



Roots and branches

Newsletter of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

"What we have heard and seen
we will tell the next generation."

Psalm 78

From America with Love:

American Mennonite Aid for Russian Mennonites in the Early 1920's

John Landis Ruth is the author of several books and films on Anabaptist/Mennonite subjects. In 2001 he published *The Earth is the Lord's. A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press). This 1390 page book follows Mennonite life in the Lancaster area through the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. It illustrates John Ruth the story teller at his very best. He captures the flavour of Mennonite life through the centuries and gives us a sense of the every day and the ordinary. His ability to depict memorable characters and events places the reader into the very centre of the action.

It is this John L. Ruth the storyteller who will grace us with his presence. The pathways of Swiss and Russian Mennonites rarely cross and yet we of the Russian tradition owe our very lives to the generosity of our Swiss Mennonite brothers.

"From America with Love"

lecture by author and storyteller

John L Ruth

at Mennonite Historical Society of BC's

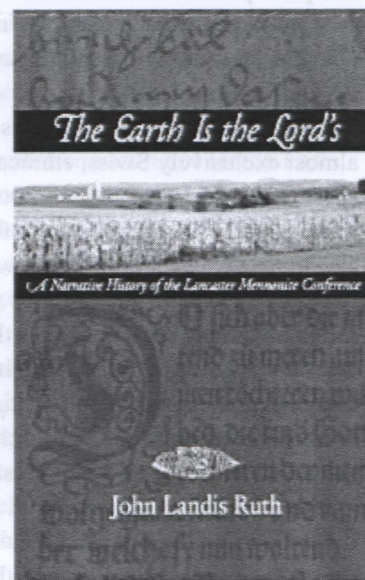
annual fundraising banquet

October 15, 2005

Columbia Place Gymnasium

6:00 pm

tickets \$20 available at the office
or from board members after Sept. 1



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Mennonite Historical Society of BC 211-2825 Clearbrook Rd., Abbotsford, BC. V2T 6S3

Phone: 604-853-6177 Fax: 604-853-6246 Email: archives@mhsbc.com

Website: www.mhsbc.com

Hours: 9am-4pm Monday-Friday

Editorial

As the newsletter deadline looms again, I'm faced with the task of deciding which of the excellent articles I've received go in this newsletter, and which will be featured in our winter edition. Thank you to all who write for this newsletter—it's wonderful to have such enthusiastic response!

Thank you to Henry Neufeld who edited the newsletter for a number of years, and has now stepped down from the board and the editorial committee. While we'll miss seeing him at board meetings, Henry will continue writing for "Roots and branches". Thanks, Henry. Your work is much appreciated!

Lora Sawatsky has agreed to join our editorial team, and has already been hard at work. Helen Rose Pauls (also chair of the events committee) is the third member of our committee and a frequent contributor to the newsletter. We invite our readers to continue sending us your stories, letters and articles. ☐ LBP

A Brief Note on Our Swiss Friends

by Dr. John B. Toews

Mennonites, mainly Swiss in origin, settled on the east coast of the United States as early as 1683. Further immigration soon established many congregations in Lancaster and Franconia counties in Pennsylvania. The term "Old Mennonites" began to be used around 1800. By 1900 the term became unacceptable to some and perhaps to avoid confusion with other groups using the term, the name *Old* was often used in parentheses as in (Old) Mennonite Church. As already mentioned the group was almost exclusively Swiss, ethnically speaking. Culturally and religiously it remained German until almost 1900. The language used in the home was Palatine German to which many English words were added over the decades. As was often the case in congregationally based Anabaptist groups a significant number of church splits occurred over the centuries.

It is probably fair to say that the Dutch/Russian Mennonites and the Palatinate American Mennonites lived in two solitudes and knew little of one

another until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The chaos and destruction that ensued brought the prosperous Russian and Ukrainian settlements to their knees. By 1921-22 a massive famine stalked the land. Desperate Mennonite leaders appealed to Mennonite groups in Germany, Holland and America for help. They dispatched a so-called "Study Commission" abroad in January, 1920. It managed to visit the United States by mid-summer of 1920. The ravages of WWI had prompted the constituency of the (Old) Mennonite Church to organize the Mennonite Relief Commission for War Sufferers. Already active in relieving suffering in Europe and the Near East the agency, at the urging of Alvin J. Miller, sent three relief workers to Constantinople in September, 1920. Meanwhile inter-Mennonite co-operation resulted in a meeting of all Mennonite relief agencies at Elkhart, Indiana on July 27, 1920. This meeting resulted in the creation of the Mennonite Central Committee officially chartered on September 27, 1920.

Working through Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration, MCC created a special relief branch within the ARA called *American Mennonite Relief*. Often confronted by delays caused by the collapse of the Russian infrastructure and a reluctant Bolshevik bureaucracy, MCC feeding operations began in mid-March, 1922 and continued until August, 1923. About 75,000 people, 60,000 of them Mennonites, were fed and clothed. In addition AMR aided in reconstruction by supplying some 200 horses and 50 Fordson tractors and plows. Between 1922 and 1924 American Mennonites spent the then enormous sum of approximately \$1,200,000 in helping the Russian Mennonites survive. Simply put, without our (Old) Mennonite friends in the early 1920's many of our parents and grandparents would not have survived. Naturally, other Mennonite groups helped as well, but in the main their economic strength and Christian generosity carried the day. During our October banquet we want to say a special *Thank You* to our Swiss friends. ☐

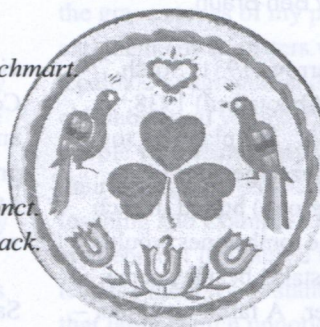
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Directors: Ben Braun, David Giesbrecht, Ed Hildebrand, John Konrad, Peter Neudorf, Henry Neufeld, Helen Rose Pauls, Louise Bergen Price, Lora Sawatsky, Ben Stobbe, Richard Thiessen & John B. Toews. Editor: Louise Bergen Price. Contributing editors: Lora Sawatsky, & Helen Rose Pauls Archivist: Hugo Friesen Staff: Mary Ann Quiring

Some Pennsylvania Dutch Talk that Gifs Laffs

by Helen Rose Pauls

*We grow too soon oldt und too late schmart.
The hurrier I go the behinder I get.
Pie is all....cake is yet.
Sorry you don't feel so pretty good.
I hope it gives what it looks like for once.
Don't eat yourself full....there's pie back.
Come down and see us a little wunst.*



*Kissin' wears out, cookin' don't.
What does it gif fer dinner?
"Shoo fly pie with schnitz un knepp with
Pot pie still gives lots of pep."
"Aunt Emmy's shoo fly pie sure eat's good, ain't?"
"A big barn and a plump wife, and a man is fixed up
good for life".*

Apparently this dialect comes from the Palatinate area of western Germany and was brought to North America as the mother tongue of the Swiss Mennonites. These sayings are often found on napkins, place mats, tea towels and other souvenirs sold in tourist areas wherever the Pennsylvania Dutch are found.

