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Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

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

Contents

Editorial — by Connie T. Braun

This issue of *Roots and Branches* explores Mennonite identity and its shaping influences. In particular, it focuses on Mennonite Brethren identity in recognition of this year's 150th anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Some readers will no doubt have attended Gathering 2010, the recent MB Conference held this past July in conjunction with scholarly papers and panels on identity and theology and other issues confronting the MB church. As a historical society, we will acknowledge this important anniversary in October during a lecture by Dr. John B. Toews entitled—embodying the dry humour often associated with Mennonite identity— *Understanding the Hundred Years War (1860-1960): The Mennonite Brethren and the Mennonite Church in Russia*. Indeed, during this 150th anniversary year, the MB Church in Germany offered a statement asking for forgiveness for its previous attitude to other Mennonite churches, and fifty years earlier, during the 100 year celebration, the MB Church and GC Mennonite Church in North America celebrated reconciliation.

Despite this encouraging movement toward reconciliation, Mennonite identity remains a complex subject. This issue's contributors outline religious, ethnic, and cultural aspects of Mennonite identity as well as highlighting many shaping influences. Andrew Dyck writes that Mennonite Brethren, in the process of differentiating themselves from other Mennonites, have been influenced, in turn, by fundamentalists, evangelicals, and charismatics, and, more recently, by the Vineyard movement, Reform traditions, and contemplative practices from a variety of Christian traditions. Dave Enns recounts the conversion to the Mennonite Brethren of his German Lutheran grandparents in post-revolutionary Russia. Robert Martens recounts how, in the early days of the MB church, Johann and Helen Wieler evangelized among the Russian people regardless of the consequences. Another article investigates the influence of Evangelicalism during the first decades of the Mennonite Brethren. Martens points out that "the bitter succession of MBs from the mainstream Mennonite Church was a part of a wider revolt of Baptists and Evangelicals against the established religious order," and notes that later during the "Stalinist holocaust" these Mennonites maintained close ties with Baptists. In a more contemporary context, an interview with Bindu Sidhu, a pastor at Life Centre Church in Abbotsford, offers a glimpse of the emerging face of the MB church among the multi-cultural Abbotsford community.

As I consider Mennonite tenets, history, culture, and identity, I find myself reflecting on how they have been engendered in my own life. I was born in the Fraser Valley. My parents are Mennonite; my mother was born into a Mennonite family from Poland, my father, into one from Ukraine. Growing up, I attended the Mennonite Educational Institute and Bakerview MB Church. I married a Mennonite fellow (a GC!). We eat Borscht. Yet, if someone asks me, "What is a Mennonite?" I'm not sure how to answer that question satisfactorily without a lengthy historical preamble. As ethnic "insiders," my friends and I used to joke that, while we couldn't explain exactly what it was to be a Mennonite, "it takes one to know one."

Evangelicalism and the rise of the Mennonite Bretheren

By Robert Martens

...There is something wrong with us – the witnesses and watchmen.... What can be expected from compla cent and self-satisfied preachers who are reluctant to do anything but read an occasional sermon which for half a century has been a part of the family heritage, without consideration whether it is relevant to the times of not.... All that we have left is a dry formalism, a shell without a kernel, a church without living mem bers. Bernhard Harder, Gnadenfeld, 1862 (Toews 20)

In the nineteenth century Russian empire, the debate over church reform was passionate, controversial, and frequently hostile. The bitterly contested secession of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) from the mainstream Mennonite Church in 1860 was part of the wider revolt of Baptists and Evangelicals against the established religious order. Political and social issues were certainly at stake – many among the MB agitators were landless – but theology often took centre stage. The new Evangelicalism advocated a personal and living experience with God, and denounced the sterile traditions of the old order. In this process, Anabaptist social distinctives such as the peace principle sometimes lost their urgency. An important question to consider is whether the MBs, if not for their fear of losing the colony privileges granted by the government, would have left the Mennonite fold altogether and joined with, for example, the Baptist Church.

The Russian Orthodox Church was so powerful that it constituted a parallel government in the empire. Even the secularization of authority under Peter the Great did little to change that. The Orthodox elite, however, could not prevent the influx of foreign traders into Russia, and ethnic enclaves emerged, including a thriving "German suburb" in St. Petersburg. These alien "heretics," including Mennonites, were strictly isolated and forbidden to proselytize. Evangelical currents entered the empire, however, under the watch of Alexander I, who seems to have been influenced by Pietism. The British and Foreign Bible Society intended to place a Bible in every Orthodox household in the land. But political events intervened. After Alexander's death, the Decembrist revolt of 1825 and the Polish uprising of 1830 incited the far less tolerant Nicholas I to suppress reformist movements, religious or otherwise.

Evangelical forces, however, so strongly motivated to win the world for Christ, would not be stopped. The German influence was strong. Johann Bonekemper, for example, from Nümbrecht, preached and organized among Russian villagers. The result was the Stundists who advocated a simple Christian life and led Bible studies, or *Stunden* (hours), in their homes. Because Bonekemper advised Stundists to remain within the overall Orthodox structure, they remained relatively unnoticed by the authorities until some time after their inception. Meanwhile, despite their relatively conservative forms of worship, the Stundists promoted education for the poor and allowed women in positions of authority. Eventually the authorities perceived the Stundists as a threat and they were severely persecuted, so much so that the movement eventually vanished or merged with other Evangelical groups. These developments, however, did not prevent the Stundists from developing a close relationship with the MBs.

Other reformist movements also had an impact on Mennonite life. When Lord Radstock of Britain visited Russia in 1874, he and Colonel Pashkov organized Evangelical salons for the aristocracy. Pashkovites, known for their ecumenical teachings on the new birth, subsequently also influenced the surrounding populace. The Molokans, so-called because they drank milk (*moloko*) during Lent, were a quietist, inwardly-directed group of Evangelicals who rejected baptism and the ordained ministry. Of greater influence on Mennonites were the Pietists. The village of Gnadenfeld in the Molotschna had long been a hotbed for Mennonite dissent. In 1846, Edouard Wuest was invited to speak at a Gnadenfeld missions festival and found an eager audience there. While studying at a seminary in Germany, Wuest had become tormented by guilt which was only relieved when he experienced an overwhelming conversion experience. This charismatic preacher had a powerful effect on his Lutheran and Mennonite listeners in south Russia, and was appointed as minister of the Pietist Neuhoffnung congregation. "Beloved," he thundered, "it's either-or – This I want to make clear to you.... Either believing – or unbelieving, either converted – or unconverted, either a natural man – or a regenerate man" (Toews 30).

Baptists developed an even closer but extremely problematic relationship with the Mennonite Brethren. In 1869, J.G. Oncken, founder of the German Baptist Church, visited some Baptist and Mennonite congregations in the Ukraine. When he ordained some MB ministers, elders, and deacons, the old Mennonite Church denounced these MBs as practising Baptists and urged the lifting of the privileges granted them as Mennonites by Tsars Catherine and Alexander I. A colleague of Oncken's wrote to him of the ensuing controversy: "The Mennonites have turned me over to the Russian authorities. These Mennonites even had the brothers, who had been newly awakened spiritually in their midst, thrown into prison. O that the Lord would take away their Russian privileges so that they would once again be privileged by God to lead sinners to Christ" (Friesen 103).

The German Baptists were legally recognized as a denomination in 1879, nineteen years after the inception of the Mennonite Brethren (ethnic Russian Baptists had a much more difficult time, as they were considered traitors to the Orthodox Church.). German Baptists and MBs alike wished to proselytize among Russians, a practice forbidden by law, and both groups baptized by immersion. Seceders from the old Mennonite Church were sometimes maliciously classified as Baptists by colony officials in an attempt to deny them official privileges such as self-government, religious freedom, and exemption from military service.

Would the MBs have joined the Baptists if politics and privilege had not been factors? Certainly the influence seemed to have run both ways: rejection of military service was pervasive among many Evangelicals and Baptists. Although the MB reform was heavily influenced by both Pietism and German Baptism, in the end the Baptists failed to absorb the new upstarts. In fact, the Brethren referred their teachings back to early Anabaptist leaders and in particular to Menno Simons. Their 1902 and 1903 Confessions of Faith were profoundly Anabaptist in nature, even while their relationship with the Baptists remained strong.

