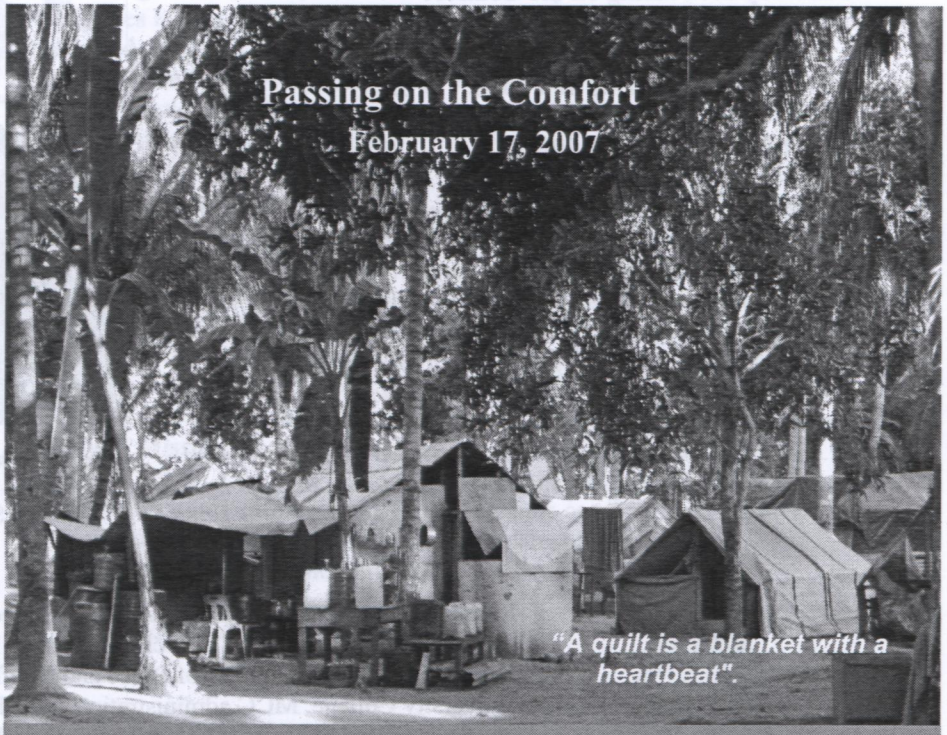
Volume 12 Number 3 December 2006

Roots and branches

Newsletter of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

"What we have heard and known we will tell the next generation."
Psalm 78



Quilt show, stories, silent auction 1-5 pm

Lecture: "The MCC Story: Engaging the world amid suffering and hope" with Ron Mathies, 7 pm

Garden Park Tower. See page 2 for details

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Editorial:

Careful readers might note that the wording of the motto has been changed from previous newsletters from 'heard and seen' to 'heard and known', the formal motto of the Society. 'A small matter,' Ed Hildebrandt said, pointing out our previous error. But indeed, an important one. Here is the complete text (NRSV) "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark saying from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done." Psalm 78: 2-4.

There is much to celebrate in our history. For many of us, the work of the Mennonite Central Committee is core to what we stand for and believe in as Mennonites—to profess our obedience in action, not words. Each week, women in many communities gather to sew quilts for those in need. At our February event, we will have a display to celebrate quilts, both practical and artistic, along with our evening lecture on the beginnings of MCC and its continuing work. Let's tell our children of the good that has been done to us, and encourage them to continue in this work. LBP

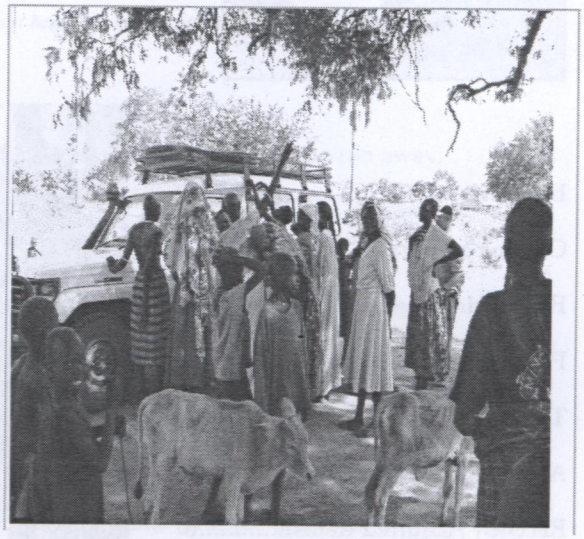
Coming events

February 17: Passing on the Comfort

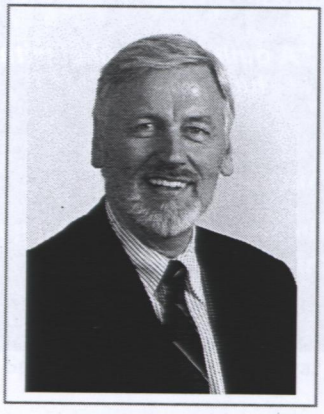
- **Quilt show, story telling, silent auction 1-5 pm**
- **Lecture, "The MCC story: Engaging the world amid suffering and hope." 7 pm**

About the lecture:

It has been said that MCC was born and is reborn in valleys of tragedy. We are living in a time of widespread injustice, poverty, natural disaster, war and despair. Through description, analysis and pictures, Mathies will reflect on some of the highlights and hard issues faced by MCC in the past decade, will look at some of the current major global issues to which MCC is responding, and discuss some of the critical issues of MCC's ongoing mission. Illustrations of MCC work he has visited most recently will be provided from the tsunami response in Indonesia and the war rehabilitation in Sudan.



Some of the expected 4 million Internally Displaced People (IDP) or refugees returning to Southern Sudan after the 50 year war.



Ron Mathies recently completed almost four decades of service within North American and international church contexts, as Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee, Director of Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel University College, MCC administration and education in southern Africa, and governance leadership of MCC at the provincial, national and international levels.

Last academic year he was the Sawatsky visiting professor at Conrad Grebel. He is currently a Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) as well as doing international development consulting. He has lived in five countries and traveled in almost ninety. He received his doctorate from the University of Toronto, with earlier degrees from the Universities of Waterloo and Guelph. He and his wife Gudrun, an educator and pastoral care giver, have three adult children and one grandchild.

Roots and Branches is a publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC and is mailed three times per year to those who donate $25.00 or more per year. All donations will be receipted for tax purposes. Your contributions are needed to further this work!
Directors: Ben Braun, David Giesbrecht, Ed Hildebrand, John Konrad, Robert Martens, Peter Neudorf, Helen Rose Pauls, Louise Bergen Price, Lora Sawatsky, Ben Stobbe, Richard Thiessen & John B. Toews. **Editor**: Louise Bergen Price. Contributing editors: Helen Rose Pauls & Robert Martens **Archive Director:** David Giesbrecht **Staff**: Mary Ann Quiring

CAOBO Russian Land "Restitution" Plan; October 2006 Update

by John Konrad, President, MHSBC

The Proposal as outlined in our April 2006 Newsletter

We reported that solicitations have been made to persons with "Mennonite" names in Canada and the US inviting them to participate in a plan for restitution and development of Mennonite lands in Ukraine. The project is driven by Paul H. Willms, chief executive officer of a company CAOBO, and a Ukrainian associate, Boris Tankhilevich, president. Both are shareholders of this Everett, Washington real estate development company, incorporated in Delaware for this specific purpose. The plan was to negotiate with the Ukrainian government the conveyance to CAOBO all of the lands generally in the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies (over one million acres) on the basis that they were **forcibly** confiscated from Mennonite landowners by the Soviet Regime.

Our recommendation was that descendants of former Mennonite land owners reject any appeal for subscriptions by CAOBO to invest in the proposed business venture because it was ill conceived, almost certain to fail and inconsistent with Mennonite values. Such effort would harm humanitarian efforts currently underway by our Mennonite institutions in the region.

Update

Complaints have been filed with several securities commissions in Canada drawing attention to this scheme, requesting that they investigate and take appropriate action to shut down any efforts to solicit funds from Canadians, as the documents that describe the venture are highly misleading and, according to our advice, violate securities laws in Canada. We have received responses from Manitoba and BC. The latter's response, based on information they have received, is that it does not appear that any BC residents have purchased securities in CAOBO. BC Security Commission has cautioned principals of CAOBO not to violate BC securities legislation. They have also alerted securities commissions in other jurisdictions. Manitoba gave a similar response.

State of Missouri Action

State of Missouri enforcement officials have investigated this company and have held hearings to determine the facts. They have determined that at least 159 persons have been solicited in Missouri and that there have been multiple violations of state law. Enforcement officials have petitioned for a fine of up to $10,000 against each individual **principal of CAOBO** and for assessment of the costs incurred by the regulators in pursuing this action. A decision is pending on the fines.

