# Mennonite Historical Society of BC Newsletter

**Volume 9 Number 3** **Summer 2003**


**Motto:**

What we have heard and known, we will tell the next generation.
Psalm 78:3&4

**Inside this issue:**



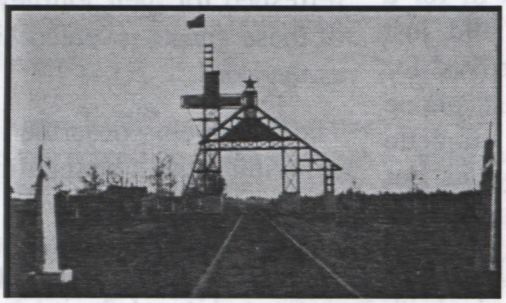
**Food & hospitality:**



## *"By the Skin of Our Teeth:"*

### The Russian Mennonite Migrations of the 1920's

Mennonites waiting to board the train that would carry them to freedom. Approximately 20,000 would find their way to Canada between 1923 and 1927 when both the Soviet Union and Canada closed their borders.



The Red Gate on the Latvian border. When they finally crossed this border, refugees sang, "Nun danket alle Gott." (Now thank we all our God)

Hear more about this fascinating topic at the Mennonite Historical Society of BC's
**Annual Fundraising Banquet**
with **Dr. John B. Toews**
**October 18th, 2003 at 6:00 p.m.**
Bakerview MB Church, 2285 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford
Tickets $15.00 All reserved tickets must be prepaid.
Contact the MHSBC office after Sept. 1st for tickets.


Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. #211 – 2825 Clearbrook Rd., Abbotsford, B.C. V2T 6S3
Tel. (604) 853-6177 Fax (604) 853-6246 email: archives@mhsbc.com
Website: www.mhsbc.com Office hours: 9am – 4pm Monday to Friday

## Editorial: Sharing a meal: hospitality and food
by Henry Neufeld

The turkey dinner was being prepared on Christmas day when the phone rang: "What's for dinner?" the caller asked. Unable to make their travel connections to have Christmas with their children, friends asked if they could join us. The table was extended and we had a great meal and visit. Their friends, on hearing what they had done, were surprised they had the nerve to call us on Christmas day. Their response was that they hoped people would do the same to them in that situation.

This kind of spontaneous interaction does not happen very often in our era. Prior to the arrival of the telephone, visits happened spontaneously, and many housewives spent Saturdays cleaning house and baking and preparing food in case someone dropped in for a visit. And often they did just that; people simply arrived for a visit. Now we must phone first and societal etiquette requires that we be invited, not that we invite ourselves.

Sunday afternoon visiting has been largely replaced with eating lunch in a restaurant after church, usually with a select group of friends. In one prairie town the new minister was encouraged to make his sermons a bit shorter so that worshippers could get to the choice restaurants ahead of those from other churches. Maybe we're too busy with two career families, extended family obligations, golf, or kids needing to be taxied. The gift of hospitality is disappearing. Think of the long evenings spent over a meal with friends, of discussion enjoyed, of laughter, prayer and tears.

"I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door **I will come in to share a meal at that person's side."** We have not emphasized enough the eating, the sharing of the meal. We focus on hearing the knock and opening the door without thinking what happens thereafter: Invite me and I will come in and share a meal.

In nomadic societies, hospitality was an unwritten law. Abraham, a nomad, is blessed by extending hospitality. When he saw three strangers he offered them water to wash their feet and a meal, so they could be refreshed for their journey. One of these guests revealed himself as the Lord.

The Gospels describe Jesus enjoying the hospitality of others; the dinners were often joyous times and occasions for many of his teachings. In the early church people made their homes available for church meetings. Hospitality was an expression of Christian love.

Jesus, a stranger, joined two others along the Emmaus road. They invited him to stay the night. Even though Jesus had explained Scriptures to them, it wasn't until they sat down to eat and he took the bread in his hands that they realized who he was. Bread. Ordinary, basic food. They knew him through the breaking of bread, at mealtime.

We want the extraordinary, the signs and wonders to assure us of God's presence. We need to recognize our Lord in the ordinary, in the common events of the day, in meals and conversations shared with friends.

Hospitality should be a fundamental attitude toward our fellow people; and it can be expressed in many ways. Eugene Peterson observes that there are a lot more "hospitality" stories in the Bible than "evangelism" stories. Hospitality is an expression of love. St. Paul's instructions are clear: practice hospitality.

The **Mennonite Historical Society of BC Newsletter** is produced quarterly to inform and to promote the work of the society. It is mailed to those who contribute $25 or more per year to the MHSBC.

**Editorial Committee**: Henry Neufeld, Louise Bergen Price, Helen Rose Pauls with help from Hugo Friesen and Mary Ann Quiring. Contributions are welcome.