After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, a reign of terror descended upon Evangelicals (and Jews as well) from an increasingly oppressive and xenophobic Russian Empire. Baptists and Stundists were arrested and exiled. Hostility to alien ethnic groups was rampant, and the German-influenced Evangelicals now became a popular target. "For instance," mocked a Russian commentator, "nearly every Stundist (even the poorest) strives to get a watch and then, with purely German exactness, tries to plan his time and activity according to his watch. Stundists demonstrate the same attitude toward their comfortable clothes" (Friesen 105). Mennonite Brethren, however, continued to support their Baptist, Pashkovite, and Stundist allies. PM Friesen, author of a mammoth MB history, was warmly supportive of the Stundists, and took part in a debate in their defence: "On the day of the debate the church was packed. The two sides faced each other: two highly educated priests and two poor uneducated [Stundist] gardeners with whom Friesen associated himself. The priests immediately began their attack. But they had underestimated their opponent.... Finally

Mennonite Historical Society of BC 2010 events

Saturday, October 23 at 6pm. Annual Fundraising Banquet with lecture by John B. Toews

"Understanding the 100 Years War (1860-1960): The Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia." Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 3471 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford.
Tickets $25, available from the archive office or board members.

Saturday, November 13 at 9am to 5pm. Annual Genealogy Workshop

Speakers: David Obee, Dr. Tim Janzen, Dr. Bruce Hiebert
For more information, go to mhsbc.com.
Dogwood Room (201), Garden Park Tower, 2825 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford.

Friesen began to attack. It was remarkable that the spectators became jubilant about his expositions while they reacted with occasional whistles when the priests spoke. Friesen knew the history of the Orthodox Church better than they did and it did not take four hours until the priests left" (Friesen 96).

The MB and Evangelical dissidents were fearless: "They deemed preaching the Gospel a duty, and the fulfillment of the Great Commission, so central to early Anabaptism, their chief obligation" (Friesen 120). At the 1884 convention of the Ukrainian Baptist Church, six of the delegates were MBs from Molotschna, and one of them, Johann Wieler, was elected chairman. It was written that Mennonites were "aroused suddenly from a century of quiet isolation from their Russian neighbours.... They live here, have the language, know the people, and have been brought up in the knowledge of the Word.... [T]hey may well be encouraged to go forward like Joshua, and possess the land" (Friesen 120). Some MB ministers were trained at the Hamburg Baptist Seminary, and many served as missionaries in India under the auspices of the German Baptist Church.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Stalinist holocaust that followed, Evangelical faith survived underground. Mennonites maintained particularly close links with the Russian Baptists who (sometimes not Russian and perhaps not particularly Baptist) became a kind of umbrella group for Evangelicals in the Soviet Union. Jacob Wiens, along with his son, Peter (they eventually spelled their name as Vins), returned during the 1920s from America to the USSR in order to help fellow Evangelical believers. It might be counted a miracle that faith survived at all under the murderous Communist regime. To this day it is debated whether the Mennonite Brethren forsook some of their ancestral Anabaptist principles, but there is no doubt that their Evangelical legacy of peace and community burned brightly during the Soviet decades of horror.

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www.bju.edu/library/collections/fund_file/russianbap (JS Mack Library – Fundamentalism File)

www.gameo.org (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online)

www.rs.as.wvu.edu/Zhuk (Ukrainian Evangelical Peasants)

Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith, "sidewalk version"

From MB Conference website, www.mbconf.ca

We believe in God as eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God created and sustains the universe. The eternal purpose of God the Father is to create a people who will bring glory to God forever. God alone is worthy of worship.

We believe that God became human in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to restore the world because humans have rejected God in disobedience. Jesus taught and modeled the way of God's kingdom. He died on the cross, making it possible for us to accept a renewed relationship with God. He rose from the dead, broke the power of sin and death, and frees us to live in obedience to God's will.

We believe that God the Holy Spirit invites all people to be reconciled with God and to join the global family of faith. Believers confess their faith, are baptized, and join in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and guided by the Bible, members of the church seek to live as followers of Christ and invite others to experience this new life.

As Christians, we are called to turn:

- from ignorance of God to a personal relationship with God
- from bondage of sin and past mistakes to freedom, forgiveness, and healing
- from individualism to interdependence with others in the local church
- from lifestyle choices that harm us, others, and the earth to choices that nurture wholeness, healing, joy, and peace
- from hating enemies and ignoring neighbours to showing love and justice to all
- from loving possessions to sharing with all in need
- from aimless existence to a mission of representing and proclaiming God's kingdom on earth

As Christians, we look forward to the day when God will once again send Jesus to bring all things under God's eternal rule.

Mennonites and the Charismatic Movement

By Robert Martens, with additional material by Maryann Jantzen

There appeared to them tongues like flames of fire, dispersed among them and resting on each one. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues. (Acts 2:3-4)

While drinking a cup of coffee in a local coffee shop one morning, I bumped into some acquaintances I hadn't met for years. Our conversation eventually settled on things Mennonite, and I discovered that this couple, while maintaining an intense interest in Mennonite history, were now attending a Vineyard church where a type of charismatic spirituality is practised. Together we reflected on why it is so common for Mennonites, particularly on the Canadian west coast, to be so attracted to uninhibited charismatic forms of worship. Clearly, for some, more traditional, relatively sedate Mennonite Sunday morning services are inadequate for their emotional needs. The amplified "contemporary services" of many Mennonite churches, with their drums, guitars, basses and repetitive choruses, are in part a moderate, perhaps half-hearted attempt to retain members who might otherwise leave. Yet the outflow continues.

Historically, the Anabaptist/Mennonite faith has most often been based on the idea of a simple, sober life and the denial of the pleasures of the flesh. Just a few decades ago, "worldly attractions" such as radio, television, dance and movies were still prohibited. Even the principle of nonresistance, it has been argued, finds its foundation in self-denial, in this case the repression of revengeful feelings. Consequently, personal displays of emotion have been often regarded with suspicion. However, for a few brief years, during the nineteenth-century reform movement of the Mennonite Brethren in southern Russia, charismatic gifts were enthusiastically practised. It was an understandable reaction to the widespread lethargy and inertia (although there were significant exceptions) of the old Mennonite Church.

Even before the birth of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church in 1860, charismatic congregations were springing up in Russia, and when Pietist Eduard Wuest, with his emphasis on a heart-felt spiritual life, arrived in the Ukraine from Germany, many Mennonites welcomed him as a liberator from a passionless and moribund tradition. The early Brethren were in fact predisposed to emotional forms of worship. Bible study groups took place in individual homes and were conducted in the very informal Low German language. Interpretation of Scripture was not based on creeds or rational argument, but on prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit. Salvation was defined and preached as a radical life-changing experience that could only occur after a painfully deep consciousness of sin. Equality was emphasized at the expense of authority, with the result that spirituality emanated from the individual heart rather than from the pulpit. Rationality, in this context, definitely received second billing. An eyewitness of the time was impressed with the MBs' "strong personal experience of the Grace of God" and the "intensely active participation of the members in the meetings of the church" (Toews 57). And with a significant number of the Brethren among the landless, a profound sense of injustice may also have played a role.

The Old Church reacted harshly to the reforms of the Brethren, demanding expulsion, and even imprisonment, of their leaders. Some MBs reacted to the repression by practising the *Fröhliche Richtung*, the "joyous movement," in order to distinguish themselves from a tradition gone stale. Psalm 47:1 was taken literally: "Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!" Bible studies gave way to noisy and emotional gatherings characterized by boisterous singing, the playing of tambourines, the whole-hearted surrender to the gifts of the Spirit. Worshippers in these services called themselves "the sound and the strong," describing those who refused to participate as "the weak and sick" (Toews 60). The Fröhliche Richtung also preached that, as in Christ all distinctions cease, sexual differences did not matter. Consequently the "sister kiss" was practised, resulting in some sexual improprieties, even scandals. This "joyous movement" eventually fell into the hands of a group of ideologically-driven and tyrannical men who burned books, banned photography, and enforced the extreme shunning, the "delivering unto Satan," of members who refused to cooperate in their charismatic services.

The lifespan of the movement was not to be long,

however, as MB leaders, reacting quickly, issued in 1865 a statement known as the June Reform. The harsh excommunications "were declared null and void." "The friendly greeting of non-members was regarded as pleasing to the Lord...." Worship services returned to the traditionally moderate patterns of the past: "Loud music was to be avoided, and that which was lovely and pleasant was to be cultivated. The joy of the Lord was not ruled out, but was to be expressed becomingly" (Toews 65). Leaders of the "joyous movement" either repented and rejoined the MBs, or walked away. Suppression of the charismatic was so complete that when PM Friesen, the eminent minister and historian, joined the Mennonite Brethren in 1866, he detected not a trace of it in the church. Since that time, the MBs have made a point of selecting leaders from among the sober and moderate, with the exception of evangelists, who are permitted a far greater degree of emotionalism.