Lecture: This is my Story, this is my Song

by Helen Rose Pauls

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC presented an afternoon of story and song on May 15, at the Central Heights Church, in conjunction with "The Mennonite Piano Concerto" played by Irmgard Baerg and Betty Suderman.

The 1000 or so guests enjoyed an organ prelude with Wes Heinrichs playing the old hymns of the fifties. Then the Celebration Choir, assembled by Holda Fast Redekopp and Rudy Baerg, took the stage and Bill Baerg conducted the songs of faith and hope, the *Kernlieder* from our past. The songs were interspersed by vignettes read by Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen from a script by John Klassen. These vignettes told of the life and experiences of Mennonites in their journey from Holland to Prussia, Russia, and then Canada. The stories told of turmoil and peace, want and plenty, leaving home, and new beginnings. The words of the hymns responded to difficult questions of faith posed by the script.

These stories and songs were echoed by the music of the Mennonite Concerto. Irmgard Baerg and Betty Suderman superbly played the concerto duet published in 1986 for four hands, two pianos. Many listeners wiped tears as vignettes and hymns meshed with their own family experiences. One remembered being told that her grandfather had sung "So nimm denn meine Hände" as the Mahknov bandits prepared to take his life.

The ten songs sung by the choir which Victor Davies intertwined to create the concerto were: *Wehrlos und Verlassen / In the Rifted Rock I'm Resting; Wie soll ich Dich empfangen / Oh, How Shall I Receive Thee?; Ein reines Herz, Herr schaff in mir / A Pure Heart Lord, Create in Me; Wirf Sorgen und Schmerz / In Sorrow and Pain; Wie süß tönt Sabbatglockenklang/ How Sweetly Chime the Sabbath Bells; O Jesu wieviel Gutes / Oh Christ, What Bounteous Kindness; Shall We Gather at the River; So nimm denn meine Hände / Take Thou My Hand O Father; Solang mein Jesus lebt / While my Redeemer's Near; Jesu meine Freude / Jesus Priceless Treasure.*

An ad-hoc planning committee consisting of Holda Fast-Redekopp, Rudy Baerg, Ben Stobbe, Dorothy Fast, John Klassen, and Helen Rose Pauls worked hard to streamline the events of the afternoon. They felt rewarded by the outcome and the warm responses of the audience.

A CD of the event (\$25) and the script (\$5) will preserve these stories and songs for our children. Both are available at the office. Also available are the CD of the original recording of the Mennonite Concerto, as well as the video *When They Shall Ask*, which had this concerto as its score. Contact the archives at archives@mhsbc.com or call 604-853-617

Future events

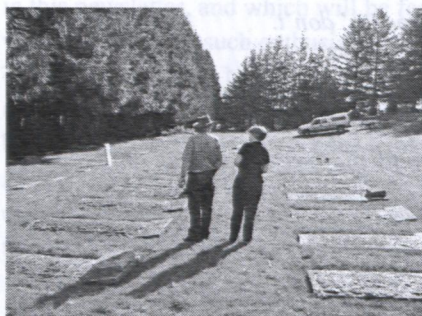
October 15. Annual Fundraising banquet. Columbia Place, 6PM. Tickets \$20 (see pg. 1)

November 12. Genealogy workshop. Speakers: Glenn Penner and Tim Janzen. Check our website for details

February 18, 2006. Speaker: Helmut Harder. Topic: David Toews, Undaunted Hero. Details to follow.

Lest We Forget! A memorial walk through South Poplar, Greendale and Yarrow Cemeteries

by Agatha E. Klassen. Cemetery photos that follow are by Ben Braun.



Walking through a cemetery has never appealed to me as an enjoyable activity because cemeteries evoke in me memories of sad feelings, perhaps reminding me of saying good-bye to a precious little sibling in Coaldale, Alberta when I was five years old, and to a second one when I was ten, or parting with a teenage nephew whose life was suddenly snuffed out in a tragic car accident, or burying my beloved parents, two older sisters and a brother-in-law. Six of my loved ones are laid to rest in the Yarrow Cemetery.

These feelings began to change in my heart and mind when I was invited to join a planning meeting to arrange a memorial tour of the three oldest Mennonite cemeteries in British

Columbia – Yarrow, 1931; South Poplar (South Abbotsford) 1938; Greendale, 1947. The plan was to select about a dozen persons (a representative group) buried in each cemetery whose tombstones would be marked with a stake, bearing name, row and number. A family member – son, daughter or grandchild – would be asked to present a short heartfelt tribute at the gravesite. The tour would begin in South Poplar, proceed to Greendale and conclude in Yarrow. What would the purpose be of this memorial walk? A rendezvous of families and friends on a beautiful sunny afternoon? A walk through three Mennonite cemeteries exploring graves of known and unknown persons long departed or more recently? Yes, all of the above, but much more. It would be a walk of appreciation for those who have gone before us, who fought a good fight and kept the faith.

If any one of us had misgivings about attracting people to participate in this cemetery tour, the enthusiasm of our chairperson, Lillian Toews, quickly dispelled any doubts. Soon the local people in each community caught the

vision and spirit of this new venture. Cemeteries were revisited, cleaned up and beautified. Cemetery lists were produced and updated for the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. website.

Saturday afternoon, May 14th, 2005, was chosen for this first memorial tour. At each cemetery the crowd grew as family members and friends, many carrying flowers, gathered to pay tribute to their loved ones. One person came from as far away as Calgary, Alberta, several from California and one family had 22 members show up for the occasion. As the tributes were given there was an amazing outpouring of love, of fond memories and appreciation of loved ones! It was a joyous celebration on a beautiful sunny day! Approximately 250 persons took part in this memorable event.

Faspa, served in the Yarrow M.B. Church, was preceded by an inspiring talk entitled "The Stones Cry Out" presented by Mennonite historian, Dr. John B. Toews. (see article below)

The Stones Cry Out

by Dr. John B. Toews

On May 27, 2001, Lillian and I participated in the unveiling of a memorial stone dedicated to the memory of some 82 victims of the Makhnovite reign of terror in South Ukraine during 1919. This particular massacre (there were others) took place in a village then called Eichenfeld and today known as Novopetrovka. Following the massacre Mennonites abandoned the

village. It was later resettled by local Ukrainians. Some persons in attendance that day were descendents of the very men who raped and murdered so mercilessly.

Also present were some of the descendents of the victims who came from Canada and the U.S. By being in Novopetrovka 82 years after the massacre we were in a sense saying

that the memories of former misdeeds were still very much alive.

We wondered – would the villagers show up? Some people walked through the village before the ceremony – not a person in sight anywhere. It was eerie. We were in for a surprise. Normally when we unveil monuments there is a moment when the cloth is pulled away. In this case it was a bit different.

Stones cry out (cont'd)

When we arrived the monument was already draped – not by a cloth but by field flowers, peonies and irises. The Novopetrovka villagers had raided their gardens and offered this spectacular floral extravagance. They – I think – were saying that they too had not forgotten. Somehow all of us gathered there sensed that painful memories were healed, that past sins were forgiven and that reconciliation took place.