## Annual General Meeting MHS of BC: by Henry Neufeld

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC held its annual meeting on May 18 at the Central Heights MB church. In 2002 the Society held three major events: a lecture on Mennonites in Mexico, another on Women without Men which focused on the suffering and fortitude of mothers in the aftermath of WWII, and one on the Mennonite Response to WWII.

**Special Projects**

*** Einwanderungszentralle.**

In 1942-44 ethnic Germans (including Mennonites) were invited to apply for German citizenship as they reached German soil. Applicants were required to fill out lengthy questionnaires to qualify for German citizenship. These records were seized by the US army and preserved in the national Archives in the USA. Richard Thiessen, of our Society, learned that these records were now available to the public. MHSBC and other groups are co-operating to acquire these items.

We have purchased 17 of these microfilm rolls and they are being indexed. These records go back several generations and provide a valuable resource for those doing genealogical research, including information on those sent back to Siberia after WWII.

*** Zaporozhye Project**

MHSBC has contributed to the microfilming of some 120,000 pages of documents under the direction of Dr. Harvey Dyck. An English-language inventory and user guide is now available.

*** Odessa Project**

We co-fund research in the Odessa archives being led by Dr. Paul Toews of Fresno, California. To date we have received 30,000 pages on microfilm covering the years 1848 –1856.

***The Archives**

Hugo Friesen reports an increasing number of visitors and use of our centre with about 150 visitors per month. Appreciation is expressed for the many excellent volunteers who regularly help out at our centre. A genealogy workshop was held in November.

**Membership Support**

President John Konrad thanked the membership for their continuing support of the Society. He noted that we received a legacy from the estate of Agnes Neustaetter adding to the society's Endowment Fund. He encouraged people to remember the Historical Society in their wills or to donate to the cost of special projects of the Society.

**Financial Report**

Treasurer Henry Martens noted that the MHSBC Board has introduced two scholarships of $500.00 to encourage high school and university students to become involved in Mennonite historical issues. The financial statements showed a small surplus for the past year and appreciation was expressed to Gilbert Epp for his financial review.

Re-elected to the Board were Edward Hildebrand, Henry Neufeld and John B. Toews

## **Singing Along Life's Road** by Henry Neufeld

A 90-voice choir performed and led the assembly in singing songs familiar to Mennonite churches and choirs of the 1930's – 1960's. Over 900 people attended this musical event at Abbotsford's Central Heights MB Church on May 18.

The choir, led by Holda Fast Redekopp and Henry Wiebe, performed German and English songs of the seasons: spring (new birth), summer (spiritual development), fall (harvest and thanksgiving), and winter (the end of the road). For many songs the audience joined the singing.

Narrator John Klassen noted that music was important to Mennonites who came to BC as a result of the economic depression in the Canadian prairies.

"Music spoke to the key issues of our lives: rebirth, growth, and consolidation," he said. "Spring" songs reflected the Spirit working in our minds and people were moved by the Spirit to accept Jesus as Saviour; the songs of a spiritual springtime. Summer is a time of flowering, of growing up, and the songs called us to consider the seriousness of life's choices and challenged us to do the gospel and not only talk about it. Autumn is a time to re-evaluate, to take stock of our spiritual condition and reflects an urgency to redeem the time. Winter reflects the period of aging, weakening, and a desire to redeem what is left.

Sponsored by the MHS BC, the event was particularly appreciated by many older people who do not necessarily value contemporary church music and who mourn the loss of church choirs.

MHSBC chair John Konrad thanked the choir, conductors, narrator John Klassen and accompanists Adelaide Epp, Helen Nickel and George Unger. He particularly thanked Holda Fast Redekopp who produced the event.

This event recalled the glory days of Mennonite congregational and choral singing and reminded us of the rich message of well-sung Christian songs.

## First Settlements and Yarrow's 75th Reunion
by Helen Rose Pauls

Of all the former Mennonite communities in the Fraser Valley, Yarrow knows how to celebrate. Although many individual Mennonite church groups have produced historical picture books at various times, Yarrow has had two books published about the community as a whole: Agatha E. Klassen's: "Yarrow: A Portrait in Mosaic" (1976), and Neufeldt, Sawatsky, and Martens' 2-volume set: "Yarrow, British Columbia: Mennonite Promise (2002).

This June 5-7, the Yarrow Research Committee and UCFV collaborated on a conference entitled "First Nations and First Settlers in the Fraser Valley [1890-1960]" held at the UCFV campus in Abbotsford. Keynote speaker was Dr. Marlene Epp who focused on "The Yoe-women of Yarrow—Raising Families and Creating Community in a Land of Promise."