But of course the controversy did not die. In the early twentieth century, the charismata (Greek for "spiritual gifts") re-emerged among Pentecostals, and by the 1950s infiltrated some North American Mennonite congregations. Gerald Derstine, a Mennonite minister from Minnesota, experienced speaking in tongues and being "slain in the spirit." When conference leaders demanded that he confess that his charismatic experiences were of the devil, Derstine refused, and subsequently was stripped of his ministerial credentials. It was only in 1977 that the conference officially apologized for the injustice done to him. In 1970, a retired missionary, Nelson Litwiller, also experienced the baptism of the Spirit, and became a leader of charismatic activities in Mennonite churches.

Pastor Eduard Wuest (1817-1859)

During the late 1960s and early 70s, the growing charismatic movement also began to infiltrate Mennonite churches in British Columbia, resulting in considerable controversy, since many were opposed to the uninhibited mode of spirituality that had become especially popular among young people attracted to the countercultural Jesus People movement. Other BC Mennonites viewed charismatic influences more positively, seeing them as new life-giving forms of worship that were to be embraced, albeit cautiously. While few BC Mennonite churches of this period sought to actively incorporate charismatic practices into their services, a significant number of Mennonite adherents in the Fraser Valley and Vancouver attended spontaneously organized weekly home groups that sought to practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These meetings would typically include lively singing, spontaneous prayer and "prophesy," as well as study of the scriptures, and sometimes even communion. In addition, some Fraser Valley Mennonites, often attending their own Mennonite churches on Sunday mornings, regularly travelled into Vancouver for the well-attended Sunday night services at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, a congregation that had by the late sixties embraced charismatic spirituality, and warmly welcomed countercultural "hippies" at a time when most mainline churches viewed them as subversively radical. By the late 1970s, the informal and lively, often scripture-based choruses associated with the charismatic movement had begun to find their way into the worship services of many mainstream Mennonite churches in the Lower Mainland, foreshadowing the contemporary worship services now standard in many congregations.

On the larger North American scene, in 1977 the Mennonite Church issued a favourable statement of reconciliation with the charismatic movement. At about the same time, Mennonite Renewal Services, which would eventually be known as Empowered Ministries, was formed to represent the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the mainstream churches. In 1995, however, it collapsed due to lack of funding.

Why this lack of funding? Was the issue no longer considered vital to the life of the church? Were "contemporary services" filling the void for some who were reacting to the long tradition of Mennonite sobriety? Certainly the controversy has not died, as many continue to walk away from mainstream churches and join in services of healing and speaking in tongues. Even on the Internet the debate among Mennonites continues, often vociferously. Several examples may suffice to illustrate the ongoing controversy. First of all, the pro-charismatic side, as represented by a sermon from Calgary:

"The Holy Spirit inspires vocal sounds that seem completely unintelligible but that are very meaningful communication between the Christian and God. … If we are willing to accept that the description of these gifts in the life of the early church describes a pattern that could be a part

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LIVES LIVED

Johann and Helena Wieler

By Robert Martens

Love is creative. Help us by praying, by working for the freedom of God's children in Russia.... In looking to the Lord to whom belong all the kingdoms of this world, including our great fatherland Russia, I hope to endure till there is a turn of events in our fields of activity. We have experienced this frequently before, in the grace of God. He is Lord and does as he pleases. Soon the clouds will dissipate and the people of God will shout for joy. Comfort one another with these words.
Johann Wieler, trans. L. Klippenstein

The early Anabaptists, despite being driven underground by their tormentors, were possessed by a hunger to disseminate their new and radical vision of God. Their Mennonite descendants, however, weary of violence and persecution, were content to farm in peaceful enclaves, to live as "the quiet in the land." And so it was in Russia. There the Mennonite Church developed into an ethnic people unto itself, as old ideals changed into moribund tradition. In 1860, however, Mennonite Brethren (MB) reformers defied the old ways, urging engagement with the "lost." Leading voices among them were Johann and Helena Thielmann Wieler, who might be called the very first Mennonite missionaries. Their passion, even obsession, to evangelize would cause them a lifetime of suffering.

After graduating from high school and attending a Swiss institute of pedagogy, Johann Wieler (1839-1889) preached the gospel in Odessa, at some point having been seized by a sense of mission. He attended the first MB Conference in 1872 and, being fluent in the Russian language, was commissioned as minister for church extension. A mere two weeks later he married Helena Thielmann (1851-1928). Johann was already under state surveillance for his proselytizing among ethnic Russians, something which was strictly prohibited, and he had endured some physical abuse from authorities. It is reported that he asked Helena, "What will you do if they deport me to Siberia?" – to which she replied, "Then I will go along to Siberia" (Redekopp 143).

Over the next few years, the Wielers struggled to survive, with Johann establishing small private schools in Friedensfeld and Nikopol. Helena was responsible for the students who boarded with them. The calamities which were to mark the lives of the Wielers began when, within fourteen months, their four children died. "They lay buried," Helena wrote, "in a large grave on a little hill in Nikopol" (JB Toews). In 1879 the couple moved to Halbstadt, where Johann taught pedagogy and Helena once again looked to the needs of student boarders.

Johann, meanwhile, was becoming a leader within MB circles. Together with PM Friesen, he translated the MB Confession of Faith into Russian for government officials. At the MB Conference of 1883, Wieler and Friesen proposed the idea of "open communion." Johann also urged that the MB Church proselytize among the Russian people, although it was well known that this was illegal. When his idea was soundly rejected by cautious delegates, Johann turned to evangelism on his own, preaching the gospel to Russians in the Odessa area. His fierce and perhaps irresponsible passion to evangelize brought him into great danger.

Nothing, it seemed, would stop the Wielers. Johann, who may have felt slighted by the MBs, became involved with the fledgling Baptist movement, and in 1886 was elected the first chairman of the Union of Russian Baptists. And he was carrying on mission work among ethnic Russians, with some support from the wealthy evangelical Pashkov. When he was accused by a former Russian brother of baptizing a Russian woman, the lives of Johann and Helena were permanently disrupted. Johann was forced to flee to Hamburg. "I went outside," wrote Helena, "and the world seemed so dark – as though it was enshrouded in fog" (JB Toews). Johann returned to the Russian Mennonite village of Tiege for a few months, but his time of hiding there must have been one of terror. Bribes were paid, and Johann obtained a passport and fled once again, this time to Berlin, subsequently sending word to his wife to follow him. Helena managed to do so, but only after burying another son: "I cried the whole way to Berlin," she later wrote (JB Toews).

It was a time of upheaval. The Wielers were soon forced to leave Germany, and although Johann had

considered emigration to America, they ended up in Tulscha, Rumania, where Johann became involved in work with a Baptist congregation. Here his journey ended. While helping with renovations of the church building, he fell or jumped off a ladder, sustaining some kind of excruciating internal injury. Shortly after preaching while in intense pain, Johann died, just short of his fiftieth birthday.

Helena remarried in 1895, to Franz Martens, a wealthy Rueckenau widower with six children. He died of a heart attack in 1907, and Helena emigrated to Canada, eventually arriving in failing health in Coaldale, where she died. She had buried two husbands and seven of her ten children. The Wielers had lived through great turmoil, some of it, critics would say, brought upon themselves. The Russian Empire was becoming increasingly racist and xenophobic; the defiant obstinacy of the Wielers, it could be said, endangered the security of Mennonites, and especially of Mennonite Brethren. Johann, however, died doing what he loved the most, and Helena, it seems, eventually discovered a sense of peace. "By nature," she wrote in her memoir, "I tended to be somewhat anxious and fearful. That fear is all gone now. I do not need to be anxious because God's presence is near all the time" (trans. Thiessen).