Our Current Assessment

We understand that Willms has recently sent out a batch letter which seems to end this scheme, no doubt reflecting actions taken by State and Provincial enforcement officials in response to complaints from our constituency. In the mean-time word has reached us that a Ukraine Internal Security agent has visited the Mennonite Center in Molochansk to inquire about the Center's connection with Caobo.

We conclude therefore that this scheme is dead and that no further action should be anticipated. If anyone has had contact with CAOBO officials in the last several months or after receiving this update, please call us. jikonrad@telus.net

Fall fundraising banquet report:

Mennonites in the Stalinist era or Impossibly Stubborn Mennonites, by Henry Neufeld

The idea of "separate" Mennonite colonies in the Soviet Union is inaccurate, said Dr. Harvey Dyck; Mennonites participated fully in the world of commerce and education. This era of prosperity ended after World War I.

Dr. Dyck, Professor Emeritus of eastern European history at the University of Toronto, spoke to over 400 at the MHS of BCs annual fundraising banquet at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church on October 14.

Focussing on Mennonites in the USSR during the Stalinist era, Dyck noted that a third of the Mennonites perished in the USSR in the 1930s and 1940s. Dyck based his comments on unpublished documents found in Russian archives. "I thought Mennonites, as a small group, would be mentioned in passing [in the archival material]; I found the opposite to be true, in the 1920s in Ukraine there was an obsession with Mennonites – they were impossibly stubborn," said Dyck.

State officials were concerned about the failure of the Communist party to get Mennonites to join the party; Mennonite loyalty was directed to their own organizations – the church, choirs, and youth groups. The Mennonites were a strong group and a rival to the state and the party. The Communists were proud of their revolutionary success and there was pressure to bear down on these resistant Mennonites. Mennonites and Baptists were considered a great danger to the state.

Deportations and purges affected all sections of the Russian population, but focussed more heavily on Germans, Poles and Mennonites. Half of all adult Mennonite males were executed; others were exiled as slave workers. Major purges started in 1933 with the imprisonment of 100 Mennonite leaders.

Dyck described the experiences of one of these men: Jacob Neufeld of Molotschna. (Neufeld's memoirs are to be translated and published.)

On November 24, two secret policemen came to Neufeld's door and asked him to come to the station to "clear up a few questions."

Over the next four months Neufeld was subjected to numerous midnight interrogations in attempts to extract a confession. He was isolated from his family, deprived of sleep, suffered from untreated boils. His interrogators tried various forms of entrapment. He was told accusations had been established against him and if he confessed the state would respond with mercy, otherwise he would face harsh punishment. He was accused of espionage and of possessing subversive materials and implicated in a conspiracy. Neufeld refuted all these charges and refused to sign a confession. He was then threatened with torture and death. When told that his children would be expelled from the community, he said he'd do anything to prevent this except confess to false charges. When he learned that his best friend made a false confession implicating him, Neufeld returned to his cell full of sadness, confusion and despair. He begged God for strength and renewed his commitment to God.

The next night Neufeld was told that the other Mennonite men had signed 'confessions.' Nine of these 'confessors' were subsequently sentenced to death, the others to three to ten years of labour in northern camps. Neufeld was sentenced to five years, which he served in Siberia and in the eastern Arctic. In February 1939, Neufeld started his homeward journey, only to find an overgrown yard; everything was dilapidated and neglected. The Mennonite world he had known had changed forever.

The evening also featured harp music by Evelyn Loewen and a delicious dinner prepared by a group from the Eben-Ezer church. Thanks were expressed to Dr. Dyck who for over 15 years has pioneered the retrieval of Mennonite material from the archives.

From Dogmatism to Mindless Tolerance: Mennonites in the Last Century.
by Henry Neufeld.

This was a remarkable and historical event that happens too rarely. On a rainy fall evening at Abbotsford's Bakerview MB church, over 100 people gathered to hear two elder statesmen from Canada's largest Mennonite groups reflect on the faith communities that nurtured them and the changes they've seen in recent decades, an event organized by the Mennonite Historical Society of BC.

John Neufeld is a former Winnipeg pastor and president of Canadian Mennonite Bible College; David Ewert a well-known and esteemed Mennonite Brethren New Testament scholar. Neufeld and Ewert reflected on the changes in their denominations and personal lives. "Life is not static but demanding… a continuous process of learning, changing, and hopefully maturing," said Neufeld. This is true about congregations as well as individuals.

Relying largely on official MB documents, David Ewert focussed on significant changes in MB theology and ethics in the past half century. Scripture is unchanging, Ewert said, but our understanding of Scripture changes. Major issues in MB circles included eternal security, teachings on the "end times" and dispensationalism, the charismatic movement and spiritual elitism, creation and science, baptism, homosexuality, the role of women in the church, scriptural inerrancy, abortion, divorce and remarriage, and spiritual warfare. Such matters were referred to the MB Board of Faith and Life, and eventually resulted in recommendations to national MB conventions. Ewert reviewed MB positions on these issues. "We have come through a rather stormy half century," he said.

On science and creation Ewert observed that the God of creation and the God of the Bible are the same. "It was recognized that the

Bible is not a text book on biology, geology or astronomy, but is a history of salvation… (and) that the age of this earth cannot be established on the basis of the genealogies of Genesis."

Regarding baptism Ewert noted that MBs have moved from a rigid adherence to baptism by immersion to the acceptance as full members of those baptized by other means. More recently the issue of baptism and church membership has become controversial, with a recommendation that the two be linked in keeping with New Testament teachings.

In discussing the role of women in the church Ewert noted an important principle: "when the scriptures point in two different directions it is not proper to choose one or the other emphasis alone; both have to be taken into account." Thus the Biblical rationale for changing the role of women was based in part on the view that the restrictive passages of the NT were culturally determined. As well, it was felt that the freedom the gospel offered pointed to a time when it would be acceptable for women to assume leadership positions.

On the issue of inerrancy of Scripture, Ewert stressed we "should not get hung up on definitions of interpretation," rather we should be challenged to live under the authority of the word of God.

Responding to Ewert's presentation, Bruce Guenther from ACTS seminary in Langley noted that MBs have changed their positions on some issues identified by Ewert. "If scripture hasn't changed, what has changed?" he asked. Guenther expressed appreciation for MB study conferences on issues prior to decisions being made, reflecting a community based hermeneutic. He wondered why MBs have been absent from the development of an Anabaptist theology. "We focus on personal ethics, not social ethics… why can't MBs name the idolatries, the principalities and powers?" he asked.

John Neufeld drew on his experiences of growing up in a relatively closed community in the Fraser Valley, where conformity and tradition were valued, and where home, school, and community together helped internalize values. Church leaders knew the truth and enforced it for the sake of social cohesion. "Outsiders were viewed with suspicion or disdain," said Neufeld. Biblical admonishments "not be conformed to the world" and to be "in the world but not of it" were common. Neufeld speculated that most of us have not heard a sermon on non-conformity in ten years.

Neufeld recalled the contentious issue of transition from German to English and the pressure to be able to identify a specific personal conversion time. He observed that there is an increase in biblical illiteracy in our congregations.

Secularization, pluralism, relativism, individualism, affluence, mobility and the impact of the media describe our current cultural context, said Neufeld. "Our culture has left its mark on each of us, probably more than we realize. We have moved from certainty to ambiguity, from dogmatism to mindless tolerance, from clarity about nonconformity to ambivalence, from separation from the world to unthinking and unchallenged assimilation."

Ethical issues are no longer black and white. "People were utterly sincere, but in retrospect they were sincerely wrong on a number of counts," he said, wryly adding that 60 years from now people might say the same thing about him. He blamed past rigidity on a dogmatic certainty that claimed to know exactly what the Bible taught on any issue.

In the future, suggested Neufeld, our thinking about morality and ethics might need to be more oriented to Jesus' teaching than to our traditions. "The Bible as the inspired word of God is more important to me than earlier, said Neufeld, calling on pastors and teachers to "share what we know and believe about the Bible as a whole with congregations."

In responding to Neufeld, Columbia Bible College faculty member Gareth Brandt noted that the plagues of individualism and Biblicism continue to this day. He also said churches are not speaking out enough about our culture of violence. Brandt pointed to the recent actions of the Amish who showed the most effective witness: the witness of love.

Neufeld said the Jewish experience in Babylonian exile is instructive: don't just drink from the cultural well of Babylon, learn as well from that which preceded you. Church history is important not only for nostalgic yearnings for the past but also to teach us about the present. The past is not always pretty. Examining past events helps us look to the future. While individuals, congregations and denominations will continue to face doctrinal disputes and division, we have Jesus' assurance: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

MHS of BC is to be commended for their prophetic courage in planning this event. Sadly, current BC Mennonite pastors were virtually absent at this event. They also need Isaiah's reminder: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the rock from which you were dug." (Isaiah 51:1)

Archive Corner: A Tribute to Jake Geddert
by David Giesbrecht

Jake and Mary Geddert

Without the very significant contributions of some thirty volunteers, the ongoing operation of our archival center would not be possible.