There were people who expressed concern that the sizeable stone monument might be damaged or vandalized. We were reassured by a village lady who simply commented: “Anyone who touches it has to deal with us, the women of the village.” I told myself that I would not want to be that person because here was a force to be reckoned with.

This event said something about the significance of a monument to the dead, the importance of a stone. On that May 27th we declared that the Eichenfeld Mennonites of long ago were not forgotten in death, that their memory was sacred and instructive, that remembering brought healing and forgiveness.

Each year I try to go back to my birthplace, Coaldale, Alberta, in order to visit my sister, sister-in-law and friends. Yet I always take time to visit the Mennonite cemetery next to the former Mennonite Brethren Church, now the Gem of the West Museum. You know why I go there? Some of my past lies buried there. In a sense those grave stones cry out to me. They evoke memories of the past – memories of grand parents, of mother and dad, of my sister and brother, of

aunts, uncles and cousins. I walk past the grave stones of my parent’s friends and the many ministers who served the Coaldale congregation during my childhood and youth. Here lie the people who shaped my young faith by their friendship, encouragement, teaching and example. A Mr. Heidebrecht lies buried there. I have a teenage memory of standing alone in that large church unnoticed by our church caretaker who was singing hymns as he cleaned the church. It was a sacred experience. I felt I had been in God’s presence. When I see his gravestone I say: “Thank you Mr. Heidebrecht.” That stone cries out to me.

During our memorial tour most of us were in some way shaped by the dead whose graves we visited today. In our innermost being we cannot forget or ignore these people because they molded and formed us. I think past generations understood this far better than we do. Yearly they celebrated a Totentag. It was a Sunday during which the departed saints of that year were remembered. Their names were recited, passages of Scripture read and prayers spoken. Unitedly the congregation affirmed that they had fought a good fight and kept the faith.

We have tried to do that this afternoon. But we can’t simply say we walked through three cemeteries and accomplished three things. A commemoration, a Totentag simply does not work that way. Each of us brought private memories to this occasion. Some were uplifting and encouraging, others possibly hurtful.

God put all of us in a place, in a locality. In a complex way we interacted with others in that locality. The church and community molded us.

Today you walked past the grave and graves of a person or persons of importance in your life. Perhaps it was the person who pointed you to Jesus, who nurtured your infant faith and set an example of discipleship. It doesn’t really matter what languages he or she spoke or to what cultural ethos they belonged. They shaped us and if we can embrace them and the past they represent it can be a wholesome healing experience. If we reject that past and run away from it, it will haunt and incapacitate us.

Unfortunately graves and grave stones seem to have little meaning in today’s North American society. There are modern thinkers who argue that life as we know it has no deeper purpose, no set principles, no beginning, no end. There is no need to search for or find truth. Simply affirm everyone and tolerate all views. I’ve heard expressions like: “chill, let it be, hang loose or why not just float.” Most certainly in this line of thinking the past and persons of the past have no relevance in our lives.

Yet how can we ignore the grave stones we saw today? Here are voices and lives from the past that called us to commitment, to hear the Gospel. It’s a Gospel that is frightening and offensive because it wants to change us and transform our lives. From the standpoint of modern thinking it’s so threatening and indigestible. But the grave stones cry out remember, recall, learn.

Paul in 1 Timothy 1:3 writes: “I am reminded of your sincere faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice.” For us it could be a grandfather or a father or an uncle or aunt or caring neighbor or Sunday School teacher who lived the Gospel and cared for our souls.

Stones (cont'd)

Some years ago the Anabaptist Foundation erected a special monument in the Coaldale Mennonite Cemetery to the memory of Maria and Benjamin Janz. It commemorated their efforts in bringing some 20,000 Mennonites from Soviet Russia to Canada during the 1920's. Almost all the Janz family was there – three

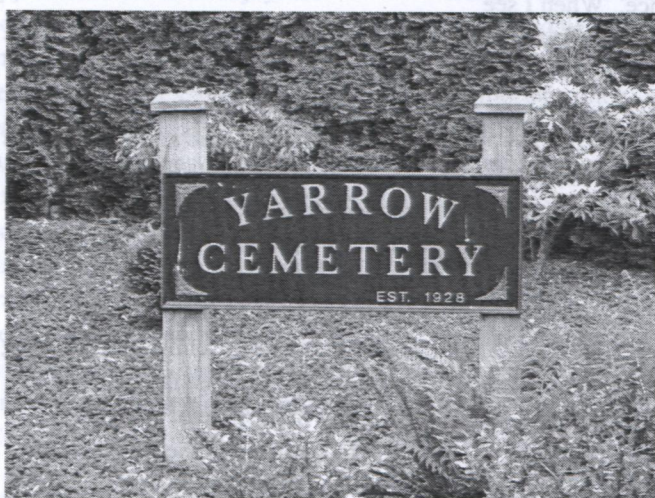
surviving children, grandchildren, great grandchildren. We sang, we talked, we prayed. Tears were shed. For the younger generation that memorial stone was their only contact with the past. In a sense it cried out saying:
*you belong
*you have a heritage of faith

*you have a past and a direction for the future

Gravestones make us pause to give thanks for those who were faithful. Perhaps in the words of Psalm 78 they urge us to "tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord and the wonders he has done." ❧

A visit to Yarrow Cemetery

By Agatha E. Klassen



The Yarrow Cemetery is situated at the end of Hare Road (formerly Alder Road) – a quiet place far from the hustle and bustle of the village. Here lie buried saints and sinners, young and old, in 17 straight rows.

The first death to occur among the Yarrow Mennonite settlers was that of infant George Giesbrecht, August 2, 1928, who is buried in the Carmen United Church Cemetery.

The Yarrow Mennonites were officially authorized to establish a cemetery in May of 1931, the current site of Yarrow's burial ground. A prominent person instrumental in establishing this cemetery was Johann Braun, one of Yarrow's pioneers, who for many years was gravedigger and keeper of the grounds. The first two persons buried in

the Yarrow cemetery were Heinrich Rempel (1910 – 1931) row 1, #42 and Agnes Schellenberg (1906 – 1931) row 1, #44. Nowhere in Yarrow is there a sign denoting the location of the cemetery but for decades the Mennonites knew it was located at the end of "Kirchhofstrasse" (Cemetery Road). Today, visitors notice a sign at the corner of No. 3 Road and Hare Road that says, "NO EXIT." ❧

A few stops on the Yarrow Cemetery Tour

George Reimer 1908-1963.

by Holda Fast Redekopp

My father, George Reimer, was born in January of 1908 in Koltan, Neu Samara, Russia. In 1926, Dad, his youngest brother, Peter, and their mother, came to Canada and settled in Yarrow. Here Dad fell in love with Helena Wiens and they were married in June of 1930 – the second wedding among the Mennonite settlers of Yarrow. The next year, both George and Lena Reimer were baptized and became members of the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church.

Our parents complemented each other in character: Mom, more serious and pious, Dad, fun loving and joking, always living on the edge. They adored each other. Dad's sense of humour made for good times and much fun and laughter especially around the dinner table. Mother would be heard saying, 'Aber Kinder!' but when she realized that Dad was in the middle of it all – often the instigator – she had to give in and join in the fun.