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Mennonites and the Charismatic Movement continued...

of the life of the church for all time as I believe, then we conclude that the New Testament evidence directs us to accept the validity of these gifts in the life of the Christian church today. … Should we pursue the miraculous gifts? Well, I think that it would be appropriate to ask God for them since the Bible speaks positively of them and considers them gifts that would normally occur within a church. … Let's ask God for the Spirit to work powerfully within us, perhaps even with one of these miraculous gifts. And let's not think that Mennonites can't have these gifts." (Calgary First Mennonite Church)

Second, a quote that argues just as forcefully against the charismatic movement:

"The charismatic movement comes and offers you something that will lead you away from your place in God. Then it cheats you out of the authentic Holy Spirit in your life. … You may enter a charismatic church on a given Sunday morning and find an entire service of praise and worship with no preaching. They prefer praise over preaching because such 'praise' gratifies the flesh. … They often live hypocritical lives, bragging that God has prospered them and accusing the poor of living in sin while they carry incredible amounts of debt. … They ... believe that a day is coming when they will begin to take over all branches of government and authority in the world.... They will Christianize the world. The Bible tells us that Satan is the god of this world and it can't be Christianized." (Yoder)

The disagreement aired here sounds remarkably similar to what Mennonite Brethren experienced 150 years ago in southern Russia. Conrad Adenauer, once chancellor of Germany, remarked that history is "the sum total of things that could have been avoided" (Toews). As with the case of the acquaintances I met in the coffee shop, the debate is generally more civilized and tolerant today, but the truce remains an uneasy one.

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LIVES LIVED

From Lutheran to Mennonite: the story of one couple's spiritual journey

By Dave Enns

On May 19, 1921, A. Heinrich Hepting and his wife Anna, nee Lechner, were baptized by immersion in a pond that supplied water for a local mill, and were subsequently accepted into the Millerovo Mennonite Brethren Church. These were my maternal grandparents. This baptism was unusual since both were descended from many generations of Evangelical Lutherans. What caused them to make such a significant change in their life? At the time they were both in their late 30s. I have tried to follow their footsteps through a series of events which might have led them to break their ties with the church of their forefathers and join the Mennonite Brethren.

Both Heinrich and Anna were born in the German Lutheran colony of Riebensdorf, located in the Don Province of Russia, about seven kilometres from the city of Ostrogosezk. This colony had been founded in 1763 and was somewhat unique since it was isolated from the rest of the ethnic German colonies along the Volga. It has been described as being a "German island in a sea of Russians." As a result, the settlers retained many of their old Swabish customs until the beginning of the 1850s. Then, a fast growing population, coupled with land-use restrictions (no land was allowed to be subdivided or sold to outsiders), resulted in the establishment of daughter colonies, first near the Black Sea and then in the traditional Don Cossack area surrounding the town of Millerovo.

Anna was born in 1880 and Heinrich in 1881. Riebensdorf was in the midst of a prolonged economic decline. Some evidence suggests that this decline was paralleled by a decline in the spiritual vigour of the colony, although Heinrich writes that his family attended church faithfully. Both Heinrich and Anna were christened as newborns and confirmed in their mid teens. In his memoirs, Heinrich recounts an incident at age 17 in which he was let down on a rope to retrieve a bucket at the bottom of a well. The man holding the rope was unable to pull Heinrich back up and he was in danger of drowning. In great fear he cried out to the Lord and recalls being aware of his presence. Shortly after his 20th birthday, Heinrich married 19-year-old Regina Kehl. A year later he was called into military service and Regina gave birth to their first child, a girl, who did not survive. Shortly before the couple's second wedding anniversary Regina, along with her infant, died in childbirth.

Meanwhile, Anna had married at 19 and by age 22 had 3 small boys. During her 5th year of marriage, her husband Wilhelm Boger died, and so she moved in with her parents, who by this time were living in the new colony of Abrahamsfeld near Millerova. In August of 1906, Heinrich completed his military service and returned briefly to Riebensdorf to see his mother and to collect a small cash inheritance. He then left to join his oldest brother, Joseph, who had in the meantime moved to Abrahamsfeld. It was here that Heinrich and Anna met in the fall of 1906, he a widower at age 25, having lost 2 infant children and a wife, and she a 26-year-old widow with 3 small boys. Within 2 months they were married and then lived with Anna's parents for two years until they had saved up enough to buy a small farm in the neighbouring village of Katherinental. It was in Millerovo that Heinrich and Anna first came into contact with Mennonites.

In the early 1900s, Millerova was a mostly Russian town of about 10,000. It was, however, surrounded by 20 to 30 German Lutheran colonies. The town had one German speaking church and attached school, both run by the Mennonite Brethren. Mennonites, German Lutherans, and German Baptists all attended the church and sent their children to the school. Those of German background formed a significant part of the town's business sector.

For Heinrich and Anna, the eight years, 1906 to 1914, were golden. Their family was increasing, all the children were healthy, and they had been able to buy a large farm in the same village as Anna's parents. Times were good. The outbreak of World War I changed their peaceful life forever. Heinrich was called up almost immediately and spent most of the war near the Turkish front. On April 21, 1917, Anna entered her parent's home in Abrahamsfeld to find that her 71-year-old father and 68-year-old mother had been murdered, along with two other inhabitants. Father Lechner had recently completed a business transaction involving a large

amount of cash, and the robbers believed that the money was hidden in the house. Even though the robbers were disguised, Father Lechner had apparently recognized one of them by his voice and made the mistake of confronting him. Six weeks later, the leader of the robbers was arrested and executed. For Anna, this was not the end of the tragedy. She confessed to being overcome by hatred and stated that she would have liked to personally execute the robbers.

Shortly before Easter in 1918, as the war entered its final phase, Heinrich was able to get a military leave, and he and Anna met at a resort town on the Black Sea. One evening as they were out for a walk, they heard beautiful music and discovered that it was coming from a nearby Russian Baptist church. They stayed for the service and were so impressed that they returned the following morning for the Easter celebration. Heinrich writes in his memoirs, "*Ostern 1918 fanden meine liebe Frau und ich Frieden im Herrn und Vergebung unserer Sündenschuld im Blute des Lammes.*" (On Easter 1918, my dear wife and I found peace in the Lord and forgiveness of sins by the blood of the Lamb.) It was this unequivocal statement of assurance of salvation that caused contention between the couple and their relatives in the following months. "One cannot know," the relatives said, "One can only hope." Anna, who had a strong personality, was not above taking some of her older daughters along on visits to her relatives, during which the girls would sing hymns while she "brought the message." It appears that these evangelistic efforts were not well received.

The turmoil of the Bolshevik revolution engulfed Millerovo in 1919, with the occupation of the town seesawing back and forth between the Red Army and the defending Cossacks. However, by late December, the Reds were in firm control. Anna's last child, my mother, was born in Millerovo during this siege. Her older sisters report that she was born "all wrinkled like an old person" because Anna had been malnourished during the pregnancy. It was against this backdrop of life under their new Communist masters that the Heptings came to a final decision. They were baptised by immersion upon confession of their faith and were received into the MB church.

Moscow in November 1929 was jammed with 13,000 people seeking exit visas, desperate to escape the "workers' paradise." As certified Mennonites, the Heptings were among the fortunate few who caught the last trains out of Moscow. They bypassed their intended destination of Winnipeg and arrived in Yarrow, BC, in the spring of 1930. Millerovo had been a cosmopolitan town with Russian as the main language. Business letterheads from that period had been written in Russian, as were the MB church records. But it was widely believed in Mennonite circles of the time that Low German was the defining language of a true Mennonite. In its day-to-day interactions, Yarrow spoke Low German. The Heptings did not. Heinrich died in 1952 of prostate cancer. During his final days in a morphine-altered state, he would sing hymns and recite Scripture. Perhaps this was a fitting doxology for a man who had staked his life on the absolute certainty of his salvation. Anna lived for another 21 years to the ripe old age of 92.

C. Martens on left, with Heinrich and Anna Martens, 1938.

How well did she integrate into Mennonite life in Yarrow? My impression was that she viewed ethnic Germans as culturally superior to Mennonites because they spoke a purer German and were more urbane in outlook. From the Yarrow community, I received the impression that Germans were like a favoured cousin: that is, they shared with Mennonites a love of all things German, particularly music, but still were not bona fide Mennonites. Anna spent her final years in the Menno Home in Abbotsford. When other seniors addressed her in Low German, she would answer back in Russian. She may have been confused. It is equally possible that she was expressing her opinion of a barrier which had proved insurmountable for over 40 years. Nonetheless, her outspokenness and evangelistic zeal remained strong to the end.

Adler, Bruno. *Die Deutsche Kolonie Riebensdorf im Gouvernement Woronesch*, Globus: 1904. This is an ethnographic study of the colony in 1904 and also includes a detailed history.

DeFehr, C.A. *Memories of My Life*, D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd.: 1967. This account gives an excellent description of Millerovo and the Mennonite business community.

"Memoirs of A.H. Hepting." Oral interviews with H.H. Enns in his 91st year, 2007. He was the son in law of the Heptings. My grandfather wrote a detailed account of certain periods in his life.