Sessions over the three days included "Aboriginal Life Before European Settlement"; lectures on the British, Catholic and Sikh communities in the Fraser Valley; the impact of the swift growth and sudden demise of the raspberry industry; pioneer diaries; Mennonite educational institutions; economic initiatives; war-time and post-war developments.

In conjunction with the conference, Yarrow celebrated its 75th anniversary as a village, beginning with a banquet which featured zwieback, vereniki, farmer sausage, and cabbage rolls in the Yarrow M.B. Church, attended by 400 mostly former residents The program following was opened with greetings by mayors from Chilliwack and Abbotsford, Chilliwack museum staff, and was chaired by Mary Froese and Russ Froese.

Holda Fast Redekopp and a selected group of singers, all of them descendants of the first Yarrow families, reminded all of the strong musical tradition and excellence in singing that Yarrow was noted for, particularly under conductor George Reimer. Taking selections from "HMS Pinafore" and "Fiddler on the Roof," the group entertained one and all with subtle "Yarrow" takes on the original text. Children of the first 1928 pioneers Bargen and Sawatsky, reminisced about the early years. Leonard Neufeldt and Esther Epp Harder made a visual presentation combining story, poem and pictures from the past.

Celebrations continued on Sunday with a community pancake breakfast and a commemorative church service. All four local churches were hosted in the MB church for documentary and drama. Religious movement in the area was traced from the time of the Sto:lo Nation to the ardent prayers in 1928 for a Mennonite community to the beginnings of all four present church fellowship groups.

It is obvious that the intertwining of geography, church life, economic life, and community relationships provided a firm foundation, a trajectory into the future in a land of promise, evidenced by the presenters and visitors who came "home" to make the conference and reunion happen. What impressed one Yarrowite, is that present day Yarrow is an inclusive, functional and strong community. One wonders how the original pioneers would have responded…

## Looking for Windows on the Mennonite and Ukrainian Past
by Dr. Paul Toews

In 2004, Mennonites and Ukrainians together will celebrate the establishment of the Molotschna colony in 1804 in what was then known as New South Russia. The history of the past two hundred years in the valley of the Molotschna belongs to both peoples.

Mennonites were a significant part of the population of the region to 1943. Ukrainians have been present for the entire 200 years. We have worked together, tilled the common soil, suffered together, assisted each other in times of need, developed many friendships and inter-married.

A bicentennial moment is one in which we both look backward and forward. It is a time to remember and to dream. For both Mennonites and Ukrainians the memories will be mixed. There is surely much that will be fondly embraced. The Molotschna story is central to the history of Mennonites in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. It was the largest single Mennonite colony. It provided settlers for many other colonies, pioneered agricultural practices that Russian officials held up for others to emulate, was the center of religious dissent and change in the nineteenth century, and provided much of the intellectual leadership for Mennonites throughout Russian imperial times and the early Soviet period. It is a story of deep religious idealism and devotion, of economic vitality and entrepreneurship, and of building thriving communities and institutions. Today its sons and daughters are scattered around the globe.

As we remember the Molotschna story and revisit these accomplishments we will also confront the tragedy that enveloped all Mennonites in the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. The ravages of war, famine, the crushing opposition of the Soviet regime and finally the relocation of virtually all Mennonites from the Molotschna area during the 1940s, are stories of deep pain and sorrow and of death and destruction.

Today in the Molotschna region Ukrainians live in houses, attend schools and work in factories once built by Mennonites. These structures are now mostly in disrepair and reflect how the passage of time since 1943 has not been kind to the inhabitants of the Molotschna region. The devastations that came to Ukraine during the Soviet era have now been overlaid by the economic failure of the past ten years. The measures utilized by agencies like the United Nations to assess the health of countries indicate that Ukraine is worse off today than it was when it achieved independence in 1991. Southeastern Ukraine in particular has suffered from an economic downturn. Deprivation is real in the Molotschna region. For many Ukrainians it is difficult to sustain hope.

From 1943 to the early 1990s the Mennonite witness in the valley of the Molotschna was silent. Now that witness has reappeared in numerous ways. The most prominent signs are the Mennonite Church in Kutuzovka (formerly Petershagen) and the Mennonite Centre in Molochansk (formerly Halbstadt). Each has refurbished a historic Mennonite building and has a visible presence. In addition Mennonite Central Committee and the Zaporozhye Mennonite Church are also active in the Molotschna region. All are sharing the reconciling faith and compassion that are central to the Anabaptist/Mennonite way. The refurbished buildings are visible symbols of hope. They not only signal Mennonites coming to establish congregations and offer humanitarian assistance, but also offer a window into the vitality that once marked their communities.