For close to six years now, Jake Geddert has faithfully donated a part of each week to MHS of BC. Jake enjoys volunteering, and does so elsewhere as well. His work in our Centre offers him an opportunity to continue using his professional skills, and in so doing, serving the community in which he and wife Mary live. In return, he appreciates the camaraderie which fosters that strong bond which exists among all of our volunteers.

Jake brings extensive training and experience in library work to our Centre. It was therefore a natural for him to take on responsibility for cataloguing new books and entering them in our Resource Mate library software. In addition to library duties, Jake also became extensively involved in scanning and identifying photographs for our archival collection and creating a new data base of marriage announcements as they appear in the MB Herald.

Sadly, Jake's volunteering at our Center will soon come to an end as he and Mary anticipate a move to Kelowna in order to live near their children. We will miss Jake. He has been a much valued, dependable colleague who brought with him a good sense of judgment and a lively humor.

We wish Jake and Mary Geddert well in making this transition and will always welcome them back whenever they visit Abbotsford.

Recently Acquired Items

Twenty-six additional EWZ files (Einwanderungszentrale) donated by Tim Janzen.

For sale:

1. *Between Worlds Recollection of a Soviet-born Canadian Mennonite* by Harry Loewen. Pandora, 2006. $35.00.
2. *Constantinoplers Escape from Bolshevism*. Editor: Irmgard Epp, Trafford, 2006. $31.00
3. *David Toews Was Here 1870 – 1947*, 2nd edited by Helmut Harder. CMU Press, 2006. $34.00
4. *Half In The Sun; Anthology of Mennonite Writing*. Editor: Elsie K. Neufeld, Ronsdale, 2006, $20.00.
5. *In Defence of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I*. Abraham Friesen, Kindred Press, 2006. $40.00
6. *Stories In Sepia; A Memoir of Grace* by Connie (Letkeman) Braun Abbotsford Printing, 2006. $28.00.
7. *Third Daughter: Living in a Global Village* by Hilda J. Born. Imprint Press, 2006. $25.00.

Queries

I am planning a trip to central Asia and would welcome information from anyone who has visited the sites of Mennonite villages settled in the 1880s: Gnadenfeld, Koppental, Gnadental and Nikolaipol in the Talas Valley near Aulie Ata; and Ak Methchet near Khiva. Jim Juhnke, Bethel College, North Newton, KS 67117 <juhnke@bethelks.edu>

We are looking for names and addresses of relatives of Otto David Rempel born 3 Dec 1924 in Main Centre, SK and died 27 Dec 1945. His father was David J. Rempel & his mother was Anna Cornelsen Rempel. If you have any information please call us at 604-853-6177 or email us: archives@mhsbc.com.

Jennifer Dijk: a profile

by Robert Martens

In our western culture that is fixated on the moment, students of history sometimes seem a vanishing species. Jennifer Dijk is a refreshing counterpoint to that trend. She has received a scholarship from the Mennonite Historical Society for her work in advancing the preservation of Mennonite history.

Jennifer was raised in a very close extended family. Their closeness is perhaps exceptional even among Mennonites who have long stressed the importance of kin and community, but has enabled Jennifer's family to overcome some serious difficulties together. "We've had to work at it to make sure it stays strong," she says. Jennifer is an energetic, confident and probing thinker. When a topic of interest is injected into the conversation, there is little need to encourage her to speak her mind. Her enthusiasm seems spontaneous.

Jennifer has been working towards a bachelor's degree at University College of the Fraser Valley. She first enrolled in university intending to major in English literature, but found that she was getting better marks in history. Besides, that was where her heart lay. History, she says, "is like a big puzzle. You know the outcome but not how you got there." Jennifer believes that the study of history is somewhat like psychoanalysis on a mass scale, that history is simply individual behaviour multiplied. Thus its importance. "We tend to think history is irrelevant," she says, "but how our society is structured is based on our reaction to the past." In that sense, the study of history can influence our future. We as a culture could change our behaviour if we were honest about our past mistakes. "Not that we actually listen to it," Jennifer remarks.

The beginnings of her scholarship-winning project lay in a UCFV course called Applied Studies in History. It was a two-semester course, the first having to do with how history is taught outside of academia, for example in historical societies, videos, popular narratives. The second semester consisted of a practicum, and this is where her interview project entered. Since Jennifer is interested in Mennonite theology, and since her grandparents have their roots in the mass Mennonite flight from Russia after the Revolution, it was her desire to preserve some of those immigrant stories on tape. Jennifer would have liked to chronicle her great-grandfather's story but, as so frequently happens, it was too late for that, so she turned to the narratives of other individuals. She interviewed her grandparents, and then talked to others, mainly residents of Greendale. Greendale was chosen primarily for its convenience: its close proximity to home, and its Mennonite immigrants known to her family. Word of mouth was used as a search engine for interviewees.

Jennifer approached the Mennonite Historical Society for help with her project. She initially found its representatives a little quizzical about what she might do or say. Someone, however, suggested board member John Toews as her mentor and advisor; he consented, and "the rest is history."

Interviewees told stories from a multitude of perspectives. One individual, for example, was only six years of age when she immigrated to Canada. The stories of the two main flows of Russian Mennonite immigration, that is, of the 1920s and 1940s, were very different in tone. Some individuals needed some encouragement. "They didn't think they had anything important to say, and I had to convince them," remarks Jennifer, "but once a story was started, they were alright." Interviewees were often impressed that a person so young might be interested in their narratives.

In the process Jennifer learned a great deal about oral histories. "I learned that history is a lot more complicated than in the history books," she says. Her approach to this project emanates from an admiration for the strength of Mennonite immigrants, and seeks to avoid the sense of victimization that frequently pervades contemporary historical research. "So much history is of the oppressed these days," says Jennifer, "but these people didn't see it that way." One female interviewee "didn't feel discriminated against, but she felt she was equal to men." A male interviewee was asked if he experienced discrimination. Yes, he replied, not from mainstream Canadians, but from other Mennonites. This happened because he belonged to the 1940s stream of immigration, and those who arrived earlier apparently considered him a threat to their jobs. This man, however, apparently did not nurture any resentment.

But were there genuine problems of discrimination at the time? "I think there was discrimination, but was it

important at the time? It depends on the experience," says Jennifer. "What's important to us now may have felt less important back then – immigrants were so focused just on making a living." Social relationships, she believes, are often not so much an objective fact as a state of mind. "You tend to make judgment calls, when it's not necessarily the case for that particular person – it depends on how that person regarded it."

Jennifer's interviewees talked little about the conflict between General Conference and Mennonite Brethren churches. "Most of the time," she says, "it wasn't a big part of their lives." As children, Mennonites connected with both denominations attended school together and became friends. Only as adults did they begin to grow apart, after baptism into their respective congregations.

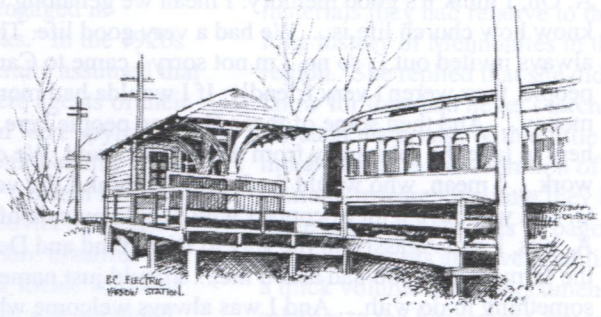
Jennifer is attending Canadian Mennonite University this year, where she can pursue her study of history, but will be able to study theology as well, "just for fun," she says, and smiles. "I like to know what I believe," declares Jennifer, "and why I believe it." In the tradition of good scholarship, she analyzes both sides of a debate. "I tend to play the double advocate,"she says, "I don't believe something just because my parents believed it."