EVENT REVIEW

Celebration 2010: 150th Celebration of the Mennonite Brethren

By Jim Baerg

After a three-day "Mennonite Brethren Consultation," mainly for leaders and pastors, a joint celebration of the US and Canadian MB Conferences was held at Pacific Academy in Surrey, July 14-16. On July 14 and 15 binational reports were made on various international mission efforts. On July 16 separate business sessions were held for Canada and the United States Conferences. After the official Celebration meetings, July 17, tour buses took attendees to some church planting projects in Vancouver, after which a closing session took place at Vancouver Convention Centre.

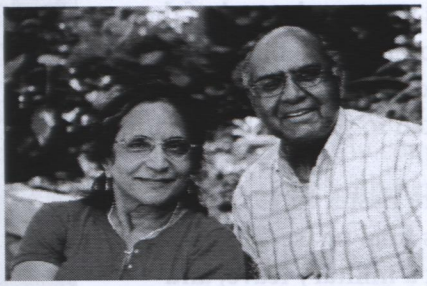
"People of the Book" – this phrase was repeated often, not as a statement of exclusivity, but rather as a challenge to remain true to God's Word.

What a celebration it was! Many of the introductory sessions focussed on the work of international missions. We heard exciting reports of what the Lord is doing in Congo and India, the combined total membership of which by far exceeds that of North America. The ministry in Thailand has taken on breathtaking impetus despite continuing opposition.

Frequent references were made to the 18 men and their families who, in 1860, felt the need for both personal and corporate renewal. In the last 150 years the Lord has blessed that desire and steered it toward a concern for fellow human beings both at home and abroad. The application of the Thailand MB Church to join the international community of Mennonite Brethren is an exciting result of the Holy Spirit's work. Canadian churches, including those in Quebec and New Brunswick, are also part of the family, as well as those in South America and Europe, where celebrations have already been held.

A highlight of the convention was the conferring of an Honourary Doctorate of Christian Ministries on Pastor David Manuel who, at 75, continues an effective ministry amongst Indo Canadians, and now, via television, also to the people of India and many in the Muslim world.

Also celebrated were the missional efforts of the 24 church planting projects in BC, and specifically the 20 in Vancouver alone, where it is reported that 42% of its citizens answer "none" to the religious affiliation question. (The Canadian average is 16%.) Twenty young enthusiastic families are organizing in various neighborhoods; they shared their stories of how the Lord led them to church planting and helped them work through their struggles. This is a multilanguage effort, resulting in congregations with names such as Artisan, House for All Nations, Reality Vancouver, and Pacific Grace Mandarin.



Pastor David Manuel (pictured here with his wife, Stella) was presented an Honourary Doctorate of Christian Ministries at the celebration.

The celebration was attended by both conferences in North America, although there were separate work sessions for Canada and the US. Attendees shared their common origins, as well as a continuing concern that people come to know the saving power of Jesus Christ.

The fellowship was rich, and meeting old friends and making new ones was a bonus. One was left with a feeling of gratitude that our ancestors at some point, whether 150 years ago or one year ago, had the courage to join this group of believers who believed "in the Book."

True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant.
It clothes the naked.
It feeds the hungry.
It comforts the sorrowful.
It shelters the destitute.
It serves those that harm it.
It binds up that which is wounded.
It has become all things to all people.

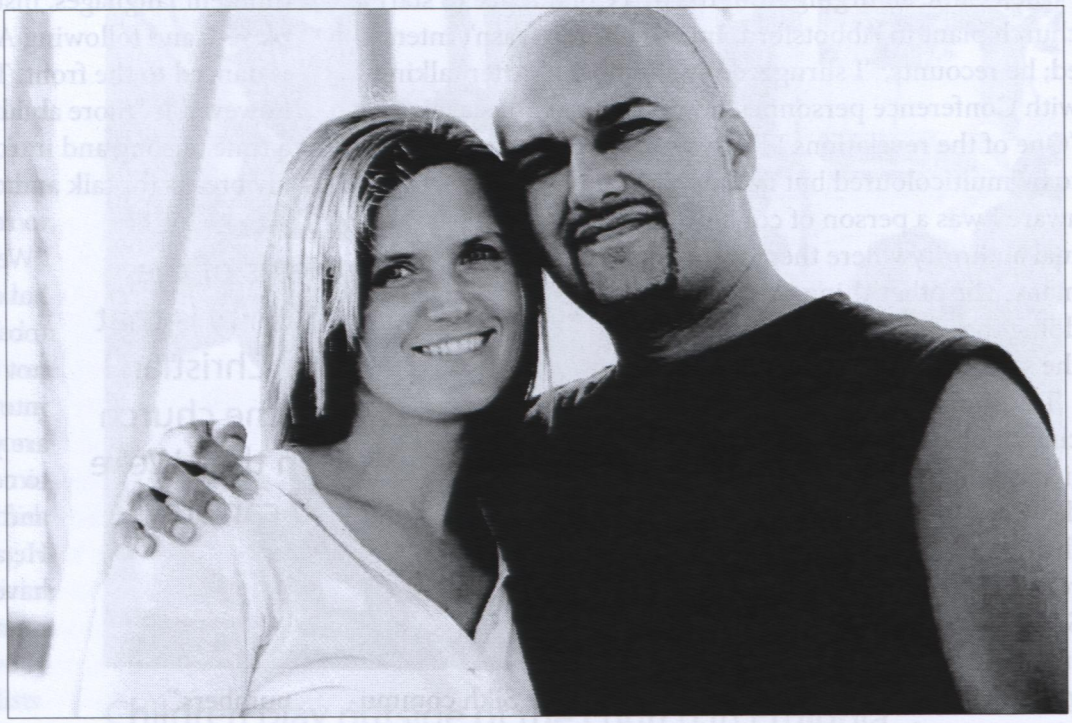
– Menno Simons

INTERESTING LIVES

Bindu Sidhu and Life Centre

By Robert Martens

"I love history," says Bindu Sidhu as he sips a large coffee. His hair is cropped short, and he is wearing a Nike sweatshirt. Bindu is the affable young pastor of the Life Centre congregation, which meets in the gymnasium of Rick Hansen School in Abbotsford. "We need to understand our times," he says, as he leans forward with irrepressible energy, "rather than just doing the latest and greatest thing." Bindu is fascinated by his Punjabi past: "It's only 55 years since we were allowed to vote," he says, "Punjabis were a persecuted people back home. If anyone could identify with them, they should be Mennonites. Mennonites have a lot to offer to the Punjabi community." On the other hand, he says, "Sikhs have been here 100 years, and I don't know why the impact with the gospel hasn't happened."



Bindu Sidhu is a pastor of the Life Centre congregation. He and his wife, Trisha, have four children.

Bindu was born in India, and in 1975 emigrated to Canada at the age of three with his parents and three brothers. The influx of Punjabis since then into the Abbotsford area has been enormous, but he remembers that at the time, "there were maybe five or six of us in the entire elementary school." Bindu graduated from high school in Abbotsford, and shortly afterwards became a Christian when a friend gave him a Bible. "My first reaction was, this is good stuff, why aren't we bringing this to people?" Bindu went on to attend Briercrest Bible College, where, he says, "my calling for ministry was clear. I knew God had called me to Abbotsford – no mistakes." He wanted to break new ground.

"The others," he says with a smile, "could fight over the 5,000 that are going to church, I'll go to the 100,000 that aren't. Mennonites have been a bit protective, exclusive, but that's a natural reaction of an ethnic group."

Bindu worked at Northview Church as youth pastor for five years, in the meantime achieving two degrees at Columbia Bible College in youth work and in caregiving/counselling. At Northview he first experienced a great sense of isolation and "felt like Moses in Pharaoh's library"; however, he was fortunate to find a mentor in Dave Currie, of Campus Crusade (now Power to Change), who contacted families "who really helped me a lot." In 1995, his final year there, he married Trisha; the couple now has four children.

Bindu then took a year off from ministry. He believes that the years at Northview were the "childhood of my faith." The year off was his adolescence: "like Elijah, [I had a] brook experience, the stream had dried up, and God said it's time to go." Bindu believes that he became an adult when he served for six years as youth and student minister at South Abbotsford MB Church. While there, he sensed that some kind of calling was about to happen: "I knew I wasn't going to be there long, but

"Mennonites have been a bit protective, exclusive, but that's a natural reaction of an ethnic group."