During the past decade it has been my privilege to repeatedly visit the villages of the Molotschna region. Many of those visits have also included a stop at one of the village schools. Frequently someone at the school has inquired if we have any photos of their community. The inquiry is usually accompanied by the statement that "we have no photo-graphic record of this area prior to the 1940s. Can you help us to acquire some photos of earlier times?" The question certainly reflects curiosity. But it is also more. Ukrainians are in search of a past that can help them construct a different future. Ukraine needs a new moral, political and economic order. For the peoples of southeastern Ukraine there is no better place to find that order than in the Mennonite story. The Mennonite story with entrepreneurial skill, democratic practices and moral sensibilities is also a part of their history.

This story is now being rediscovered as a Ukrainian story. Contemporary Ukrainian scholars are re-introducing the Mennonite story to classrooms in eastern Ukraine and are eager to document the story more fully with photographs, documents and artifacts. This interest in our Mennonite past can result in warm and authentic connections today. Irmie Konrad and her Vancouver family have an ongoing relationship with the High School in Vladivka (formerly Waldheim), thanks to their encounter with the history teacher and their sending of important photos and documents. The prosperous looking village of the past was embraced as a symbol of what is possible in the region.

The celebration of the bicentennial of the establishment of the Molotschna colony can be an important window to this part of the Ukrainian story. One of the bicentennial gifts that we can give to the region is a photo-graphic record that shows this achievement.

"Small house" built for Johann Cornies' daughter. This building was in use until several years ago – now is abandoned and falling into ruin.

Picture by Louise Bergen Price

Last fall representatives from museums, educational institutions and the mayor of Molochansk (formerly Halbstadt) all lent their voices to a request for such a photographic record.

The Mennonite archival network of North America that collects Russian Mennonite materials (from Ontario to British Columbia and from Kansas to California) are collaborating to bring together a rich collection of images that we can reproduce and bring to Ukraine. To do so we need the photographs that are in the homes and family albums of the descendants of the Molotschna Colony. Many persons have rich photographic collections.

The MHS of BC is one of the archival agencies that is asking that you send copies (or originals that we will duplicate). Please contact your Society if you can help us to create a photographic record of the Molotschna Colony.

Paul Toews, Director
Center for MB Studies
Fresno Pacific University
1717 S. Chestnut Ave.
Fresno, CA 93702

Email: pttoews@fresno.edu

## Mennonite Benevolent Society celebrates 50 years

by Irene Bergen

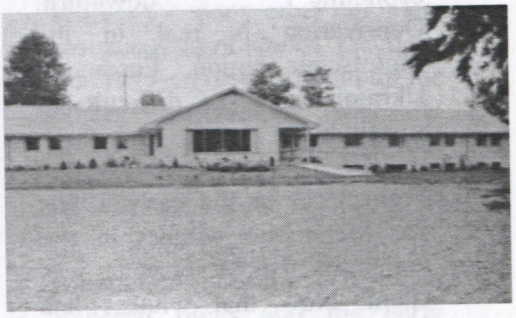
Six hundred young and old friends of the Mennonite Benevolent Society gathered around festively decorated tables to celebrate the Society's 50th anniversary on May 24, 2003. The Menno Home opened in 1953 as a 25 bed retirement home. It has expanded to become one of the major long term care organizations in B.C., serving about 500 residents in three different levels: Menno Home (intermediate care), Menno Pavilion and Menno Terrace (supported independent living units) and Menno Hospital (extended care). The staff numbers 280 and includes a wide range of service professionals.

Among the guests of honour at the celebration banquet were Abbotsford mayor, Mary Reeves, "daut tjliene Mennistsche Mejaltje," and MLA John van Dongen. Mayor Reeves expressed deep appreciation on behalf of the city and the community for the exemplary history of caring that has been demonstrated by the MBS all these years. Van Dongen mentioned that his own mother is a resident at Menno Hospital and how much she appreciates the chapel programs.

After the meal, a powerpoint presentation, 'MBS – past, present and future' was shown followed by a video 'Images of the people, the place and the heart of MBS,' in which a number of residents of the Menno Home expressed their appreciation for this facility. The evening included an auction of the first '50th Anniversary History Book' of the MBS, authored by Les Friesen. The evening was further enriched by the wonderful music of Calvin Dyck and Betty Suderman. Fred Strumpski, member of the Board, discussed present and future opportunities. The evening closed with an inspirational message by Rev. Jake Tilitzky. Tilitzky's mother was a resident of the Menno Home in the 1960's.

For more information or copies of the book, call 604-859-7631.


**This house became the residence of our first House parents Peter and Mary Dyck.**



**Menno Home, dedicated May 30, 1954. 25 bed capacity.**

**Thank you!**
by Henry Neufeld

Most of us eat three times a day, sometimes more. Someone has to prepare the meals, whether we eat at home or in a restaurant. Meal preparation has traditionally been the work of the lady of the house. In recent years men have become more involved in preparation of meals, though this is often limited to standing around and watching meat (prepared by women) burn on the barbecue.