Mother loved music as much as Dad but was not as much in the public eye. She was the encourager when we all took music lessons. She had to put up with many different sounds going on at the same time. After school, we often came home to freshly baked bread.

Among the special times we children remember were our trips to Vancouver's Stanley



Park to hear the Sunday afternoon symphony concerts. I can still see Dad leaning forward and itching to conduct the orchestra, especially when they played exciting Rossini overtures. The other specialty at our house was listening to Foster Hewitt's "Hockey Night in Canada." We never missed a Saturday – soup, freshly baked buns and hockey. We had a regular visitor from the other end of town who didn't have a radio and showed up at the door just in time for the game. Without saying a word, Jack Wittenberg came and went quietly.

Choir singing in worship was for Dad the ultimate expression. Inviting people to join the choir was considered so special this warranted a visit to the home of the potential choir singer and a personal invitation. Dad continually searched for new and challenging music for the choir; Dad's great love for singing, for music and for the church is probably his greatest legacy. Without Mom's support he could not have accomplished this. In addition, our parents passed on to us a legacy of hospitality – visitors were always welcome. Exemplifying compassion and love, our parents took in their nieces and nephews when Dad's sister and her husband died of tuberculosis in the 1930s. George Reimer died in 1963 at 55 years of age.☐

Margaret Klippenstein Enns, 1888-1977, and Henry Abraham Enns, 1883-1972.

by Sarah E. Martens

My mother, Margaret Klippenstein Enns, was born April 19, 1888 in the village of Alexanderwohl, Molotschna Colony, but spent her childhood in, Logovsk, Neu Sawara Colony. With her husband's blessing, she took a medical course in 1923 in order to become a midwife. She was an independent person and was dedicated to her chosen vocation.

After moving to Yarrow with her husband and children, mother continued practicing midwifery. At that time, the nearest doctors resided in Chilliwack which meant that mother was often required to rely on her own skills. Our family would sometimes be awakened in the middle of the night, and we children walked to the

neighbours where we often slept on the floor. Later, a guest room was set-aside in our home for new mothers who usually stayed for ten days even when husbands complained. Being a midwife was difficult for mother and for her family, but she was convinced that she was called by God to practice. In addition to assisting others in childbirth, Mother gave birth to eleven children (two died in infancy). She died February 5, 1977.

Henry Abraham Enns, was born January 6, 1883 in Crimea, Russia. In his eleventh year he moved with his parents to Neu Samara. He was baptized into the MB church in 1901, the same year his mother died. His father died a few years later.

Father dreamed of traveling to America but his plans changed when he met Margaret Klippenstein in Logovsk, Neu Samara. They were married in 1908 and it wasn't long before the young couple moved to Slavgorod Colony to start a new farm. When, during World War I, Dad was conscripted into the forestry service, Mom took care of the farm and even ploughed the fields.

In 1926, our family emigrated to Zeneta, Saskatchewan and then in 1929 moved to Yarrow, BC. Both my parents were dedicated deacons in the Yarrow MB church for many years. Dad was a friend to young and old, Christian and non-Christian. He died in 1972.☐

Susanna Wiebe Thiessen, 1915-1998

by Ike Thiessen

My mother, Susanna Wiebe Thiessen, the sixth of twelve children, was born to Isaak and Katharina Braun Wiebe February 24, 1915 in Neuendorf, Ukraine. She was baptized in 1934. Susanna and John Thiessen were married October 7, 1934 in Neuendorf where four of their five children: John, Isaac, Susan and Frank, were born.

In 1943 our family fled from Russia to Poland. Here the fifth child, Agatha, was born December 22, 1944 just two hours after father was conscripted into the German army. This was the last time we heard from or saw our father. In 1945, our family fled from Poland to Germany and from there we immigrated to Canada. We arrived in Yarrow December 9, 1948. Mother joined the Yarrow United Mennonite Church, became a member of the "Mary-Martha" Ladies Aid, sang in the church choir and taught Sunday School.

Mother made a living by hoeing, picking and growing berries, picking hops, beans and whatever else was available at that time. After her children left home, she worked for the Mennonite Central Committee clothing depot in Yarrow and Clearbrook until her retirement. Church, food and clothing played an important role in her life. Every Sunday she made sure her children were dressed neatly and clean for Sunday School. In addition we knew her as a great cook and baker.

Susanna Wiebe Thiessen never gave up trying to find her husband, but prayed and hoped until her dying breath. My father, Johann Thiessen, the youngest of twelve children, was born August 23, 1912 to Franz and Agatha Bergen Thiessen. In 1942 he was baptized. He worked on a collective farm as a mechanic and caterpillar and tractor operator and, when time allowed, he enjoyed hunting and fishing. We heard a rumor that father died December 23, 1945 but none of us can be certain of this date. Susanna Wiebe Thiessen died January 6, 1998 in Abbotsford, BC and is buried in the Yarrow Cemetery. ☐

The Pretty Pink Dress



In 1921, in the middle of the civil war, 3-year-old Helen Dyck attended the wedding of her half-sister, Katerina (to Frank Thiessen.) Helen's 'pretty pink dress' was made over from a dress that had belonged to her father's first wife, Susanna (Toews) Dyck. The family had recently been evicted from their home across from the flour mill and now lived in a tiny workers' cabin on the mill site with many other evicted relatives.

The original dress had a silk lining (from which Helen's dress was made) topped by a mesh layer embroidered in pearls and beads, the material probably bought by Abraham Dyck for his first wife on one of his trips to Germany.

The wedding was held in the church in Schönwiese, and the reception in the granary. Large assemblies were forbidden at the time, so guests arrived and left stealthily. Even so, the authorities were notified. They arrived the next day to search the premises but found nothing, not even the remains of the wedding torte hidden on a rafter.

The dress and photo were donated to the archives by Helen Dyck Klassen. ☐

Silencing the Voice of the People.

Part Two: How to deaden acoustics and seriously damage congregational singing, by Evan Kreider.

If the acoustics of two sanctuaries owned by the same congregation can differ so drastically, what causes the one to ring with our singing and the other to act like a musical black hole? Stated simply, congregational singing is either enhanced or deadened by the room's shape and by the materials used in the construction of its floor, seating, walls, ceiling, and stage.

The very shape of a sanctuary affects the sounds heard within it, because successful distribution of sounds throughout the room is determined by how the sounds are reflected by the room's walls, floor, and ceiling. Over the centuries, the building of churches has demonstrated that longer rectangular sanctuaries reflect congregational singing more efficiently than do the more recent fan- or even semi-circular shapes. Concert halls have likewise shown that parallel walls enable sound to be distributed evenly throughout the entire room, though there are ways being developed for working with non-parallel structures. Since this utterly simple rectangular shape not only works superbly for congregational singing but also for our listening to 'worship teams' or preaching, why are many of our congregations now opting for the fan-shaped sanctuary in which singing is so effectively deadened?