Excerpts from Jennifer Dijk's interviews

Helena Braun

Q: When were you born and where?
A. I was born in 1924 in Saskatchewan, but I only lived there for about 6 months and my parents moved to Manitoba....
Q. What was life like there?
A. ...Our parents came from the old country with nothing and so they were on a rented farm ... a farm with everything, they raised cattle and animals and chickens and whatever they could, so we grew up on the farm and worked along with our parents.... We were very free. Our parents were not too strict – they taught us how to work but ... they let us have a lot of free time, so I remember roaming in the woods and picking crocuses along the fence and watching gophers and things like that in the early years....
Q. Where did you go to school [near Steinbach]?
A. ...We went to a lovely little school, a one room school called Good Hope, and there were 8 grades in the room, so we had a very good education, we had excellent teachers. And they tried to keep us well occupied and when you are in a room with other grades, you are always listening in, so we were thoroughly grounded.... Then later on ... I went to the convent, grade 10 and 11, and that was run by the grey nuns. That was a very fine school too....
Q. Where did you go to get your teaching license?
A. Oh, that was very interesting. It was war time when I graduated from the MCI in Gretna and they needed teachers so badly they offered grade 12 students a short course, a crash course, at the university in Winnipeg, and then they assigned us to schools for the first year, so we were called permit teachers....
Q. And can you tell me about your decision to come to the Fraser Valley?
A. Well, really it was because my parents moved. They moved in '46, and I stayed out there to finish out my teaching year, and so when I came to visit them at Christmas time, the private school in Greendale needed a teacher for next year and they asked me whether I would be interested, and I thought I would be.... I was very interested in teaching, I loved teaching. So it didn't really matter to me very much where I taught....
Q. So what kind of wage did you get?
A. ...When I came to BC my first wages were $1600.00 a year! (laughter) Not a week!... I was taught or raised to be very frugal.... During the thirties, everybody didn't have money.... You didn't feel poor, just didn't have things.... We didn't clamour for things. We had to learn to do without....
Q. So where did you live when you moved?
A. I lived with my parents ... on Sumas Prairie Road.... My parents had gone to BC [1947] to get away from a very cold and adverse climate and ended up the next year with the flood. And then 12 feet of water in their place. And my year of teaching was cut short because the flood came the 1st of June, so that summer I worked for the Red Cross....
Q. How did your role as a woman influence your daily life – what you could do in the community and also in your job?
A. ...I think I had the advantage being a single girl, of having a profession. I was considered a professional. And it was easier for men to talk to me ... than if I had just been anybody. I sort of had a good job, I was competent in a way, and I felt well respected, well received in the district, and in the church too.... My mother complained that once for 2 weeks, I had never had one evening at home, I was in church every evening. But ... you shared in people's lives, we sang at all the weddings and funerals ... and it was a close community....

Q. So how did [the lay pastors] make a living?
A. All of them had their own property, their own farms. Rev. Dueck had a dairy farm. And Rev. Harder did too, I think.... Those ministers were so dedicated. I remember Rev. Dueck saying one time he had made 200 trips to Vancouver in a year – unpaid. And he still had to milk his cows and keep his dairy farm going....
Q. How did you relate to others outside of Greendale?
A. ...When our Mennonite people [made] sort of a closed Mennonite settlement, there was some resentment from the outside.... One of the men who had been in the air force overseas ... was angry with them and ... said when the flood came that the dyke should have been broken and all those people should have been drowned.... Later on they apologized for their attitude....
Q. So you were saying that your work changed in the sixties then?
A. Well, I became a principal ... of several schools for about 15 years. And then I was asked to be the primary consultant for the area, and that was the first time anybody had been a consultant, so it was sort of pioneering that work.... Later on I joined MCC.... I offered my services for overseas, and I could do that – not being tied down at home.



From 1910 to 1950, thousands of people in the lower mainland used BC Electric to move farm goods to market and to travel from place to place. This was Yarrow station.

Notecard for sale at the Archive office.

Frank Hildebrandt

Q. Can you tell us a bit about yourself?
A. ...I was born 1925, July 25 in Neuendorf in the Ukraine.... Our teacher in our village was all German. We had a couple hours a week we had Russian.... We worked on a community farm. You had to go to work just like here on a job and you didn't get paid.... At the end of the year they paid you with grain and the money they paid you, you had to pay back to the government again.... There was about seven villages with all German people.... There was no school 1941 – the war started in June ... and the school was out, we had to move out ... of the village but we came back after the Russian army had left us and the Germans came in ... and then we could go back to the village again and live our normal life again....
Q. Why were you brought to Germany?
A. Well, because we were all afraid that when the Russians came back they would all murder us.... So that's why the Germans ... took all the German people from the Ukraine and Russia as far as the German army went into Russia and they tried to bring all the Germans back again.... We all had to walk, but I didn't have to walk – I was driving the team of horses but my sisters and mom, they were all walking. Day and night we walked – we walked the first 2 days, no stopping. We stopped a little bit for feeding horses, and then we walked and walked and walked. We were walking behind the wagons just like asleep. Hanging on to something and walking....
Q. What made you decide to come to Canada?
A. Well, there was no future in Europe. Germany was all busted up.... The whole ship was immigrants.... We went across the channel to England ... and then we took the big trip to Halifax – 9 days! We landed in Mission on the train, CPR, and then we moved to Sardis....
Q. What were some of your first impressions of BC?
A. Well, I tell you, not very good! (laughter) I couldn't speak the language you know and if you can't speak the language you're just about a dumb guy,... you can't talk to anybody and you want to go buy groceries,... you had to ask for everything.... But we managed and then when we were here for a while I started studying English myself,... I got books and started reading it. Back then you couldn't go to school, you didn't have no money, and the government didn't help you.... I worked at the dyke after the flood, that was a government job, we would get 90 cents an hour.... And in two months I saved enough money up to pay for my boat fare.... It [temporary residence] was just an old rough cabin, shiplap floors. Our son, he was crawling.... In the evening give him a bath and put him to bed, [my wife] always checked the legs and there was always slivers in them – that's how rough it was, and this is the honest truth.
Q. So what are some of your memories of the community of Greendale?

A. Oh, I think it's good memory. I mean we get along with all the people and associate with all the people and – you know how church life is.... We had a very good life. There's not too many days we spent at home, nights. No, we always invited out,... so no, I'm not sorry I came to Canada. First, I'll tell you,... I couldn't speak the language and people, they weren't very friendly. If I woulda had money I would have went back to Germany. But I didn't have money.... And then some of these German people here, they spoke English, and they always told us ... we just came here to take the jobs away from them. And I said, We don't, and what are you going to do, I mean, you have to work.... I mean, who would feed you?... I think I did very good in this country....
Q. Did you have a lot of contact with people outside of the Greendale community?
A. Yes. From Agassiz all the way to Richmond and Delta [in his capacity as employee for Fraser Vale Growers]. All the farmers,... if you had asked me,... I could just name about every farmer in the Fraser Valley what I had something to do with.... And I was always welcome when I went to see them, I always sit down,... usually they invite me in for a cup of coffee and they sit and talk round the table. And in the spring there was 2 months where I made contracts with different growers.... We ran 3 shifts. We had up to 500 people working at Fraser Vale....
Q. So what role did music play in the church?
A. Music? Well, I always enjoyed music, we always had a choir sing in church,... but lately this overhead singing, that's the pits, for me.... I mean we are not pushing this overhead singing away, I mean the older people we tried to have at least one or two songs out of the hymnody, you know, I mean the songs that we know the Christians were singing years ago.... Honestly, when they sing a song out of the hymnody, then you hear the voices coming and that's good singing.... This overhead singing, how can you sing bass or tenor,... it doesn't work that way very good with them songs....

Moscow Archives

by Paul Toews

This past December I stood on a street in Moscow clutching five big boxes with 101 rolls of microfilm. It was a very cold afternoon. The wind was howling, the temperature well below zero and yet it was a moment of great exhilaration and satisfaction. For in the five boxes was the most extensive collection of materials, created by Mennonites during the early Soviet period, that to date has been retrieved from archives in Russia and Ukraine. The films acquired after a very long and frustrating set of negotiations with the State Archive of the Russian Federation (the national archives of Russia) are records of the work of the Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein (All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union) and American Mennonite Relief during the 1920s.

The All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union (AMLV) was an organization created in 1922 by a meeting of representatives from various communities across European and Siberian Russia. The original intent of those who gathered was to create an organizational structure by which Mennonites could stay in contact on many different issues. Soviet regulations did not permit the co-mingling of economic and religious interests so the Union was registered as an economic entity. Its chief task was to insure survival in the face of a widespread famine and to assist the economic reconstruction of Mennonite communities that had suffered substantial decline because of the First World War, the civil war that followed and early Soviet policies. With nineteen chapters and fifty-six sub-chapters scattered across vast sections of Russia and Ukraine, the Union worked to improve seed and livestock in these communities and to facilitate the marketing of produce. The minutes of the local chapters provide us with vivid descriptions of the desperate economic conditions in many communities. The correspondence between the chapter leaders and the central office in Moscow gives us insight into the their collective efforts at rebuilding.

Paul Toews and Larissa Rogovaya, Assistant Director, Archive of the Russian Federation.

If the charter of the Union stipulated economic activity, its real function among Mennonites was much more. It was a means to maintain contact, to collectively resist the intrusiveness of the new Soviet order, and to reinforce solidarity in an increasingly hostile environment. It also played a central role in the emigration of 20,000 Mennonites who left the Soviet Union during the 1920s.