Bindu Sidhu and Life Centre continued...

didn't want to be a pastor who bailed out. My dad and culture taught me, if you start something, you finish it."

Then came an urging from the MB Conference to start a church plant in Abbotsford. Initially Bindu wasn't interested; he recounts, "I shrugged my shoulders." After talking with Conference personnel, however, his enthusiasm grew. "One of the revelations I had was, most churches want to be multicoloured but not multicultural. I became fully aware I was a person of colour in spiritual authority where there weren't very many. The other thing was, if you keep doing the same thing, you keep getting the same results."

Traditionally, Bindu says, when a church plant is envisioned, a representative is sent to visit various churches and draw out some of their members. But the new church plant chose a different route: "I said, God, we are not going to South Abbotsford to ask for 100 people." In summer of 2006, a tiny new congregation interested in communicating with the Sikh community met at a home. Four couples with inter-racial marriages were involved. After six months, Life Centre moved into quarters at Rick Hansen School, with about 50 people at the first service. The congregation has since grown to about 240. The church's vision statement is "Loving God, Reflecting Community." Bindu muses, "If we focus on loving God, we can't hold our people back. If you hold a mirror on the church, it should reflect all communities. We believe in heaven on earth," says Bindu with a grin, "in loving those around us intentionally."

The idea was to create a multicultural congregation: "If Wal-Mart can do it, why can't the church? Grocery stores and schools have a multicultural identity, only the church does not." Language and music, says Bindu, are critical to culture. Although English is naturally the primary thrust at Life Centre, he emphasizes that "we celebrate different cultures by singing songs in different languages, in Punjabi, or Swahili, or Portuguese." Often the reaction to the new venture was, "So you're planting a Punjabi church? We are so stuck!" he laments. "Come as you are, it's OK to be Punjabi and to be Christian. People will say you are Mennonite, I say, no, I'm Punjabi." Old habits, says Bindu, die hard. "One of the views of the Punjabi community is that when I become Christian I become white: the church often goes with that. We're saying, no, you can stay Punjabi."

"One of the views of the Punjabi community is that when I become Christian I become white: the church often goes with that. We're saying, no, you can stay Punjabi."

Consequently, prayers at Life Centre are offered in different languages, instruments such as the tabla are played, and following African tradition, the offering is danced to the front. The focus at the congregation, however, is "more about people than program." After a time of song and introduction of visitors, the assembly breaks for talk and coffee, and only then returns to receive a sermon. Bindu states, "We're always going to eat together, have coffee together; we'll never be too big for that. Our main focus is not to bring people to church but into our homes. How many people are you loving? Jesus doesn't ask us to convert, but to love and disciple, and then conversion happens." He adds, "I was asked, how many have you reached? I answered how many has the church reached in 100 years? – we don't measure by numbers."

"By statement of faith," says Bindu, "I'm MB, but to say I'm Mennonite? I value the Mennonite history, the courage to bring the gospel forward, even from the stake – but where is the risk today?" He expresses some frustration with the inaction, as he perceives it, of the mainstream church with regard to multicultural identities: "Honestly, I don't understand how we can miss this; all we're doing is the latest American method of doing church. We do great things overseas, but it's more authentic if we do it at home." On the other hand, Bindu Sidhu feels a sense of accomplishment, of pride, at Life Centre, even a sense of peace: "For so long I felt so alone, but I've never been around so many coloured believers in my life."

Ethiopia and the Mennonite Church: Part II

By Richard Thiessen

Meserete Kristos Church

Missionaries to Ethiopia considered it a part of their work to establish churches. Complete freedom for this was given in Muslim areas such as Hararge Province, but restrictions were placed on such activity at Nazareth, a strong Orthodox area. The first believers were baptized in 1951; they were from Nazareth but were taken to Addis Ababa for the ceremony because of the government restrictions. The service programs set up by the mission opened doors and helped establish confidence with the people and the government. Jobs in teaching and medicine brought young Ethiopians into contact with the missionaries. Doctors prayed before treating patients and evangelists were hired to minister to patients.

Children play outside of the church in Ethiopia.

The church officially began in 1959 when 11 Ethiopian lay leaders met with missionaries to set up a structure to coordinate the work of the five congregations which had formed on the mission stations. An annual Christian Life Conference helped make the church known to other evangelical groups. Under the direction of Daniel S. Sensenig and Chester L. Wenger a General Church Council was organized in 1959 with lay "counselors" chosen to each represent 20 members in the fellowship groups. By 1964 Ethiopians had replaced missionaries in the executive offices and missionaries then served as assistants. The council met semiannually to plan for nurture and evangelism and review institutional work. The name Meserete Kristos Bete Kristian (Christ Foundation Church) was chosen because the term "Mennonite" had no local meaning. The church took over the administration of the schools and hospitals begun by the mission in order to minister to the whole person. It organized a medical board, board of education, and evangelism board. These institutions helped the church become established. A number of leaders in the 1980s came to the church from contacts made during medical and secondary training. On Sundays eager Christians went into the surrounding areas to witness to the gospel.

Congregations were established at Wonji, Shoa, and Meta Hara among people from other areas who moved to these places to work on sugar plantations along the Awash River. A church was built in the Bole area of Addis Ababa for the fellowship that met at the School for the Blind. By 1973 Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) had 8 congregations with 800 members, 11 elementary schools, 2 junior high schools, 1 boarding high school, 2 hospitals, 2 clinics, 2 guest houses, a bookstore with several branches and a literature program which produced a newsletter, Zena. From 1966 to 1974 MKC joined with the Baptist General Conference Mission to form Globe Publishing House which published Sunday school materials and leadership training courses for evangelical churches.

In 1972 the government outlawed the Mulu Wengel (Full Gospel) church. This Pentecostal church was started by a group of high school students learning English from a Mennonite doctor in Nazareth. The group was eventually influenced by the teachings of the Finnish Pentecostal Mission. After their churches were closed, many members joined Meserete Kristos Church congregations and had a significant influence on the denomination. After what had been a period of slow growth, a spiritual awakening began in 1973. As a result, the Meserete Kristos church is far more charismatic and Pentecostal than most of its sister Anabaptist/Mennonite denominations.

With the coming of the communist military rule (known

as the Derg) in 1974, workers who felt oppressed under the monarchy began to demonstrate and demand more rights and better pay. The Meserete Kristos Church, unable to meet the worker demands, transferred its hospitals to the government. The Menno Bookstore was nationalized in 1977 and the Bible Academy in 1982. In 1982 the government closed all 14 congregations of the Meserete Kristos Church and detained five of its leaders for four years. The church no longer officially met during this time, choosing instead to meet in small cell groups. Mennonite Central Committee continued to carry on agricultural development work, reforestation, resettlement of refugees, and distribution of food in times of famine.

Even though the church was in hiding during the Derg years, membership grew dramatically. In 1982 the church had 5,000 members in 14 congregations. After the fall of the communist government in 1991, the church had 34,000 members in 53 congregations. In 1994, 50,000 Meserete Kristos members gathered in a stadium to publicly congregate for the first time in 20 years. In 1994 the Meserete Kristos College was established to produce new church leaders. Originally established in Addis Ababa, the college moved to Debre Zeyit in January 2007 and had 140 students at the main campus in fall 2009.

Characteristics of the Meserete Kristos Church

As stated earlier, the Meserete Kristos Church is the most charismatic of all Anabaptist/Mennonite churches. Churches practice faith healings, the exorcism of demons, and speaking in tongues. Wednesday evening services in Meserete Kristos Church congregations are well attended, and often include exorcisms and healings.

Sunday morning services are fairly long by North American standards – at least two hours in length. Music is a central component to the services. Churches have worship teams led by a worship leader and often have choirs as well. Ethiopian worship music, like a lot of other aspects of their lives, is unique. It is sung in unison and uses a pentatonic scale (5 note), different from the western 7 note scale. Verses and choruses are repeated numerous times, both during congregational songs and when soloists are singing. People in the congregation participate not only by singing along but with vocal trills that are vocalized from the back of the throat. Churches have electronic keyboards that accompany the songs, and sometimes other string instruments are included as well. Often the electronic keyboard has a brass instrumental sound.

Many of the churches have a very active ministry to children during the week. It seems that many churches receive funding from the government to feed and educate children. The funding comes to Ethiopia through para-church organizations such as Compassion International, and then is directed through the government to the churches. The Meserete Kristos Church has a very active development arm, working together with Mennonite Central Committee to help alleviate food shortage situations in parts of the country.