Part of the answer can be found in our recent interests in the community of faithful gathering around its pastor, its charismatic leader. But part of the explanation also comes from visible symbolism of this community of faith being gathered together for corporate worship. Some Mennonites now place a

premium on being able to see the *faces* of other worshippers and not just the backs of their heads. We are comforted by the sense of our being gathered together, as opposed to our being lined up in straight rows. The exaggerated fan-shaped sanctuary can promote a heightened sense of community to us visually (I find that this is noticeably increased as the room's fan-shape is opened towards the semi-circle or beyond, as in the case of the Goshen College Mennonite Church). In my experience, however, the distribution of sound from the 'voice of the people' is never as successful in a fan-shaped sanctuary as in a rectangular one. (This is why you will never find fan-shaped concert halls.)

My visits to our churches, however, suggest that all the advantages or disadvantages presented by any particular room shape can always be profoundly modified by the inclusion of certain building materials. Hard surfaces obviously reflect sound more readily than do softened surfaces such as those found in false ceilings or acoustical tile (*acoustical* implying a deadening rather than enhancing of sound).

Of these building materials, one of the most significant is the presence or absence of wall-to-wall floor carpeting. I am tempted to entitle this section, "Wall-to-wall church sanctuary carpeting, the invention of the devil", for even old Screwtape himself could not have contrived a more efficient way to dampen our joy in worshipping God through congregational singing or sharing from the pews—our determined Mennonite carpenters have done the

devil's work for him. CARPETS ABSORB SOUND. Indeed, this is one of the main reasons we install carpeting in our homes, hotels, hospital lounges, aeroplanes, stores, and waiting rooms.

The argument usually posited is that we wish to create a dignified sanctuary, one promoting a quiet environment for our corporate worship. Some people do not want to hear babies make any sound whatsoever, nor do they want our young children to interrupt the funereal lecture-hall atmosphere of the morning's sermon. And if soundproofing does not win the day for our determined carpenters, finances do. The initial outlay for wall-to-wall carpet is often less than that for equally beautiful wooden or (Italian) tiled floors, and the cost of upkeep is thought to be less (until, of course, one realizes that carpeting has to be replaced at considerable expense about every twenty years!) Carpets are wonderful in high-traffic areas such as the aisles, but wall-to-wall carpets kill congregational singing and responsive readings; even congregational rhythmic hand clapping and laughter sounds anemic when performed in a fully-carpeted room. As far as the sanctuary's stage is concerned, I can think of no justifiable reason to have it be carpeted. If you ever expect music to be sung or played from the stage, the only reason to carpet it is if your congregation's musicians are so bad that you really don't want to hear them (or if everything is going to be amplified and therefore sound 'canned' rather than fresh and live). (I have never seen a carpeted concert stage—never!)

A protestant church in the greater Vancouver area recently decided to replace its sanctuary's ageing wall-to-wall carpet. Their clever organist asked whether the old carpet could possibly be removed and not be replaced for just one month so that the congregation could hear for itself whether this made any difference to their sanctuary's acoustics. The congregation agreed to the experiment, and before the designated trial period had concluded, they voted to sand and seal the wooden floor and leave all but the aisles uncarpeted, for the sounds of their piano, choir, and even congregational singing were remarkably improved by the more resonant acoustics of their sanctuary. Choirs now beg to perform in this sanctuary, the contemporary praise songs have a congregational ring to them, and amplified speaking is heard with ease.

"And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads,

who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid. "(Ezra 3:11-12)

These days, as I sit in the pews of one after another of our new churches in British Columbia, the story told by Ezra comes to mind. In Ezra's day the older people wept when realizing how much less significant the new temple was than the one so gloriously constructed by Solomon. Today, we older Mennonites lament the passing of the more resonant acoustics of our older sanctuaries and with it the enthusiasm for congregational singing regardless of repertoire.

A significant part of this acoustical transformation is directly attributed to our change in pew designs. The first (and perhaps least significant) change was that of adding padding to the seats of the pews (though I have yet to see a Mennonite bottom which requires additional padding). While padding the surfaces upon which we sit does not affect a room's acoustics when the congregation is seated in the fully-occupied sanctuary, it does dampen

congregational singing once the congregation rises to its feet, for the padding partly absorbs the singing of those people standing just above it one row back.

Far greater problems arise, however, when our congregations wish to save money by purchasing pews or chairs which are covered with padding on the front and carpet on the back. By placing carpeting on the pew's back (the side supporting the hymnal rack), we are ensuring that the voices of the people sitting behind each pew will be partially absorbed by the surfaces of the pews in front of them. This one money-saving feature of our modern church pews works with unbelievable efficiency at deadening each and every voice while singing or reading aloud from the pews. If you wish to kill congregational singing, be sure to buy these carpeted pews. Better still, put your carpeted pew on top of your wall-to-wall floor carpet. ☐

The conclusion of Evan Kreider's article follows in the next issue.

Shoo-Fly Pie

by Helen Rose Pauls

When the early Mennonite settlers came to North America by boat, they brought along staples that were non-perishable such as flour, brown sugar, molasses, salt, shortening and spices.

Waiting for the first harvest in the new land, settlers wives had to feed large families from the limited selection in their pantries. By filling a pie crust with a crumb and liquid mixture, they created a three-layered pie. It had a gooey bottom, a cake-like middle and a crumb topping. Baked and left to cool on the window sill or outdoors, these sweet pies sometimes attracted flies and the exclamation, "Shoo Fly!" became quite common. The name stuck and this pie is to the Swiss or Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites what "Platz" is to the Russian Mennonites.

Jean Friesen, wife of our archivist Hugo Friesen, has a Pennsylvania Dutch heritage and she baked two such pies from different recipes at our first planning meeting for the annual banquet.

Her recipes are included below. We each tasted both, and I voted for the second, but "Wet Bottom Shoo-Fly Pie" won out. Jean said that sometimes wives baked twenty-one pies on Saturday, one for each meal in the next week. "Shoo Fly" pie was a breakfast favorite. Pie safes on the porch helped keep the pies fresh and the flies away.

Wet Bottom Shoo-Fly Pie

Mix: 1 egg, beaten
2/3 cup corn syrup
3/4 cup boiling water with 1 tsp baking powder

Mix into crumbs:
7/8 cup flour
2/3 cup light brown sugar
2 Tbsp. shortening

Set aside one cup of crumb mixture. Stir remaining crumbs into liquid mixture. Do not beat. Pour into an unbaked 9" pastry shell. Sprinkle reserved crumbs over top. Bake at 375° for 10 min.; lower heat to 350° and bake for an additional 30 min.

Shoo Fly Pie

Top: mix into crumbs:

1 1/8 cups flour
3/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup Crisco
1/4 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. baking powder

Bottom:

1/4 tsp. baking soda
3/4 cup boiling water
3/4 cup molasses or corn syrup.

Mix baking soda with boiling water, add molasses. Do not stir. Pour into an unbaked 9" pie shell. Mix flour, sugar etc. into crumbs. Spoon the dry mixture into the juice. Bake at 425° for 5 minutes and 375° for 30 minutes. ☐

Recent Acquisitions

by Hugo Friesen

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

- South Poplar Cemetery lists from the South Abbotsford M.B. Church
- Original minutes of community meetings held in 1947 to establish the Greendale Cemetery, donated by Ben Braun.
- Cornelia Lehn and Sara Lehn Harder have donated their family files including biographies and genealogy plus copies of some of Cornelia's writing projects.
- History of the La Glace Bible School (1933 – 1946) donated by Helen Franz.
- Photo index of *In the Fullness of Time* by Walter Quiring and Helene Bartel, donated by Alfred Redekop.