Many of us have childhood memories of Mom's cooking and baking, the smell of freshly baked bread, chicken noodle soup, and the rich smoked flavour of home-made farmer sausage. Eating out was rare and fast food restaurants were unheard of.

In many developing countries women still grow most of the crops for domestic consumption and are primarily responsible for preparing, storing and processing food. They also handle livestock, gather food, and fuel-wood and manage the domestic water supply. Yet women's work often goes unrecognized.

In some regions of our world, women produce more than half of all the food that is grown. In Asia, they provide from 50 to 90 percent of the labour for rice cultivation. In Southeast Asia as well as Latin America, women's home gardens represent some of the most complex agricultural systems known. Today, in many regions of the world, women still spend up to five hours per day collecting wood and water and up to four hours preparing food. In addition, rural women provide most of the labour for farming, from soil preparation to harvest.

Ted Regehr points out that in rural Canadian Mennonite families the male head of the family had final responsibility for everything, but that everyone worked together and everyone made a contribution. "… the important place of women in the farm economy gave them greater influence than was the case in many non-farm families." (Mennonites in Canada, p28) We have not adequately acknowledged the major contributions of women.

The sewing, knitting, farming, gardening, canning vegetables, constantly feeding their families, caring, comforting and nurturing, often making do with little, was standard for our mothers.

Our lives have become even busier. In many families both parents work away from home and often women still do a lot of the tasks their mothers did. Despite the importance of women in the functioning of society, women are often underpaid. The amount of the paycheck seems to dictate the value we put on work. We should never undervalue the work women have done and continue to do. Women need to be recognized for their continuing contributions over the ages.

**At the table…**

"It seems to me that the minimum condition which makes life worthwhile is a family eating together. That means there is food on the table, and there's a family to eat it with. If you have rice and you have community, you are not poor. If you do not have them, you are poor. Our goal in combating poverty, then, is the multiplication of the number of families eating together… Eating together is a constant motif in the Gospels… Eating together is a human witness to the kingdom of God." – Raymond Fung

The ***Mennonite Historical Society of BC*** is a non-profit organization funded by donations. All donations are tax deductible. For a $25.00 donation you can become a member and receive the newsletter with notices of coming events and special projects. One of the special projects is the EWZ Microfilm Acquisitions Project. These microfilms contain important genealogical information of persons coming to Germany during WWII. The cost of a microfilm is $60.00. Your donations to this project are also tax-deductible. Help us preserve our history and our heritage for future generations.

## Pig Butchering
by Peter Neudorf

*Peter Neudorf says of his background: "I relate to the village Gnadenthal, 12 miles west of Altona and 12 miles south of Winkler. This village except for one family were 1920's immigrants." Neudorf mentions that each family had it's own way of butchering, which was respected by those who helped. Peter Neudorf is a board member of the MHSBC.*

As a young boy, the highlight in fall was the butchering of a pig. The staging of this event involved much preparation. In late summer my father would be casting an eye in the pig pen for the necessary volunteer; a big sow, 500 to 600 pounds stood the best chance for winning the nod. Once selected a few extra treats for a few more pounds were certainly in place. The next task was to select a date in November that would also suit the other couples who would be invited to help. Of these, one man would have the skills to gut the pig without damaging the intestines that were needed for sausage casings. Also, we had to borrow a gun, block and tackle, and two "*meagropen*" (cauldrons). These were heavy and it took three men and boy to lift them into the trailer. We had a large trough and ladder that father had made.

Finally the day arrived, and I was allowed to stay home from school. The action started at about 5 in the morning when the *meagrope* was filled with water and a fire built under it. By 6 a.m. the guests had arrived; typically, the first thing the men would do would be to check if the water in the "*meagrope* was boiling. It seemed that the tone for the day and the competency of the host were judged by the roll of the boiling water. After breakfast, the butchering process began.

Now aprons were put on and the men went out to the pigpen. The lucky pig, usually with much objection, was brought into position. One small crack from a .22 short and the pig dropped. Now the man with the stabbing knife had to be very quick and cut the jugular veins before the pig started its final kicking. The blood gushed out and death took over.