The cell group model is very important and stems back to the time beginning in 1982 when the communist government officially closed the church. Forced to go underground, the church created a structure that would allow church life to continue. In 1983 a council of the underground church met with representatives from the 14 congregations that were in existence at the time (5,000 members). Congregations with more than 500 members were divided into two to allow for pastoral care. They believed that daughter churches could more easily grow and further reproduce. Nine key ministries were identified: children's ministry, visitation ministry, group Bible study, women's ministry, prayer ministry, worship services ministry, new believers' ministry, pastoral care ministry, and a counseling ministry. The council worked to make sure that all nine of these ministries were being carried out wherever there had been a Meserete Kristos congregation.

Bible study groups were no larger than five so as to not draw attention from government officials. People would arrive and depart at different times. There was no singing or clapping of hands and no one carried a Bible. Worship services corresponded with Orthodox Church services, and people would wear the same white shawls as the Orthodox worshippers to blend in. When some leaders were jailed, others were trained to take their place. If a large church had 7 elders, that model would be reproduced in the small divisions that were created when the church went underground. Each new church would train up 7 new elders, along with Bible study leaders, prayer group leaders, and preachers.

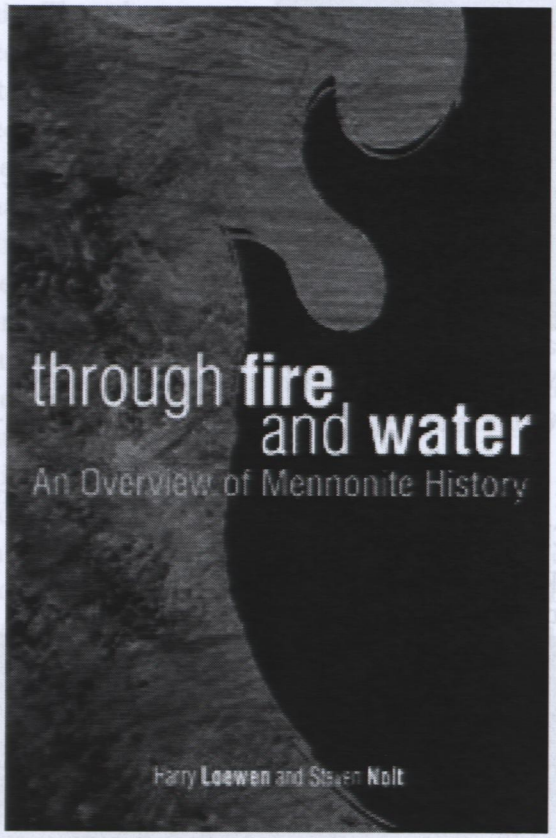
The collapse of communism in 1991 left many, especially young people, disillusioned with politics, and many flocked to the church looking for answers. The poor economy has also had a positive impact on church growth. The holistic ministries of the church have attracted many to a faith in Jesus Christ. In 2009 there were 518 congregations and 867 church-planting centers in the Meserete Kristos Church with a total of 188,230 baptized members and a total of 365,808 faith community members, making it the world's largest Anabaptist conference. The church reported 17,852 baptisms in the most recent 12-month period, and the average growth rate at that time was 4.85%.

The denomination's blend of anabaptist theology and charismatic worship has allowed it to meet the spiritual needs of thousands of new Christians. The perseverance of the church through the years of communist rule, and its continued resilience in spite of economic and financial hardships is a testimony to the Meserete Kristos Church's faith and wholehearted commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

BOOK REVIEW

through fire and water: An Overview of Mennonite History

By Robert Martens



In the simplicity and broadness of its narrative, *through fire and water* would seem to target a youthful generation sometimes unfamiliar with Anabaptist/Mennonite history. In fact, in its retelling of the Gospel story, it appears to assume an ignorance even of the biblical tradition. Cultural and spiritual ignorance are common, of course, to all generations, but it is unlikely that *through fire and water* would appeal strongly to many adults. Some of the questions it raises for discussion purposes border on the simplistic, and the numerous attractive graphics, cartoons and photos are clearly designed for the young. On the other hand, the book is a delightful and consistently articulate telling of the very complex Anabaptist/Mennonite story.

This overview of Mennonite history is told with a strong Anabaptist/Mennonite bias. The Gospel story as told here is strongly populist and anti-elitist. The Roman emperor Constantine is blamed for the institutionalization and corruption of the Early Church. The medieval Church is described as essentially oppressive, and Luther is characterized as something of a sell-out to the political powers of his time. Authors Loewen and Nolt do not idealize the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition, however, and their frequent calls for renewal in that tradition are honest and refreshing. They maintain a careful balance between the evangelical and practical, summed up well in a comment from a Honduran Mennonite church leader: "I've been converted twice. Maybe my conversion to the love of neighbour was really my first conversion. I used to think that salvation was something just for me" (302).

through fire and water is an updating of a 1996 edition. It deals thoughtfully with well-known and traditional histories such as the Russian Mennonite experience, but moves quickly on to stories about "new ethnic" churches, peace and justice work in inner cities, and women's roles in the congregation. The book also emphasizes the astounding growth of the Mennonite Church in the poorer nations of the world. Peacemaking and reconciliation, living the Anabaptist way, can be brutally dangerous during times of poverty, oppression, and warfare, but Loewen and Nolt point out that the Anabaptist/Mennonite Church seems to flourish under those conditions. The authors of *through fire and water* end their book with a call to group discipleship, urging us to honour and use our past in order to reshape our future. A Mennonite pastor from Burkina Faso sums up their ideas this way: "God includes us in the management of time and events so we must not simply be subjected to history. We must make history. We must influence history in the direction God wants" (311).

Mennonite Brethren and contemplative practices

By Andrew Dyck

Andrew Dyck is currently co-pastor at Highland Community Church and has taught part time at Columbia Bible College. The following article outlines his ongoing dissertation work towards a Ph.D.

The research for my doctoral dissertation arises from the observation that Canadian Mennonite Brethren, like other Mennonites and many evangelicals, are adopting contemplative practices (e.g., spiritual direction, *lectio divina*, silent retreats, Ignatian discernment) that have typically been associated with Roman Catholic Christians. Some Mennonite Brethren find that these practices are tremendously enriching and are restoring their capacity to have a "personal relationship with Jesus." Other Mennonite Brethren, however, are critical of these practices, seeing them as New Age, inappropriately Catholic, excessively subjective, or at odds with doing the work of God's Kingdom. Unfortunately, too many proponents *and* detractors are inadequately critiquing this Mennonite Brethren adoption of the contemplative. Sound critique is necessary if Mennonite Brethren are to remain true to their Anabaptist and evangelical expressions of following Christ, neither adopting what is unbiblical nor rejecting what is truly Christ-like. I hope to further such critique with my research.

An icon of St. Benedict.

Canadian Mennonite Brethren have repeatedly been influenced by other traditions. Lutheran Pietists and then Baptists influenced the first Mennonite Brethren at the time that they were differentiating themselves from other Mennonites. Subsequently, as Mennonite Brethren were migrating to Canada, they were influenced in turn by fundamentalists, evangelicals, charismatics and, more recently, by the Vineyard and Reformed traditions. The engagement of some Mennonite Brethren with contemplative practices – from Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Quaker traditions – has been going on for some years.

My first step in pursuing this research has been to describe the spirituality of Mennonite Brethren in Canada; my working definition of spirituality is "lived experience of God." Two secondary aspects of spirituality surround this core: (a) actions that contribute to and result from those experiences, and (b) ways of talking about those experiences. In short, the heart of spirituality is religious experience that is embodied in practices and embraced by theology.

Among Mennonite Brethren, the primary expression of spirituality has been personal conversion. In the early decades of the denomination, conversion was viewed as typically involving a profound life-changing experience of God's awakening, convicting and forgiving – an experience often marked by strongly expressed emotions. Later, this emotional expressiveness came to be minimized and even squashed. With the

influence of the charismatic movement, however, it was again honoured. In the early decades, this profound affective experience of God often took place over weeks and months, but in time it came to be understood as happening more instantaneously (e.g., at an evangelistic crusade). In recent decades, Mennonite Brethren have again recognized that conversion is a process. Throughout their history, Mennonite Brethren have given attention to the affective aspects of conversion because they have understood conversion to be a matter of the heart, and because they have often understood emotions as an expression of that interiority.