In 1920 North American Mennonites responded to the

starvation facing their co-religionists in Russia by creating Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). American Mennonite Relief (AMR) was the vehicle by which they brought food, medicines, clothing, seeds and ultimately also agricultural machinery to Russia and Ukraine. AMR worked under the general administration of the American Relief Administration organized by Herbert Hoover and along side the International Red Cross and many relief organizations that sought to forestall the effects of a widespread famine. AMR, while technically a relief agency, brought much more. The AMR personnel brought assurances that the Russian Mennonites would not be cut off from the outside world. They brought solidarity and cooperation with Mennonites elsewhere.

The offices of both agencies were closed and in 1928 the records were seized by the Soviet government. The archives do not reveal which Soviet agency took the records. No doubt it was the NKVD (the predecessor to the KGB) for they were both interested in, and suspicious of, agencies that had religious and foreign connections. From discussions with the personnel at the State Archive of the Russian Federation it is apparent that the NKVD kept the materials till 1951. Then both collections were turned over to the Central State Archive of Ancient Documents. In 1953 they were sent to the Central State Archive of the October Revolution and Social Construction of the USSR. Finally in 1966 they were received by the State Archive of the Russian Federation. A note from 1978 reveals that they were bound and stitched with covers. Presumably it was with this cataloguing that a short introductory note was written describing the agencies and the surviving archival material. This commentary is mostly prosaic except for the charge that AMR was engaged in "intelligence tasks." In the 1920s the Soviets generally assumed that all foreigners were agents of their governments and were spying. The charge, while complicating relationships for western MCC personnel with Soviet officials could have far more dreadful consequences for locals who had worked with them and remained once the MCC personnel left.

That these records survived is not surprising. During the past decade I have spent several weeks each year visiting archival institutions in Russia and Ukraine in search of records relative to the Mennonite story. Mennonites first moved into what is now Ukraine in 1789. With time, either through voluntary migration or forced relocation, they fanned out across many parts of the vast Tsarist and Soviet empires. The Tsarist bureaucracy was relentless in the collection of data and the Soviets continued this tradition of extensive record taking and preservation. Record collections now in many regional archives and the national archives of Ukraine (Kiev) and the Russian Federation (St. Petersburg and Moscow) contain an astonishing amount of documentation on the Mennonite story. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union these records were closed to foreign scholars and in many cases to locals as well.

In the early 1990s, when the archives first became open to foreigners, it was difficult to locate materials in many places. Mennonites were lumped together with other Germanic peoples and during the Soviet period, research into their past was marginalized. Ethno-cultural studies were not fashionable in Soviet historiography. I will never forget a visit in 1997 to a large regional archive in Simferopel, Crimea. I inquired of the Director of the Archives as to what kinds of materials they had relative to the long history of Mennonites in that region. She replied that she did not know for they had never searched for such materials. With a little seed money and the collaboration of a German research institute they have since located thousands of pages of archival records and even published a thick volume listing documents relative to the history of Crimean Germans.

Paul Toews receiving the records

The records in the Moscow archives that we filmed had been previously identified by several Russian scholars interested in the Mennonite story. So I went to Moscow in the fall of 2004 knowing that these two large collections were there. They had been declassified in the1990s and now could be reproduced.

The exhilaration I felt that cold day in Moscow was from the sense that these records were finally coming home. They were created by Mennonites. And while we have not the original paper, but only films, after seventy-five years the records are finally accessible to those who care most about the story they tell.

Ben and Linda's Ukraine

from letters by Ben and Linda Stobbe, summer 2006

The most common question asked of us by North Americans is "what exactly do you do in Ukraine?" Exactly? Nothing. Everything here is done very inexactly. After reflecting on what has happened this week it appears to be a mix of planning, opportunism and good guidance or some would suggest fortune.

Planning:

A lot of effort has gone into trying to deal with the ongoing winter problem of heating buildings. In Soviet times, villages like Molochansk relied a lot on a large central coal heating system where they had a big boiler guarded by a blackened sentinel chimney, with pipeline-like heating pipes wrapped in bats of insulation radiating out to schools, apartments and other major buildings. The problem with this approach was that when the price of coal went up or the supply diminished, buildings simply weren't heated. Everyone was dependent on one central system.

The hospital in Vladovka (formerly Waldheim) ran out of coal last February while still in a protracted cold snap. The inventive administrator starting burning the shells of sunflower seeds; soon truckloads of shells were dumped on site and into the boilers. He could get the shells free from local processing plants and basically was only paying farmers for the fuel to deliver them. Not only did he get heat, he got good ash which he could return to the soil.

Now the administrator has come to us asking for support to build a storage shed for this year's supply of sunflower seed shells. For $2000 US he will have a shed assuring him of winter heat for the hospital.

Over the spring a lot of work went into this by the administrator, by the Regehrs (spring North American directors) and by the Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine board (FOMCU) reviewing the proposal, looking at plans, etc. The storage shed will now be built. And if this works (as it assuredly did last winter) we will be looking at using this and other local alternative fuel sources to replace or supplement coal.

And if you don't think this makes a difference, ask the pensioners who survived because they stayed in this hospital during the coldest nights last winter. Other villages, apparently even Molochansk, had people who froze to death.

Opportunism:

Linda got a call at the beginning of the week from Ann Goertzen, the *Mennonite Mother Teresa* in Zaporozhye, who runs the Bethania care home. Could Linda, as a breast cancer survivor, come to Zaporozhye and have lunch with a local politician and another cancer activist to talk about her experiences dealing with cancer and give suggestions re fund raising. Friday found Linda and her friend Larissa Funk, one of the German Aussiedler missionaries, board a micro-bus called a Marshrootka (not Matruska, the Russian mini-dolls) and trundle off to the pizza place in Zap. They wanted to compare notes particularly on treatment and fund raising approaches. Linda talked about community fundraising events like "Run for the Cure" and "Cops for Cancer." She quickly breached the limit of their imagination when she described

policewomen and policemen having their heads shaved in fundraising efforts. The dropped jaws and incredulous looks said everything. Much here is said of police, but not this. They want her back this week, so off she will go, this time to meet with some doctors and visit hospitals.

Good guidance/good fortune?

On Wednesday Ben and Katya took the two and one-half hour drive to Dnepropetrovsk. They had never met Lorne and Hilda Epp, the new fall North American Directors. But one look at their smiling faces and upon hearing his CBC bass "you must be Ben" voice, the new team came together.

It has been amazing to see how each of the newly arrived North American Directors bring unique skills that fit in so well to the needs of the Centre. The Epps will be no exception. For when Linda reported back on her meeting with the emerging cancer activists in Zaporozhye, we found out that Hilda Epp has lots of experience in home care nursing and has a passion for nursing and teaching. Now we have someone with professional expertise who can help people transition from institutional care to home care.

Now Lorne is no slouch either. When we came back from Melitopol yesterday Linda

declared that an electrical junction box was adding to the heat of the house. When she came out of the bedroom she couldn't miss the shower of sparks and smell of burning (it wasn't her cooking)! Wisely she ran to Larissa our neighbour who cut the power at the breaker box. Larissa then went to find an electrician down the road. However the only available electrician has a drinking problem and was already poorly wired! So when we returned home, Lorne, as any good Saskatchewan farmer-turned-minister would, declared that he would trust his own skills long before trusting the skills of a drunken electrician. A confident man with a good set of pliers meant no more sparks and good light. We are indeed blest to have this couple with us.

Meet board member Ben Stobbe by Helen Rose Pauls

For twenty-five years, Ben lived in Abbotsford, where he was born and went to school: Peardonville, South Poplar, and then Abbotsford Junior and Senior High.
"I had the benefit of great math teaching from Ron Sweeney, learned to write term papers from Miss Drummond, and heard John Wittenberg down the hall quoting Shakespeare," he says.
Later Ben attended CBC where A. J. Klassen was a mentor; then Western Washington State University, Bellingham.

He was posted in Prince George as a probation officer with BC Corrections. During this time he convinced Linda Suderman from Chilliwack to marry him, a non-musical product of Abbotsford, and says that was the second best decision he ever made (next to his commitment to live a life of faith.) Ben and Linda have been married for over forty years, living mostly in Prince George, and now in Victoria. They have three children: Karl and Stephanie and two children in Winnipeg, Joel and Tracy in Tsawassen, and Julia in Victoria.

"After my retirement, Helen Rose Pauls twisted my arm to join the board and now I seem to be the one to remind our constituency of our financial needs and the value of their contributions, " says Ben, "as I am often MC for the various events. It is easier doing these roles because I really believe in the work of the MHS." He serves on the events committee and enjoys that because MHS brings together a community of Mennonites which goes beyond our churches, recognizes the incredible past contributions of so many unselfish people, and gives honor to our Godly heritage.