From here, the pig was carried to the trough into which four ropes had been laid. The men slid the pig into the trough and poured boiling

water over it, turning it with the ropes until all sides were scalded evenly. After this, a ladder was pushed under the pig to raise it out of the water, and the hide was scraped with the oval disk scrapers until it was very clean. Every so often, more boiling water was poured over the pig. Then the head was removed and the block and tackle, one on each hind leg, was attached and the pig hoisted. The expert butcher ran his sharp knife down the pig's belly then turned the knife so as to cut the membrane holding the guts from the inside out, so there would be no damage to the intestines. Two men held a large pan to catch the guts, which were then brought to the ladies for cleaning. The women turned the intestines inside out and removed the inner membrane with metal knitting needles. This left an almost transparent tube for stuffing the sausage. The pig was now sawn from top to bottom and the halves laid on the butchering table. The hindquarter was removed to be processed into hams, and the front shoulders cut up and ground into meat for sausages. The ribs were cut out into chunks, each with about 4 ribs and with at least an inch of fat on top of the meat. The remainder of the side was cut into about 2 inch wide strips and the skin was shaved off. The fat was cut into thinner strips and put through the meat grinder and then taken to the *meagrope* and gently heated to render the lard. As the lard became liquid the rib chunks (*Repschpea*) were added and cooked. The *meagrope* had to be stirred constantly with the "*reaholt*" (a stirring stick about five feet in length).

The head meat was removed to be cooked with the skin and then ground up together to be made into headcheese (*ziltjis*) which was pickled in whey. The neck (cut into chunks), the feet (with toenails removed), the heart and the tongue ended up in the same crock.

Now the cleaned casings were brought and the sausages stuffed – the small intestine for farmer sausage and the large intestine for liver sausage. The noon meal was a hearty one, possibly a borscht, roasted chickens with bubbat and pie. When the butchering was completed and the cleanup done, everybody came in for supper. Liver sausage and ribs were set out along with other foods. Then the guests would leave for home.

In the following days, the hams were laid in salt to cure for a few weeks, and then smoked. Then my father would rub them and hang them in the hayloft for summer eating.

(cont'd from page 8)

In the following weeks and months, we ate pork in its many forms. "*Gruebin*" (cracklings) were fried for breakfast and often potatoes were fried together for a supper meal. The fine residue (speckled lard) that settled after rendering "*gruebin schmalz*" was used as a spread on bread in place of butter. The head cheese, after it had been pickled for a month or two was eaten cold with raw onions and bread, or fried for breakfast. *Repschpea* and liver wurst with a homemade mustard made for a good and easy supper. The farmers sausage was eaten raw for supper with raw onions and vinegar or fried and served with potatoes and "*schmauntfat*" (cream gravy). Pickled pigs feet and tongue, possibly for a Saturday evening meal, were dunked in vinegar with bread on the side. (I must admit I never did acquire a craving for this dish.)

By the time haying season arrived, most of the pig had been eaten. It was time to bring down a ham from the hayloft. By now, the heat of the loft would be such that the fat of the ham was dripping. Some people found maggots in their hams. We rarely did. Father believed that maggots did not like his brand of red pepper. Hams were sliced and fried, and on occasion eaten raw with vinegar and onions. With summer well on its way, Father would be eyeing the pigs and picking a volunteer for the coming "*Schwiens schlacht.*"

## Wheat and Mennonites and Zwieback

(From *The Mennonite Treasury of Recipes*, Derksen Printers, Steinbach, 1961, used with permission.)

Wherever our people settled, they grew wheat. No wonder our mothers and grandmothers were experts at baking breads and Zwieback.

No one had to go hungry as long as there was bread in the house, and where can you find a more delicious aroma then stepping into a Low German Mennonite home on a Saturday afternoon where freshly baked buns are taken out of the oven?

Tweback or Zwieback which means two bake in High German, is similar to bread but richer in butter and saltier. The dough itself is of a softer consistency than bread dough and after it has risen, uniform round pieces are pinched off, which is a skill in itself. The bottom ball is slightly larger than the top ball, which is pressed into the bottom ball with the thumb, preventing the top from sliding off during baking.

When baking Saturday, usually one or two pans of "Zucka Tweback" were baked for Saturday supper, but only enough as they are good fresh, only. For weddings and funerals Tweback were made very small, and eaten with a lump of sugar, which was dunked in the coffee. Sunday "Faspa" when visitors came, Tweback were always served with coffee. Some prefer to dunk them, others believe dunking spoils the taste. Butter was never served with buns as the goodness of the butter was already baked in the buns. Now we bake our buns with shortening, serve butter, jams, jellies and cheese with them.

## Watermelon Syrup

by Irene Bergen and Louise Bergen Price

Watermelons. In our immigrant families in summer, watermelons were not dessert - they were the main course along with a heaping platter of Rollkuchen. The watermelons were delicious, especially the center, the Obraumtje. Not as sweet as the watermelons in the Ukraine, though, the older people said. Now those were watermelons!

Watermelons in Ukraine were not only eaten fresh, they were also juiced and cooked into syrup, and pickled for winter eating. Irene Bergen describes how watermelon syrup was cooked in Nieder Chortitza from melons that were harvested on the collective farm, but not good enough to sell.