DIARY

- Jacob C. Reimer kept a diary of his adventures in the Medical Corps Service, the Revolution and his emigration to Canada, 1915 – 1926. Translated by son Edgar Reimer, formerly of Greendale, who has donated copies to us.

FAMILY HISTORIES

- Wilhelm Hiebert (1847 – 1908) and Katharina Esau (1849 – 1940), donated by Dave & Irene Kroeker.
- George Dyck (1853 – 1937) and Anna Wiebe (1856 - 1926), donated by Evelyn Labun.
- Abraham Friesen (1823 – 1903) and Maria Heinrichs (1831 – 1904), donated by Richard and Connie Friesen.
- Cornelius C. Reimer (1892 – 1968), donated by Edgar Reimer.
- David Koslowsky (1769 – 1846) and Anna Wiebe (1792 – 1846), donated by Agatha Ratzlaff.
- Rogalsky/Janz family history book to 2005, donated by Linda Friesen.

BOOK

- The Story of Low German and Plautdietsch by Reuben Epp, *Tracing a Language Across the Globe*. This book will be of interest to someone looking for a definitive description of the origin and use of the language used by most "Russian" Mennonites. ☐

Book reviews: Joseph Stalin: Koba and Uncle Joe

by Louise Bergen Price

In 2002, I stood in Livadia Palace, where the infamous Yalta Conference took place between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, and listened with deep anger while our tour group leader told a 'funny' story about Stalin. Why, I wondered, does one still hear 'funny' stories about this ruthless killer? Why is it all right to have belonged to the Communist Party, but not to the Nazis? (For a more recent example, witness the furor of Prince Harry wearing a Nazi uniform to a party in January of this year. What if he had dressed as Lenin or Stalin? Would anyone have commented? And if not, why not?) Martin Amis's *Koba the Dread: laughter and the twenty million*. (Random House, 2002, 306 pp.) asks the same questions. Is there a moral difference between the 'Little Moustache' and the 'Big Mustache'? (Amis believes there is, but only because he *feels* it is so.) Why were so many intelligent people taken in by Stalin and the promises of "Uncle Joe?" How is possible that most Western reporters who toured Ukraine at the height of the famine stated that people in famine stricken areas were well fed, and those who reported the truth were scorned?

The litany of Stalin's crimes is horrific: torture, artificial famine, death marches, the Gulag prison camps. How many died? Although estimates vary, many historians believe the

number could reach twenty *million*.

Koba is not an objective history, but could be a good starting point for anyone wanting a readable, short book about Stalin and his times. It asks questions that need to be asked, but offers no easy answers.

Simon Sebag Montefiore's *Stalin; the Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Orion Bks, 2003. 720 pp.) tells a story of political intrigue and maneuvering that is so engrossing one can almost forget that the lives being juggled belong to real people. And yet, it brings to light a side of Stalin and of his 'court' that is more disturbing than Amis's *Koba*. Here are men who will stop at nothing for the Party, yet these same men show affection to their families, read important literature, listen to great works of music. Stalin loves his daughter, and is overwhelmed with grief at the death of his wife, Nadya.

Montefiore makes it clear that Stalin is responsible for millions of deaths: he also makes it clear that Stalin's henchmen, including Khrushchev, often exceeded the quotas for imprisonment and executions set by their leader. After Stalin's death, the only two of his inner circle who admitted to their part in the Terror were Khrushchev and Mikoyan, the others blaming Stalin or Beria for the 'excesses' of the Terror.

In spite of the broad scope of the book Montefiore's specific references brought the crimes of Stalin's regime home to me in a way that Amis's broad strokes could not. For example, "In the summer of 1933, Molotov received a report that a factory in Zaporozhe was producing defective combine harvester parts due to sabotage." (p.125) The factory was in the Mennonite suburb of Schoenwiese, and employed numerous Mennonites, including my grandfather, Johann Sawatzky. Montefiore does not tell us what punishment was meted out to the 'wreckers' in this case. Later, on p. 277, another reference that involves my family: "In 1938, 106,119 people were arrested in Khrushchev's Ukrainian Terror." 79 of that number came from Nieder Chortitza, 41 from Neuendorf. Both of my grandfathers are included in these numbers; neither was ever heard from again.

As his sources, Montefiore uses newly opened archives, as well as unpublished memoirs of members of Stalin's entourage and interviews with their relatives and children. His purpose, he says in his introduction, is to go beyond picturing Stalin as 'enigma, madman or Satanic genius.' "I hope Stalin becomes a more understandable and intimate character, if no less repellent." (xxiii)

Both books are available from local bookstores.

Annual General Meeting Notes

The 2005 Annual General Meeting (April 5) was planned in conjunction with a report by Ruth Derksen Siemens on the Peter Bergen Project. Bergen had preserved and transcribed over 700 letters received from family and friends in Russia from 1930-1970. Bergen passed away shortly after the video sessions were filmed; a documentary of these interviews is currently being produced. Derksen, an instructor in the English department at UBC, introduced the video project at the AGM, and showed a video clip. The MHS of BC hopes to show the complete video at a future event.

Researching the Reiseschuld (Travel Debt) Records

by Ron Isaak email: teched@direct.ca

In the last article we looked at the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC) records which provided us with Russia-to-Canada travel details on the arrival of the 1923-1930's Mennonite immigrants. On the CMBC family record cards were a family number and a folio number which were used to track the repayment of the travel debt or Reiseschuld.

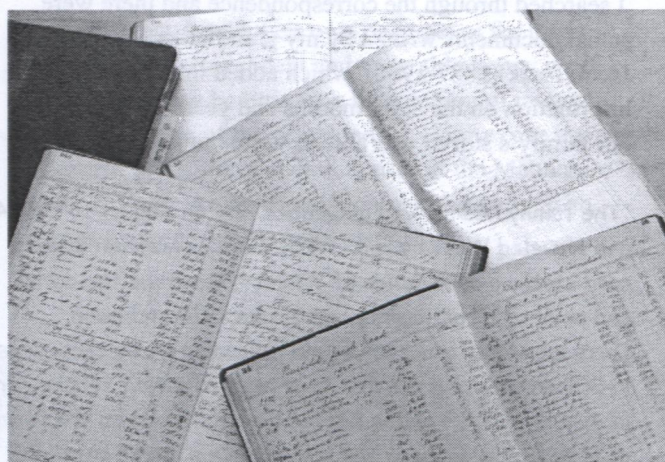
The following, from the Mennonite Encyclopedia On-Line, provides an introduction to the role of the CMBC, the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Mennonite Central Committee, the travel debt and the Mennonite immigrants.

The C.P.R. played a very important role in the history of the Canadian Mennonites. When the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia in October 1917, their political and economic dictatorship brought starvation to millions of Russians and persecution to the church. The Mennonites of Russia turned to their coreligionists in North America for help. In America the Mennonite Central Committee and in Canada the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization were organized. In the early 1920's the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization approached the C.P.R. with a proposal to move Mennonites from Russia to Canada on credit. This request was granted by the C.P.R., and from 1923 to 1930 over 21,000 Mennonites came, most of them on credit. This was a unique undertaking in the 400-year history of the Mennonites. A private business concern extended a credit of over 1.5 million dollars, without any security, to impoverished people for their transportation from Soviet Russia.

