sup>9</sup> Farmers along the rural routes who did not pick up their mail in the village were also not entitled to cast a ballot.<sup>10</sup>

The list of names was then narrowed down to four: two local and two suggested by the federal post office. These were:

- **Newman** – after Cardinal Newman, the influential British Anglican academic who later chose Catholicism and was ordained a cardinal by Pope Leo XIII in 1879;
- **Wavell** – after Field Marshall Archibald Wavell, later 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Wavell, a senior British General in the Second World War;
- **Gort** – after John Vereker VC, the Irish Lord Gort, chief of the British Imperial General Staff in the war (and the future 6<sup>th</sup> Viscount Gort of the United Kingdom);

- **Maryhill** – since the church was on the hill and the local people wished to place the village under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Maryhill seemed a perfect fit.



Leigh Hogg

Just over a year before the name was changed, this postal cover from a New Germany business was sent to Kitchener. It was that type of unintentional advertising that helped cause the village's citizens to clamor for a new name.

Following late mass on Sunday January 26, those eligible to vote cast their ballots. The *Daily Record's* story the next day noted the decision in favor of Maryhill as "unanimous" but that Newman was the second choice. Perhaps the reporter meant that the balloting was overwhelmingly in favor of Maryhill. The village called New Germany for the better part of a century became Maryhill on Sunday, January 26, 1941. Postal authorities wasted little time. Two weeks later, on February 10, the New Germany post office was gone – Maryhill, the people's popular choice was in.<sup>11</sup> Approximately 50 people from the village and immediate area enlisted in the armed services during the Second World War and most were able to enter "Maryhill" on their attestation forms.

## Notes

1. Theobald Spetz, *Diamond Jubilee History of the Diocese of Hamilton with A Complete History of the County of Waterloo 1856-1916*, (Toronto: Catholic Register and Extension, 1916), p. 50.
2. *Ibid.* Württemberg is the modern spelling. It was formerly known as Wirtemberg or Wurtemberg and is located in the southwestern part of modern Germany. Once a separate state, it is now part of Baden-Württemberg.
3. Information gathered from various records held at St Jerome's University archives / University of Waterloo and at St Boniface Church in Maryhill.
4. That is the popular legend recalled by Maryhill-ers. Postal historians researching the subject have yet to find such a "smoking gun" in post office archives. It appears more likely that the accepted story is based on the community's collective memory confusing two events 55 years apart. Combining the wording in the *Daily Record's* January 13, 1941 article with the post office details (see next endnote) points to the impulse for the change coming from the citizens of New Germany and area rather than a government body.
5. E-mail from Justus "Gus" Knierim, October 8, 2015. Thanks to Knierim, who is a Kitchener director of the Postal History Society of Canada, the following details help situate the story: On September 1, 1879 a post office named New Germany opened in Waterloo County. On February 10, 1941 that post office changed its name to Maryhill. On May 29, 2006, that post office closed. In 1886, residents of a hamlet named New Germany in Welland County, Ontario petitioned for a post office. Because an unincorporated village of the same name was already operating a post office in Waterloo County, the new post office in Welland County was given the name Snyder. On November 1, 1886 Snyder post office opened. On February 28, 1915 Snyder post office

closed. Rural delivery, RR #2 Stevensville, replaced it.

6. "New Germany to Change Name Because of Nazi Boast," *Kitchener Daily Record*, January 13, 1941, p. 3.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. "90 Will Vote on 4 Names," *Kitchener Daily Record*, January 25, 1941, p. 3.
10. "Maryhill New Name Chosen by New Germany Folk," *Kitchener Daily Record*, January 27, 1941, p. 3.
11. *Ibid.*, and Knierim.

## MORE ONTARIO NAME CHANGES

by ryck mills

One other Waterloo County name underwent a change during the early days of the Second World War.

A small hamlet (located where 2015's Manitou Road crosses Schneider Creek) had been known as German Mills since the mid-1850s. One of Block 2, Germany Company Tract's earliest sawmills had been built on the creek in 1812 by pioneer Philip Bliehm. Later businesses at the site included a flour mill, stave factory, a cooper shop and even a retail store. Estimates of the immediate area's population varied from 50 to 125 in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the German army was rolling across Europe, German Mills residents decided their hamlet's name was too loaded with baggage. In early 1941, ten days before the Maryhill vote, it changed to Parkway, by which name many residents still call the rapidly urbanizing area located between Kitchener's Bleams Road and Fairway Road.<sup>1</sup>

However, this was not the first time the place underwent change: earlier names included Edenburg, Jewsbury, Bleams Mills and Hopewell Mills.<sup>2</sup>

Just outside Waterloo County a popular term, but not a community name, also lost favor. A fashionable beach on Puslinch Lake, east of Galt and south of Hespeler, had been known as Swastika Beach ever since Guelph businessman T. Ross Barber purchased waterfront property, created a sandy beach and installed a dance hall and other entertainment amenities. With the outbreak of war, the beach owner dropped the dis-honored word and the summer resort was then known as Barber's Beach until sold in 2000 for a housing development.<sup>3</sup>

Another Swastika in Ontario almost disappeared during the Second World War. Near Kirkland Lake, at a railway junction on the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway, the name, Swastika, was unceremoniously eliminated. Ontario's highways minister, Hon T.B. McQuesten, announced on December 11, 1940 that henceforth provincial highway maps would bear the name "Winston" at that location. "Although the swastika had been a symbol of