Watermelons grew well on the sandy soil along the Dnieper River. Little sugar was available in the Ukraine in the 1930's, so whenever it was possible, we cooked watermelon syrup. We started early morning, and finished the job by lantern light.

In order to get an early start, we had prepared as much as possible ahead of time. We had collected wood for the fire from the Barwolsche Lecht, a small forest near our village. We tied the dry sticks into bundles and slung them across our back to carry home. The straw we used for heating our home was not suitable for cooking syrup.

Our family did not own **Sirups-plauten**, so we borrowed one from a neighbour. The Sirupsplaut was a long metal (tin) trough that came in various lengths --the one we used was medium sized; about 24" wide by 60" long and 10" deep. We dug a trench in the ground, almost as wide as the trough but much longer. Four iron rods were laid across the trench, the metal trough placed on the rods, and the sides of the ditch sealed with weeds and earth. We built a fire at one end of the trench. The fire heated the trough and the smoke escaped at the other end.

We usually made some watermelon juice the night before, so we could get an early start on syrup-cooking day. Ma poured the juice into the trough and brought it to a rolling boil. We children wiped the watermelons, and cut them in half. Then we scraped the watermelon flesh into a tub, using a special Utschropy—a machine with a handle like a meat grinder. The rind we put aside to feed the cattle.

The watermelon pulp was put into a sack and pressed with a stone until all the juice was extracted,. This juice was added to the juice in the trough. The fire had to be kept at a constant temperature—too hot, and the juice boiled over.

All day long, we cut, pulped, juiced and cooked the syrup, adding more juice as the syrup condensed, skimming the foam off the top, stirring. During the last few hours, no more juice was added, so the syrup would be nice and thick.

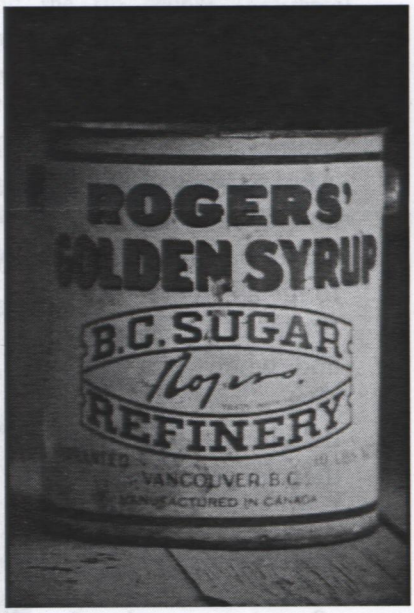
It was late evening by the time we were done. We gave the neighbours a litre of syrup in exchange for the use of the Sirupsplauten.

Watermelon syrup made excellent Sirupsplatz and Peppernuts . We loved to dip our bread into it.

The leftover pulp was used to pickle whole small watermelons (about the size of a small cabbage). These were layered into barrels, each layer covered in pulp and sprinkled with salt and dill. When the barrel was full, it was covered with a white cloth a weighted with a stone. The cloth had to be cleaned often until fermentation ceased. The watermelons tasted very good in winter.

We also cleaned enough watermelon seeds to plant for the next year.

**When the '48 immigrants arrived in Canada, they became acquainted with Roger's Golden Syrup. This syrup was, and is still, a standby in our house. Is it as good as watermelon syrup, I ask? Better, I'm told. But the watermelons — nothing can beat the Ukrainian ones!**




***Siropsplatz***

*1 cup syrup*
*½ cup oil*
*¾ cup brown sugar*
*1 cup buttermilk*
*2 cups flour*
*1 tsp. soda*
*1 tsp baking powder*
*1 tsp each cinnamon & star anise*

*Bake at 325 for approximately 45 minutes.*

## Quotes from an old cook book...

*An undated Blue Ribbon cookbook, originally from Mary Suderman, Winkler, Manitoba, likely printed in the early 1900's. This book has a section on "Bachelor cookery," preparing gruels, invalid cookery, compotes, cooking in high altitudes, made-over dishes, and a section advocating the avoidance of intoxicating liquors while cooking.*

## Common Mistakes in Cooking

Divided recipes fail because they are not accurately divided.

Sponge cake has heavy streaks near the bottom when the stove has been jarred, or the door slammed soon after the cake has been put in the oven…

If the oven won't bake thoroughly and brown nicely, try putting a few layers of newspaper on top of the oven. It will work like a charm. *(Note to MHS readers: **DO NOT** try this at home.)*

To prevent doughnuts being greasy. When frying them have a kettle of boiling water on the stove and as each doughnut is taken from the fat, plunge for an instant into the hot water and drain.

Slightly scorched food may be much improved by taking the kettle at once from the fire and setting in a pan of hot water for a moment or two. Of course any really burned bits may be at once removed.