Ben's hobbies include woodwork (canoes, kayak, furniture), reading (Rudy Wiebe, P. D. James, Ukrainian history, Globe and Mail), and knitting gloves, toques, sweaters. For the last two summers, Ben and Linda have spent several months living in the former village of Halbstadt, Ukraine, and being active with the Friends of the Mennonite Center. They enjoy doing community development, serving with fellow Christians, and acknowledging the Mennonite heritage.

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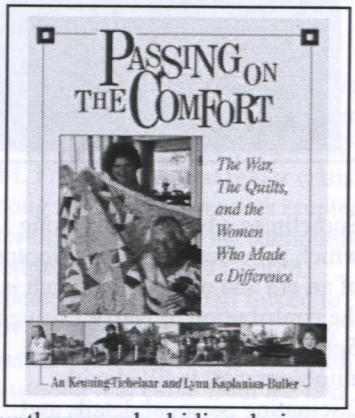
An Keuning-Tichelaar and Lynn Kaplanian-Buller, ***Passing on the Comfort:*** *The War, the Quilts and the Women Who Made a Difference.* (Intercourse, Pennsylvania: Good Books, 200?) reviewed by Helen Rose Pauls



The lives of Lynn, an American operating an American bookstore in the Netherlands, and An, who had worked in the Dutch underground resistance decades before, are intertwined by a chance meeting over "the quilts". When Lynn is invited to pastor couple An and Herman's house for the weekend together with expatriate students in 1980, she sees very familiar quilts on every bed, and stacks of them in the bed cupboards. They remind her of the work of her Mennonite relatives in Mountain Lake, Minnesota.
Ten years later, Lynn plans a quilt display in her bookstore and asks An for the use of the historic quilts. Now the stories begin to be told. Seeing the quilts from war time hanging in Lynn's shop, An finally tells about her work in the Dutch resistance during World War II. An and Herman, a Mennonite pastor, housed and sheltered countless people, hiding during them in emergency lodgings in their cellar. The refugees included streams of Jewish children who

used their house like way station, rescued from certain death. These little ones, hidden and sent into underground cells like An's home, were later temporarily adopted by local Mennonite families.
When the war was over, Mennonite refugees from Ukraine began trickling into Holland. In all 450 arrived, and the Dutch Mennonites attempted to feed and house them. It was a daunting task, for although there were thousands of Dutch Mennonites, they had nothing. They had barely survived the war, and everything was rationed. Somehow, hosts were found for them. "It required a lot of altruism", says An.

After the war was over, An washed the quilts and stored them in her bed cupboards, and they became the only link to her wartime memories. As she washed and folded them, she wondered what had become of the many people who had passed through her home. It wasn't until 1991 at the Mennonite World Conference in Winnipeg that An met one of the women who had lived in their house so many years ago. "As I looked into her sad, sad face, I felt the unspoken grief and worry of those same years bubbling up inside me," says An. For twenty minutes the two women hugged and sobbed, and the woman told An where this one had ended up, how that one had died. It had taken 45 years to let their feelings out.
"A quilt is a blanket with a heartbeat," says Lynn, who has collected the quilts into a traveling display which visited several Mennonite communities in America last year. They will be permanently housed in a proposed meeting place in Witmarsum, Friesland and continue to tell the story of the gracious women who made them and gave them to comfort strangers.

"My wish is," says Lynn, "that these work-weary quilts will inspire all of us to help, in whatever small or common way we can, when a need is before us."

*This book is in the MHS archives library.

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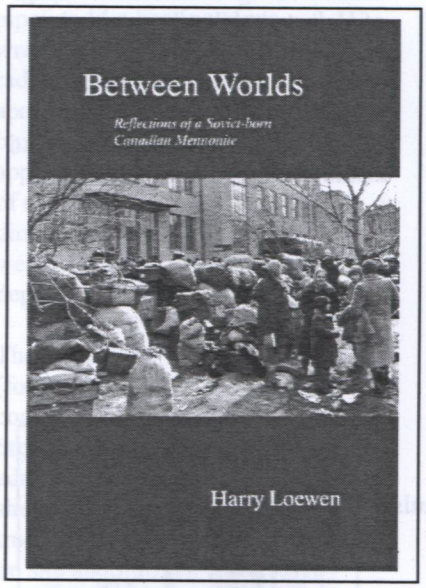
Harry Loewen, **Between Worlds: Reflections of a Soviet-born Canadian Mennonite** (Kitchener: Pandora Pr., 2006) reviewed by David Giesbrecht



Sometimes a book comes along which provides an intimate footprint of an era and of a people. Such is the contribution of Harry Loewen's *Between Worlds*. While this autobiography is filled with fascinating personal details and vignettes, its scope extends far beyond.

The first section of this book covers the author's early years in the Soviet Union and the harrowing escape from "fortress Stalin." After sixty three years, Loewen still painfully recalls the day in September 1937 when his father was arrested by NKVD operatives (one of them a Mennonite collaborator), and his mother's unheeded pleas. For Loewen the pathos of that moment remains enshrined with his father's last words: "Harry, we might not see each other again. You are the oldest, be good to mother and help her as much as you can." That day, seven-year-old Harry lost his youthful innocence. With the collapse of the German army a few years later, the Loewens, along with large numbers of other Soviet Mennonites, spared no efforts in leaving the country they once loved. The escape through war-ravaged towns and villages included numerous perilous moments, as the day on which Mrs. Loewen threw herself over her son's body to shield him from overhead strafing aircraft to discover later that a bullet had riddled her left sleeve. Without his mother's indomitable spirit, this family would not have reached the British Zone.

Mrs. Loewen and her children arrived in Canada on 19 May 1948. The middle section of *Between Worlds* recalls Harry's orientation to Canadian (and Mennonite) society and his scholarly career. It was only after he left the Soviet Union that he discovered his Mennonite roots. But once in Canada it did not take long for him to absorb its essence. He was nurtured in the Coaldale MB church and subsequently spent three formative years in the Coaldale Bible school. Given his keen intellect, Loewen was invited to continued his studies at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, a time of "sheer joy filled with almost daily excitement." But it was also at MBBC where his acquaintance with prominent Mennonite leaders of the day led him to conclude that many were

paying mere lip service to their faith tradition. He regretfully notes that for many, the "Anabaptist vision was largely lost."

Loewen's spiritual journey only intensified his desire for graduate studies culminating in the completion of a doctoral program at the University of Waterloo and a teaching position at Waterloo Lutheran University. Finally the Loewen family had comfortably settled in a community they loved. Students recognized an outstanding teacher. In the church and community he was a much sought-after speaker. But the Eden was not to last. In the Spring of 1978, Dr. Loewen was invited to accept responsibility for the Chair for Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, only the second such program to be established in any Canadian university. Here his productivity blossomed. In addition to inspiring a renewal for Mennonite studies, Loewen wrote numerous books, established the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, and helped a generation of Canadian Mennonites wrestle with the essence of their faith.

The final ten chapters include a selection of "reflective essays" touching on matters that have been of vital concern to Loewen's understanding of the Anabaptist faith.

For readers not familiar with the tumultuous events of the early 20th century, the introductory essay sets an important historical context. Significantly, the book includes some fifty personal photographs and an appendix listing the author's amazing literary productivity.

Harry and Gertrude Loewen have now retired to a home with a commanding view of the Okanagan valley. However, it is the panoramic perspectives with which the author views 20th century Mennonite spiritual and cultural developments that commend this story to a very wide reading audience.

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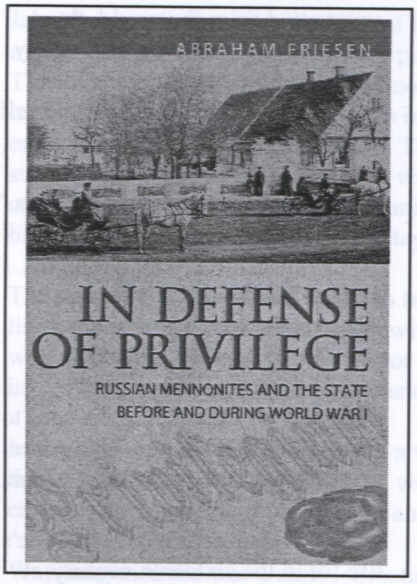
Abraham Friesen, ***In Defense of Privilege***: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World *War I* (Kindred Productions, Winnipeg, MB and Hillsboro, KS, 2006) reviewed by Robert Martens



In 1912, prominent Russian Mennonite archivist Peter Braun wrote: "The knowledge of history in general, or that of their own past in particular, is always of incalculable importance for a people.... We Mennonites have, I am sorry to say, distinguished ourselves since time immemorial through an unforgivable disregard of our own history..." (33). Mennonites in Russia had grown defensive and insular over the years. The doctrine of nonresistance, for example, had become merely a part of their cultural baggage as Mennonites lost touch with their Anabaptist origins.