In the 1930s, the C.P.R. and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization renegotiated the debt, which, with the interest accrued, now totaled \$1,767,398.68. The C.P.R. agreed to cease charging further interest and, if the entire debt were repaid, to hold the \$180,000 already paid in interest in a Special Suspense Account for future transportation needs of refugees under the auspices of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. The last of the debt was finally paid off to the C.P.R. in November 1946. The C.P.R. continued to hold the \$180,000 in credit for the Board until 1951, when \$125,390.68 of the total was used for the transportation of 703 Danzig and Prussian Mennonite refugees.¹

There are numerous references and many 'mentions' of this travel debt in family histories, obituaries, etc. and it seemed to hang as a cloud over many of these immigrants. Peter Hamm stated "*The description of the typical Mennonite Brethren immigrant of the 1920's stands in marked contrast with that of a Canadian Mennonite Brethren today. He was known then for his few earthly possessions and frequently, a sizeable Reiseschuld. The average Mennonite Brethren of the 1920's was economically deprived and, because his immigrant status compelled him to be a farmer, was cast into a lower-class structure.*"²

I knew that my grandparents had a sizeable travel debt and had heard about it on occasion over the years. It was not until I actually reviewed the records that I started to comprehend the magnitude of this obligation and its impact on our family. The Reiseschuld financial ledgers and records are held at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg and may provide



Reiseschuld Ledgers (photo courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Centre)

¹ Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia On-Line, (search term) Canadian Pacific Railway Company <http://www.mhsc.ca/index.asp?content=http://www.mhsc.ca/encyclopedia/contents/D36ME.html>

² Hamm, Peter M., *Economic Ascendancy and the Mission of the Church*, Direction – A Mennonite Brethren Forum, Volume 7, No. 2, April 1978, www.directionjournal.org

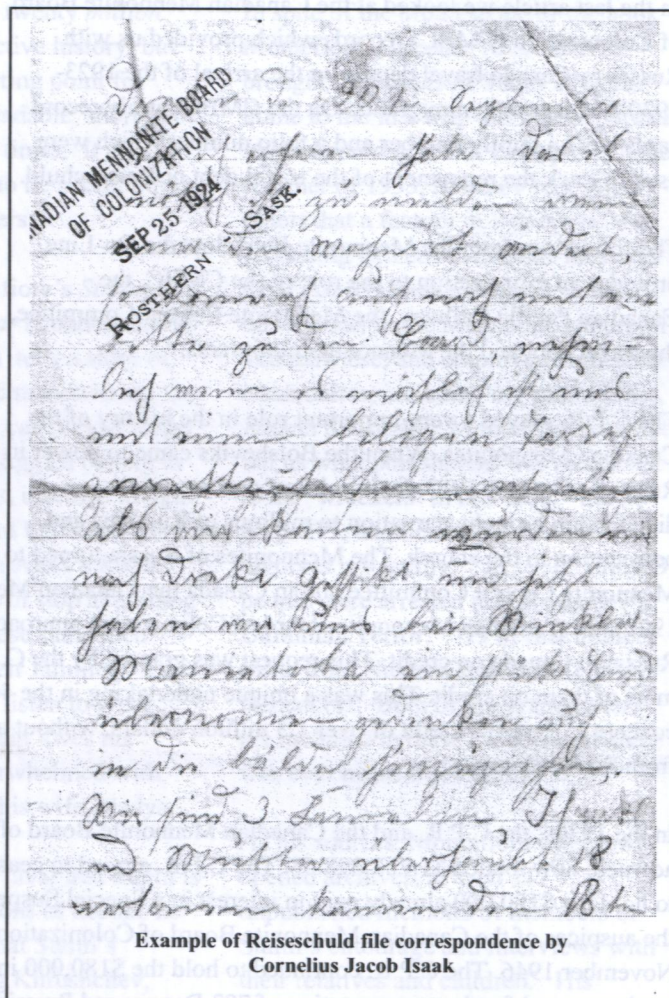
additional information for the family historian. I have made several trips there and was fascinated to find that in addition to the ledgers there are related miscellaneous correspondence files.

I searched through the correspondence and there were actual documents written by my grandfather, Cornelius Jacob Isaak (1887-1968), which added important information on the early months and years in Canada. For our family's story I was able to write the following:

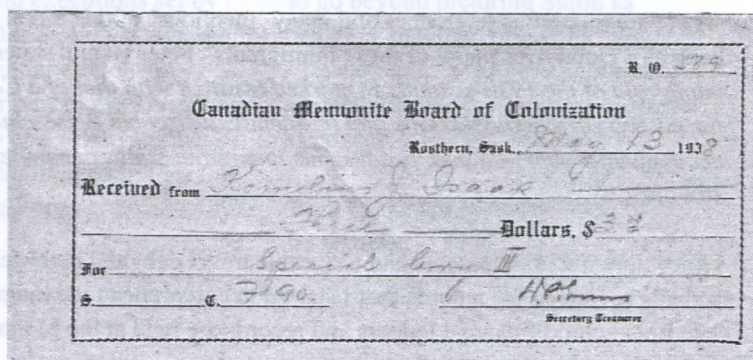
"The family had arrived in Quebec City on August 14th 1924 and traveled West by rail. While the Colonization Board card states a destination of Winkler, Manitoba the actual end point of a rail journey was Drake, Saskatchewan. Correspondence has been found regarding these early days in Canada and it shows that they resided with a Johann Funk in August of 1924 and in September they were on the farm of H.H. Bartel, working the harvest. In a letter dated 20 September 1924 Cornelius writes to the Colonization Board for assistance with relocation to the Winkler area in Manitoba. He writes "Since it is still possible to earn money here, two families (Aaron Jacob Isaac and John Jacob Isaac) will stay here and I and my family want to move to Winkler next week since seeding has to be done. My family numbers nine souls, the oldest two sons of mine, Jakob and Abram are staying here in Drake. My name is Kornelius Jakob Isaak..." and by September 26th they were about to move to Manitoba. Another letter indicates that the Cornelius Isaak family were applying for 'land seekers train rate' to travel from Drake, Saskatchewan to Winkler, Manitoba."³

Additional materials were found including notes sent with payments and receipts from the Colonization Board. The difficulties of the 1930's is clearly reflected as there was no money for payment and interest accumulated. In the case of my Isaak grandparents, they had arrived in Canada as credit passengers with their 7 children and initially owed a travel debt of \$936.78, a huge sum of money in those days. Following the ledger and sorting through the correspondence gave new insight into the family's struggle to pay the debt over the years. Finally, in November of 1942, the debt was paid off and it had amounted to a total of \$2,077.63.

The correspondence files are alphabetical and the contents are mixed so it takes some time to search



Example of Reiseschuld file correspondence by Cornelius Jacob Isaak



Example of a Reiseschuld receipt

³ Isaak, Ron, Taken from Chapter 7 of a draft Isaak Family history, the Descendants of Jacob Isaac, 1729-1805, unpublished.

through and find those items related to a particular family and ledger folio number. The best approach is to go to the archives and do the search yourself. However, if that is not possible then you can contact the Archive and enquire about someone doing the research for you for a fee.

MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE

600 Shaftesbury Blvd.

Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0M4

Tel: (204) 888-6781 Fax: (204) 831-5675

Email: archives@mennonitechurch.ca

Website: <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/heritage/>

For families who paid their own passage, or for those who had a small travel debt and were able to pay it off quickly there may be little new information of interest except for a copy of the actual ledger. In my case it was well worth the effort of spending time at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives in Winnipeg and gaining an increased respect for my grandparents. □

O Canada*

O Canada, mein Heim und Vaterland

Wie glücklich der, dem hier die Wiege stand!

Das Herz erglöh't, wenn wir dich seh'n

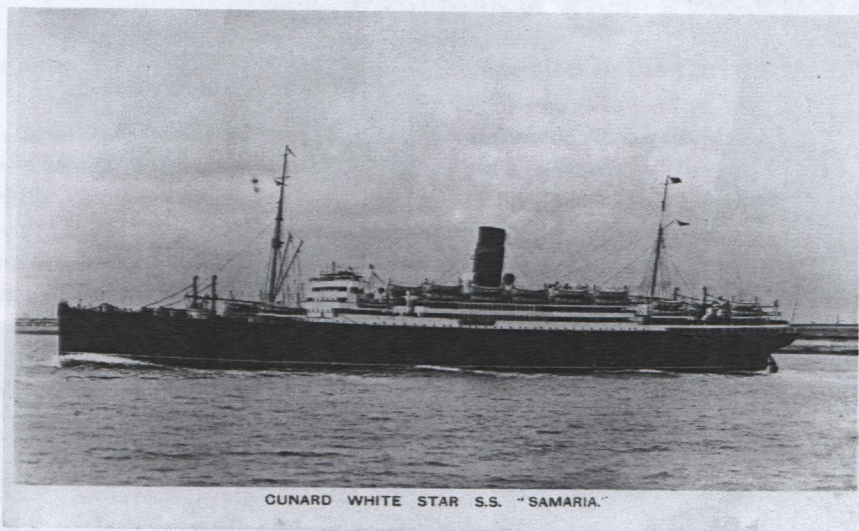
Du Nordland, stark und frei,

Wir halten Wacht, O Canada

Wir halten Wacht dir treu.

O Canada, O Canada, O Canada,

Wir halten Wacht dir treu.



*Source of translation unknown. Handwritten copy found in papers of Maria (Janzen) Peters, 1900-1994. The S. S. Samaria brought thousands of refugees to Canada after WW II, among them my own family. (Louise Bergen Price)

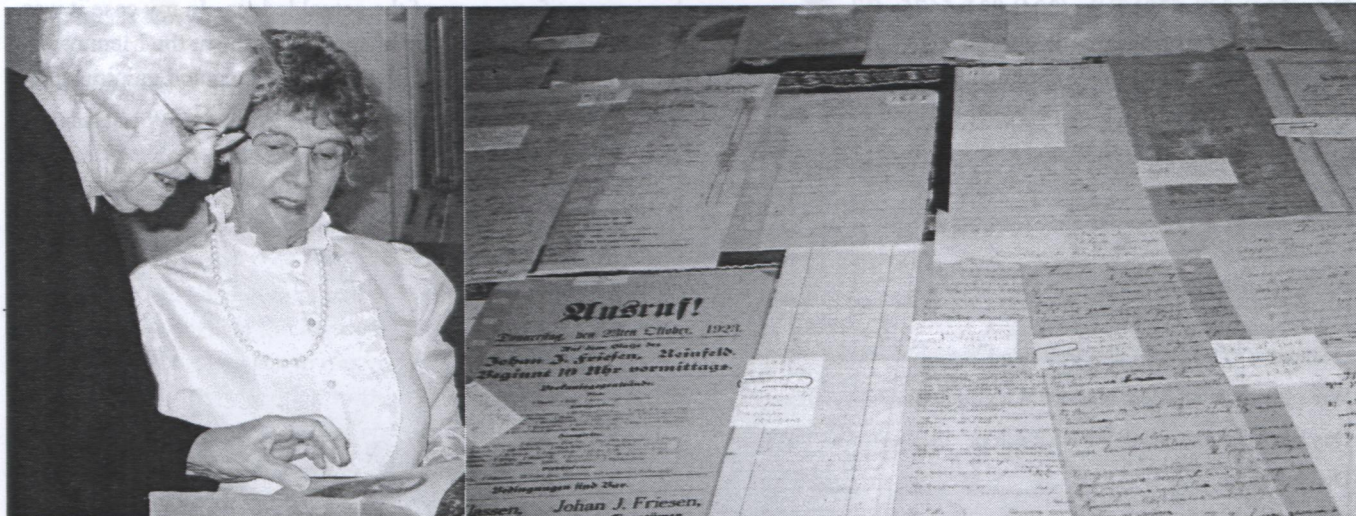
GAMEO : Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online **from a release by Sam Steiner**

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee and Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission have agreed to partner in the Encyclopedia to be launched by the end of 2005. Initially the Encyclopedia will be English language-only, focusing on North American content. Volunteers will scan and upload the 5-volume Mennonite Encyclopedia, and also be involved in writing and editorial work. Funding will be sought from individual, corporate and institutional donations to pay for core administrative work and to support GAMEO's expansion and maintenance. GAMEO is an expansion of the Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, and will incorporate the almost 2500 articles already in CMEO. <http://www.mhsc.ca/>.

Abe Dueck, Executive Director of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, said GAMEO's ultimate goal is to provide reliable information on all facets of Anabaptist Mennonite life, from 16th century Europe to 21st century Africa and Latin America. Unlike a print publication, GAMEO will continue to be updated and expanded as long as constituency support continues. Persons wishing to donate to GAMEO, to volunteer for writing or editorial work, or simply to stay informed on the progress of the Encyclopedia can contact any member of the Administrative Group (Bert Friesen (bfrie@mts.net); John Sharp (JohnS@MennoniteUSA.org); Abe Dueck (ajdueck@mbconf.ca); Sam Steiner (mhsc@uwaterloo.ca)).

Lydia's Museum

Imagine having a museum in your own home. Lydia Isaak has one, a 'permanent exhibit' in the basement of her Clearbrook townhouse, but it houses only a small part of her collection of photos, letters, clothing, artifacts—each item part of her family's history, each with its own story. (Some of these family stories have been featured in 'Letters from the Past' in the past 3 issues of this newsletter.) Occasionally, Lydia brings the contents of their storage boxes, labels them, arranges table and wall displays to fill the downstairs room, and invites people in. Here are some photos of 'Lydia's Museum'.



Top left: Lydia (in white blouse) with a guest. Top right: display of old documents, including family auction
Bottom left: Guests Betty and David Giesbrecht at 'permanent exhibit'. Right: old camera and childhood doll.
photos and story by Louise Bergen Price

² Isaak, Ron. Taken from Chapter 7 of a draft Isaak Family history, the Descendants of Jacob Isaak, 1774-1805, unpublished.