## Food for Laboring Men

This should in part be adapted to the nature of their labor and to season and temperature. But in general if there is a large expenditure of muscular effort, the supply should be equal to the drain. Hence beef, mutton, a proportion of pork, with vegetables, bread, butter, coffee, tea, all come in play and serve to restore the waste of tissue, and sustain the vigor of the body.

## For Professional People

Professional men, thinkers and students, whose expenditure is chiefly of the brain, and whose bodily activity is necessarily limited, require such a supply of nutriment as will measurably compensate for this waste.

Hence, only a moderate supply of beef, mutton, lamb, but a larger proportion of fish, wild and tame fowl, oysters, fruits, nuts, raisins or figs are best; oatmeal in its various forms, wheaten grits, and coarse wheat bread, should form the staple of the diet.

## Fat and Corpulent People

In many families the tendency to corpulence and even obesity is constant. Yet such people often use a diet directly tending to induce and aggravate the evil, while a proper diet always limits, and often removes, the entire difficulty: for adipose tissue is only produced by certain fat making articles of food.

## Diet for the Aged

If fat, heavy and sleepy, inclined to sit and slumber, let them avoid fat meats, butter, sugar, and fat-creating elements of food; and, instead, eat of lean meat, brown bread, fish, nuts, vegetables and fruits, with the usual quantity of tea or coffee….

On the contrary, if they are lean querulous or sleepless, let them eat of fat meat, bread and butter, buckwheat cakes, rice, milk, buttermilk, potatoes, etc., and the better nourishment of the system will manifest itself in improved sleep and disposition.

## Food in the year 1500...

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man "could bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning and death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "upper crust."

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a "wake."

**Next issue**: Mennonite emigration from the Soviet Union in the 1920's and the famine that followed, culminating in the years 1932-1933. This year will mark the 80th anniversary of that disaster.

We would appreciate receiving letters, stories, and articles relating to this topic, or any other topic that connects to the history of BC Mennonites. Submission may be edited for length and clarity. We will gladly translate from German.

**- the Editor**

# The Wedding

by Henry Neufeld

Even though lateness is not uncommon at such events and might even be considered fashionable, this wedding had a leisurely delay about it. Some guests arrived after the service began, bowing in prayer before taking their seats. Finally the bride and groom were in their appointed places and the music faded to signal the end of the preliminaries.

Hymns were sung, prayers seeking God's blessing were made, and the young couple was reminded of their responsibility to each other, their families, their faith, and society. Ideally, they were told, they should seek to achieve oness in spirit and in body. As weddings go, it was a colourful, impressive, and beautiful ceremony.

Flavourful aromas soon drifted into the sanctuary, confirming the destination of the ladies who left during the latter part of the service. We were served an abundant meal; the food was as tasty and as varied as one might expect at any Mennonite wedding.

The master of ceremonies introduced the head table, welcomed guests, singled out those who had come from afar, told a few jokes and did all the things required of him.

The high-pitched clinking of spoon on cup demanded a show of newly wed affection and all eyes turned to the couple. The mother of the bride was not amused and whispered something to her daughter. Words between bride and groom, then he leaned over, moved her veil gently and kissed her on the cheek. Video and flash cameras captured the moment; the crowd applauded in approval thirsting for a repeat performance.

The religious faith of the group was a major concern of the older people present. Many important traditions were being lost and the faith was being eroded. Young people were adopting the behaviour and dress style of Canadian society. Alcohol consumption, formerly forbidden, was now common at weddings; one glance at the amply stocked bar confirmed this.

The food was traditional, tasty, and reflected a well-organized kitchen of which any congregation could be proud. We were told this crowd was conservative and there likely would be no dancing, but at other weddings where there were more youth, dancing was not uncommon.

The older people had concerns about their youth: they no longer came to worship regularly and they were caught up in the competitive world of education, careers, and business. Children were still being instructed in the faith, but as young adults they left the fold and there was hope that they might someday return. But many valued traditions were being lost.

Conservative dress was giving way to popular Canadian styles. For reasons of convenience and acceptance by the larger society, these changes were almost inevitable but unfortunate. The loss of the old ways was to be mourned, as was the loss of the mother tongue. While older people spoke with marked accents, the youth spoke only English. In one generation the language of the ancestors was being lost.

Regular worship was important, the elders said, to maintain connections to others, to the larger community. Failure to become part of the community of faith would lead to selfishness and individualism. People seemed too busy to take time to worship regularly. God was not given a rightful place in people's lives. It was sad, they said, and shoulders shrugged in impotent resignation.

It could have been any Mennonite wedding; but the saris, turbans, and curried foods reminded us that we were at a late 20th century West Coast Sikh wedding.