Meanwhile, however, as the Russian empire attempted to transform itself into a nation state, and anti-foreigner prejudice grew, Mennonites were pressured to assimilate, to give up their "sacred" privileges, among them the speaking of German, control over their own educational system, and above all, exemption from military service. Mennonites relearned their own history, late in the nineteenth century, in order to fight back. Abraham Friesen points out that their "defense of privilege" was carried out in the context of a debate: What are we, Dutch or German? The significance of this debate unfolds gradually in the book. But already in the preface, Friesen states his perspective (he likely would not appreciate the word "bias"): "It was not the case...that the loss of the German language and culture would inevitably entail the loss of the Mennonite faith. Indeed, precisely the opposite turned out to be true: it was those who advocated *das Deutschtum* most adamantly who lost their Mennonite faith" (ix).

Friesen's book focuses on a handful of spokesmen for Russian Mennonites, all of them educated intellectuals, among them Benjamin Unruh, brothers Heinrich and Peter Braun, David Epp, and occasionally P.M. Friesen. The first major crisis among Russian Mennonites erupted after the secession of the Mennonite Brethren from the Old Church. Repeatedly the MBs felt forced to prove to the government that they constituted not an illegal "sect" (an accusation that came from the Old Church as well), but a "confession" that merited all the privileges granted to Mennonites upon their arrival in Russia, such as exemption

from military service. In contrast to the Old Church, MBs deeply desired to evangelize the unsaved, although this was strictly proscribed by law. When the authorities proclaimed in the Manifestos of 1905 that proselytization would henceforth be legal, MBs sprang into action. The Manifestos were soon abrogated, however, and Mennonites came under close scrutiny by a government now in the grip of a growing anti-German hysteria.

Investigations were conducted by the authorities, particularly in Molotschna, into the possible "subversive" activities of Mennonites propagating their faith. Spokesmen such as David Epp and Peter Braun countered with their own versions of Mennonite history that would ostensibly prove that Mennonites were totally loyal to the tsar. Their interpretations of history, Friesen argues, were deeply flawed. They were based on a theory that the Mennonite church stemmed not from Menno Simons, who was reduced to a mere organizer, but from the true strands of the early church, and consequently constituted neither heresy nor sect. Mennonites in their isolation failed to realize that this theory was a slap in the face of the Russian Orthodox Church, which claimed absolute purity for itself. The theory also ignored the Anabaptist origins of their own faith. In addition, Old Church and Mennonite Brethren were deeply divided, and did not achieve any kind of consensus until a draft for a common constitution was written up under the intense political pressures of 1914 and the start of the Great War. It was too little, too late. Neither side, Friesen contends, appreciated historical Anabaptist/Mennonite values. The Old Church, with its automatic membership, had become a territorial religion much like the Catholic or Lutheran, while the MBs emphasized a Pietistic instant conversion experience that was Lutheran rather than Anabaptist. "Here now," Friesen writes, "was the Russian Mennonite tragedy.... [I]gnorance of their history, especially that of their origins had permitted such things to transpire and to divide them radically..." (163). Mennonites were later to flee the USSR still deeply divided.

The second major crisis for Mennonites was the land liquidation laws of 1915. Russian racism and xenophobia had grown during World War I to the point where the lands of all German settlers were to be confiscated, and their owners transported elsewhere, likely to Siberia. Mennonites immediately argued that, although their mother tongue was German, they were in fact Dutch in origin and faithful to the tsar. When the authorities refused to relent, panic ensued. Mennonites stated in a memorandum, "In our veins flows not a drop of German blood. We reject everything Germanic" (240). How honest were these declarations of "Dutchness?" They were made under extreme duress, and Friesen may overstate their "hypocrisy." It is clear, however, that Mennonites were prepared to emigrate from Russia long before the Revolution. Regarding the Russians, Peter Braun later wrote, "We hate and loathe this people..." (257). And Benjamin Unruh, upon his escape from the USSR to Germany, became a convinced follower of Adolf Hitler, hoping that German forces might liberate the lost Russian Mennonite lands.

In his fascinating epilogue, worth reading in itself, Abraham Friesen summarizes the basic issues of his book. "In Defense of Privilege" takes a long time getting there, with a rather slow start, meticulous academic style, and a circuitous argumentative structure. It may also focus too much on the writings of a handful of men. The volume, however, is a journey worth taking. "Who <u>are</u> the (Russian) Mennonites?" Friesen asks. His vision is profoundly Anabaptist/Mennonite, as one might expect from a specialist in Reformation history. Menno Simons, Friesen maintains, was clearly the founder of a pacifist and mainly Dutch movement quite distinct from the violence of some early Anabaptists in places such as Münster. Mennonites, he says, were later never quite convinced of Simons' pacifism, and would turn to the early church for their origins when they wished to argue for military exemption. Meanwhile, due to extreme persecution, Mennonites soon became the "quiet in the land," disavowing proselytization and concentrating on economic and social success. In Russia, Mennonites eventually referred to themselves as a distinct *Völklein*, segregated from the world, thus becoming an ethnic/cultural entity and retaining Anabaptist values only by tradition. They became self-aware only late in the nineteenth century, and perhaps only then, Friesen asserts, "cultural Germans."

The identification with Germany, Friesen concludes, was a moral disaster, as some Mennonites abandoned Anabaptist values for those of fascism. It has been necessary in the ensuing decades to recover the "Dutchness," the peace principles, of the Anabaptist vision. "...[I]f the Anabaptist faith," he writes, "was worth sacrificing one's life for in the sixteenth century, it should certainly be worth our while to attempt to recover it in its pristine form in the twentieth century. Perhaps, as we are assimilated into the Canadian, American, or any other dominant culture, we should seek to separate even our race from our faith as it was in the earliest years of the movement" (372).

Henry Schapansky. ***Mennonite Migrations and the Old Colony*** (New Westminster: Self Published, 2006, 816 pp) reviewed by David Giesbrecht

The author has developed an impressive expertise with respect to Russian Mennonite history. The first half of this major study offers a detailed accounting of Northern European Mennonites and their migrations, including a listing and brief biographical account for each of the early Anabaptist reformers. Schapansky continues his narrative by delineating among High Germans, Flemish and Friesians and Lamists; then traces the migration to, and the development of, Mennonite communities in Prussia

In large measure this book focuses on the immigration and settlement of Mennonites in the Old Colony (Chortitza). Many readers will appreciate the methodical naming and discussion of prominent leaders as well details pertaining to the expansion of Mennonite colonies.

Appendices include immigration documents of the era as well as maps (eg. Gemeinden in West Prussia), tables (eg. Population Statistics for the Old Colony) and a wealth of information reflecting early Russian Mennonite history.

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Profiles of the Past: Jakob C. Reimer – a Soldier
translated by son Edgar Reimer, North Vancouver (formerly of Greendale)

When Jakob C. Reimer was drafted into the Russian Imperial Army, at the beginning of WWI, he was not very well prepared for his army life. He had always felt comfortable and secure up to that time; as an eldest son he was the favourite of his parents; he always had the money for anything he wanted. He had never had to do anything straining or exhausting; he had never had to face anything ugly or unpleasant, and he would pass out at the sight of blood.

Jakob's conscience demanded that if he had to join the army he would have to be in the medical corps, where he could help people rather than kill. His training was rough. The doctors who trained him were mostly female army captains. Cleaning wards, making beds, handling bed pans, giving injections and assisting in the operations were experiences he had not anticipated. The first time he saw blood while assisting in surgery, he collapsed in a faint. He was rudely awakened with a dousing of water, a bit of kicking, and a great deal of screaming by a female doctor. It did help him to get his blood pressure up so that he could stay conscious. Eventually he could take any kind of sights.

The army outfitted medical trains to transport wounded men from army dressing stations to hospitals well behind the lines. Most trains had 24 box cars, with one trained medical corpsman in each car; each box car had bunks for 36 wounded men; and one female doctor circulated through the train. If a medic could keep half of his men alive until he got them to a hospital, it was considered a successful trip. Jakob served two years on a train.

In the confusion of war at the front, a train would sometimes take up to three days to reach a hospital. During that time a medic, in boots and uniform, would steal sleep here and there in ten minute snatches, while men moaned and called for help and died. It was not an easy life for a man of compassion.

Watching men die was a daily, sometimes hourly experience. But there were rewards as well when a dying man could be saved or a disabled man rehabilitated. Jakob noticed that one man who had a head wound from a bayonet, would pass out at the slightest exertion or excitement. Jakob discussed surgery with the man and the on-board doctor… Jakob helped the doctor make an incision on the head, and they came across a bayonet tip that was so placed in the skull, that the slightest increase in blood pressure would bring the brain into contact with it The tip was carefully removed, and the man restored to perfect health.

Revolution brought a peace treaty with Germany, and Jakob could leave the army. But it was not the end of his experiences with deaths and violence. The Civil War, the Great Famine and 'War Communism' as well as his arrests and sentences perpetuated fear and difficulties. But he survived to become a peaceful family father in Canada.

Katja

*a fictional story based on my grandmother's experience during Stalin's artificial famine in Ukraine, 1931-1933**

by Louise Bergen Price

Katja knew everyone in this village, but today there were no friendly greetings. Her husband, Heinrich, had just been arrested and jailed for not paying taxes levied three times in as many months, their house, barn and possessions sold, and Katja put out on the street with their children: Anna, three months old; Heina, only ten; Peter, Susie, Liese and Jasch in-between. A few people mumbled something like "Good day" and hurried on. Was it pity she saw in their eyes, or fear for their own safety?

"Hey, *kulaks*! How does it feel to be poor?" A group of young boys in ragged shirts and dirt-stained pants ran alongside.

Heina's fists clenched.

"Heina! Keep walking. We're almost at Tante Tina's. See? There it is."

The small room Tina's husband cleaned out for them was dim and smelled of cows. An old wooden table and two chairs stood near the window; straw filled a back corner.

Eine Mennonitenfamilie im Hungersnotgebiet.

"A Mennonite Family in a famine-stricken area"
photo from Meine Flucht *by Abr. Kroeker.*
(Striegau, Theodor Urban, 1931 p. 96)

Katja lay awake into the night while Anna fussed and drank, the tiny mouth tugging a small comfort at Katja's breast. Only last week Katja had handed out cooked potatoes to beggars; now she and her children would join the crowds that streamed from door to door.

Within days, the older children knew what to do, returning with sugar beets, pumpkins, potato peelings, sunflower seeds. Seldom bread – the Soviet government's Red Broom Brigade had swept every grain from attics and storehouses. Soon Heina, Susie, Liese and Jasch resembled the skinny urchins who had taunted them. Peter whined and chewed on anything he found. Anna barely woke to drink.

The old woman has kind eyes. Her gnarled fingers gently shift Katja's shawl to touch Anna's cheek. She turns to Katja.

"Feed the boy."

"What?"

"This one will not live – but that one may." She nods at Peter. "Let him drink."

"Get out!"

"She's getting weak; she'll hardly notice."

"Out. OUT!" Katja screams.

"Mam? What's wrong?" Liese knelt beside her.

"A bad dream, Liese. I'm all right. Go back to sleep."

Katja propped herself up on her elbow. Peter whimpered; she rubbed the nape of his neck until she felt him relax. She fell asleep.

The black cat silhouetted against the early morning sky has a kitten dangling from her mouth.

What will the mother eat? Mice, rabbits, squirrels – they're all soup now. She will show it mercy.

The kitten thrashes in the water, claws raking the metal bucket. Katja looks away, presses fingers on ears, and waits. Then she carries the bucket to the manure pile. But the emptied bucket is heavy, scrabbling with mewing kittens. All Katja thinks of is soup. Rich and meaty, with chunks of potato, carrot and onion, and lots of fresh dill.

NO! Katja hurls the bucket but instead of kittens, babies tumble out, twig-like limbs tangled in dill-weed; faces just like Anna's. Katja opens her mouth, but no scream sounds.

"Mama! I have to pee." Peter wriggled against her. "Mama! Take me outside." Katja sat up, confused. Beside her, Anna slept peacefully. She put her face to the baby's till she felt Anna's breath.

"Mama!"

"Yes, Peter. Let's go."

Heina brought home a head of cabbage that day. He did not say from whom or where, and Katja didn't ask. She chewed a mouthful until it was soft, scooped a bit onto her finger and slid it onto Anna's tongue. Anna turned her head, and the cabbage dribbled out of her mouth.

Katja withheld her news until after dark and the children lay in a row on the straw. "I'm going away tomorrow," she said. "If Anna doesn't get milk soon, she'll die. I'm taking her and Peter to Oma and Opa's in Sagradovka. They still have a cow. And a big garden."

"Take us too!"

"I wish I could, but I was barely able to borrow enough money as it is. I'll be back. Three or four days at the most."

Silence. Then Jasch's small voice. "Mam? Can you bring us a bread?"

"I'll bring a big loaf, Jasch. I promise. And you listen to Heina and take care of each other while I'm gone."

"Yes, Mam."

She left early in the morning, when the children were still drowsy with sleep, and arrived in Sagradovka the next day, exhausted and sick. Three weeks later, she was finally strong enough to return home.

As the train crept from village to village, Katja sat straight, eyes ever watchful. Under her shawl she clutched a loaf of heavy rye, enough to keep her older children alive for a week. *If* they had survived – she'd had no news.

Along the tracks lay scattered bundles of rags. Beggars. Some were alive. A boy Jasch's age looked up as the train rumbled by, his face all eyes and sharp bones. Others lay dead where they'd fallen, children and old people mostly. Who would show them mercy and cover them with earth?

The stench of decay seeped into the train where passengers jostled on wooden benches and crowded the aisles. No one spoke – a wrong word could mean prison or death. They stared at windows, at their own feet, anywhere but at their own terror mirrored in another's eyes.

The train groaned to a halt. Katja stumbled onto the platform.

"Christ have mercy…have mercy…Christ..." She averted her eyes as she passed the beggars.

She saw Jasch first. He was trudging down the dusty road, dragging a sack behind him.

So. At least one was safe.

(excerpt from 'Katja' *Half in the Sun; Anthology of Mennonite Writing* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Pr. 2006)

* On November 28, 2006 the Ukrainian parliament recognized this famine as a *Holodomor* or genocide perpetrated on the Ukrainian people by the Stalinist regime from 1931-1933. Up to 10 million people (one third of Ukraine's population) perished.

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Half in the Sun; anthology of Mennonite writing was launched at a plenary session of "Mennonite/s Writing: Beyond Borders" conference in Bluffton, Ohio on October 25. Present were editors Elsie K. Neufeld, Robert Martens, Leonard Neufeldt, Louise Bergen Price, and Maryann Tjart Janzen as well as contributor Connie Braun. The readings and presentations were warmly received. The audience was especially interested in our Russian-Mennonite heritage, unfamiliar to many on the east coast.

Several local book launches and readings have also taken place in Abbotsford, Langley, Vancouver, Chilliwack and Yarrow. A Winnipeg launch will take place in the new year. *Half in the Sun* is for sale at local bookstores and at the archive office.

A New Year's Wish

Etj sach jün Schorsteen roake;
Etj wisst waul waut je moake,
Je moake Niejoarsch Koake!

Jäw mie eene, bliew etj stone
Jäw jie me twee, dann fang etj aun te gone
Jäw jie me dree, feea, fiew tojlikj,
Dann wensch etj jünt daut gauntze Himmelrikj.

(photo: *http://www.typicaldutchstuff.com/oliebol.shtml)*

I saw the smoke from your chimney. I know what you're baking!
You're baking New Year's fritters. Give me one, and I'll remain here, give me two, I'll start to run away.
Give me three, four or five, I'll wish for you the whole kingdom of heaven!

Portzeltje

To 'portzel' is to 'tumble' they say—
these fritters tumble in fat
as they fry.

Ingredients

1 1/4 cup milk
1/4 cup shortening
1 tsp. salt
1 Tbsp. yeast
3 eggs
3/4 cup sugar
1/4 tsp. nutmeg
4 1/2 - 5 cups flour
2 cups raisins

Mix ingredients as in Olie Bollen recipe.
Let rise. Pinch off as for making buns.
Let rise again on cookie sheets.
Deep fry until brown.
Sprinkle or roll in icing sugar when cool.

Anne Sawatzky, Ft.Langley (from her mother,
Annie Giesbrecht, Abbotsford)

Olie Bollen: the Dutch connection

Ingredients: 500 g flour - 25 g yeast
½ litre lukewarm milk - 5 g salt - lemon peel (grated) - 1 apple (in small pieces) –
200 g. fruit: currants (washed and dried), raisins (washed and dried) and candied orange peel - vegetable oil for frying.

Mix the yeast with a little of the milk gently, let rise. Put the flour in a bowl. Make a little hole and pour in the yeast mixture.
Stir the rest of the flour, milk and salt to a smooth batter. Add the currants etc.
Let rise for about one hour in a warm place.
Heat the oil (about 180 C). Take two metal spoons and make balls of the batter and fry for several minutes. Take them out with a skimmer and drain on paper towels. Dredge with icing sugar. Serve warm.

Leidi Schilthuis Clevering,
Middlestum, The Netherlands.
Leidi and Gijs Schilthuis are members of Middelstum Doopsgezinde (Mennonite) Kerk.