Conversion has been associated with a variety of Mennonite Brethren practices. For many years, giving a public testimony, praying audibly in public, and being baptized (or re-baptized, if one's first baptism had not been preceded by a definite conversion event) were understood as evidences of true conversion – alongside, of course, the work of upright living, evangelism and missions. Conversion was fostered by preaching, reading scripture, prayer, *Hausbesuche* (house visits, a form of evangelistically-oriented spiritual direction) and personal witnessing.

From the early decades of the Mennonite Brethren, conversion was emphasized as being personal. Baptism upon confession of faith therefore took place on the basis of an individual's personal experience of confessing sins and receiving assurance of God's forgiveness rather than on the basis of having learned a catechism. Later, the language of personal experience shifted to the language of personal choice. A converted person was one who had personally decided to accept (or follow) Jesus as his or her personal Saviour. In addition to understanding conversion in terms of interiority, actions, volition and change, Mennonite Brethren have also emphasized that conversion is about relationship with God and with people.

I plan to explore two other key features of Canadian Mennonite Brethren spirituality. One is the conviction that God speaks to believers through scripture and the community of faith. A statement by the Mennonite Brethren Board of Reference and Council in 1950 states that God's Spirit gives understanding about the scriptures by speaking to the "entire brotherhood," so "that we, together with all saints, come to the knowledge of the Son of God so that we can firmly stand against the craftiness of deceitful teachings." In the mid-twentieth century, this corporate understanding of hearing God took particular shape in the emergence of Bible schools and study conferences.

A statue of St. Ignatius of Loyola in St. Peter's Basilica.

Another key feature of Mennonite Brethren spirituality is prayer and worship. These have been given renewed attention in recent decades through the influence of the charismatic and Vineyard movements. The widespread changes in music styles among Mennonite Brethren churches reflect this shift, as does the increased emphasis on worship planning. Prayer meetings, once common among Mennonite Brethren, have largely faded away. However, prayer has continued to be viewed as important, as expressed in various other expressions of devotionalism – e.g., personal quiet time, concerts of prayer, speaking in tongues, and, most recently, contemplative practices such as prayer retreats, praying the scriptures (e.g., *lectio divina*), and centering prayer.

In my research, I am also examining contemporary expressions of two forms of Catholic contemplative spirituality – Ignatian and Benedictine – as well as present-day contemplative activities among Mennonite Brethren. The biography and *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola offer a path for initial and ongoing conversion, while the *Rule of St. Benedict* offers ways of reading scripture and praying. I welcome conversation with Canadian Mennonite Brethren who consider their own lived experiences with God to have been shaped by contemplative traditions.

Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method*, Revised ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 41.

The research of historians John B. Toews (Abbotsford) and Dora Dueck (Winnipeg) is particularly helpful here.

Henry Brucks, ed. *Another Look at the Mennonite Brethren* (Winnipeg: Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1983).

BOOK EXCERPT

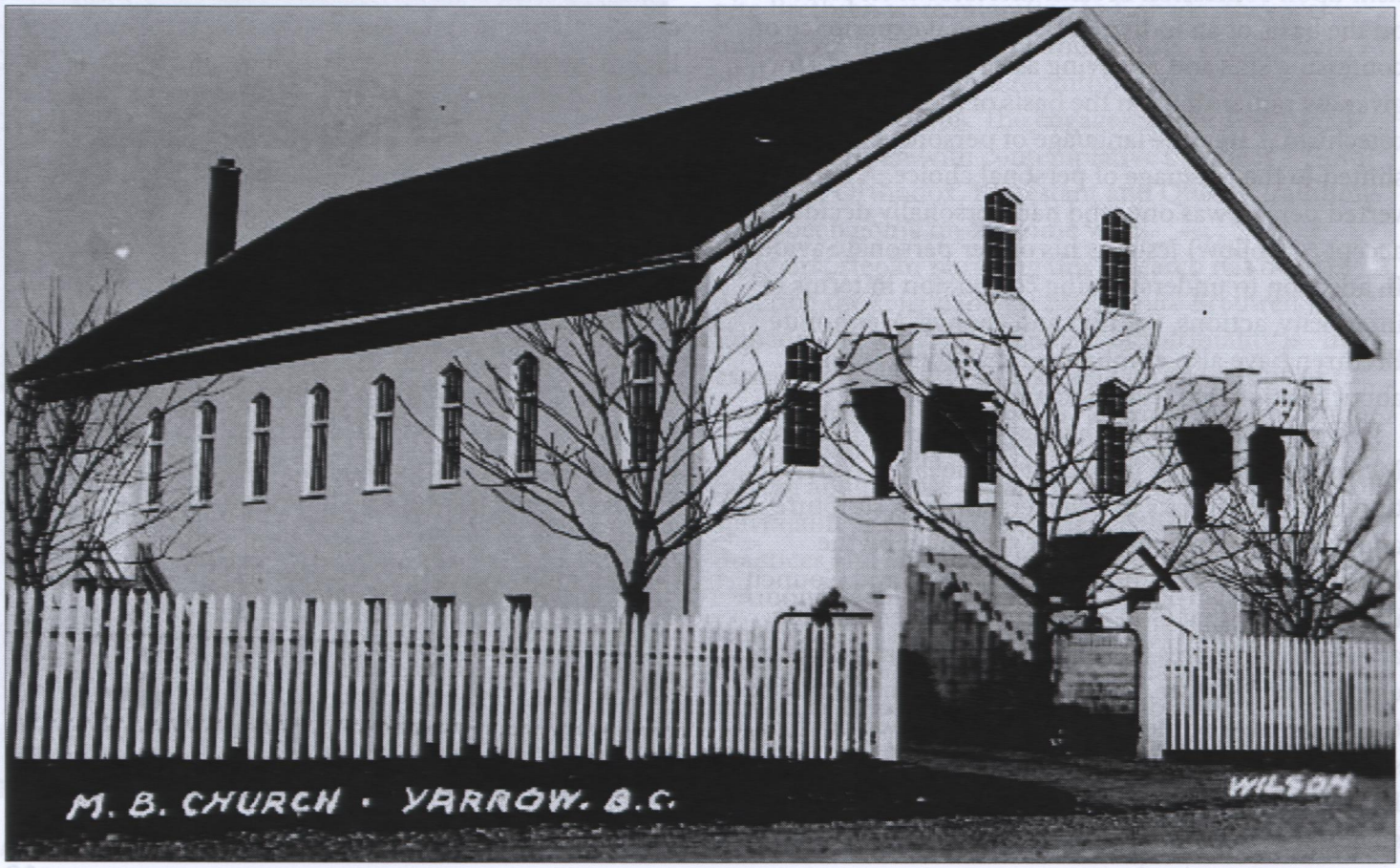
The Way We Were: A trip through Mennonite settlements in British Columbia in 1940

Translated by Louise Bergen Price from *"Eine Wanderung durch die mennonitschen Siedlungen in Britisch Columbia,"* in *Warte Jahrbuch*. Edited by Arnold Dyck. Part III

In Parts 1 and 2 of our journey, we took the BC Electric train from New Westminster to Mennonite settlements in Strawberry Hill, Cloverdale, Coglan, Abbotsford, Arnold and Yarrow. Now, on the last stretch of our tour, our train takes us to Sardis, Vancouver and Black Creek.

In many ways, Sardis competes with her older sister, Yarrow. She is also growing by leaps and bounds, stretching out in all directions. Many an old time local farmer, in spite of a resolution not to sell to a Mennonite, ends up doing so anyway. The enormous price Mennonites will pay for land is too tempting. So one road after another is laid out, some with quite aristocratic-sounding names.

Thirteen years ago, Sardis looked quite different. Here and there, shabby huts declared the poverty of the pioneers who had to take paying jobs to eke out their miserable existence. Hard was the beginning, but diligence, frugality, and honesty helped overcome adversity. Today, Sardis wears a different face. Where earlier one saw bare homesteads, one now sees lush gardens; primitive cabins have given way to pretty homes, amongst which one also sees several stately dwellings with modern conveniences such as electric light, bathrooms, and running water. Several of the more prosperous dairy farmers now use electric machines to accomplish the tedious chore of milking. Two shops and a co-op provide all the necessities for the now affluent farmers. The general upswing in prosperity is evident everywhere. A particular adornment in the community is the modern church of the



Mennonite Brethren – one cannot find its equal in any Mennonite settlement.

The first fifty Mennonite settlers arrived in Sardis in 1929 and 1930. Today [1944] 160 families have homesteads here, a total of 750 persons. Land prices have increased greatly in the intervening years. In the beginning, one paid between $42 and $137 per acre; this has risen to between $300 and $400. The main occupations are dairy and chicken farming, and berry cultivation.

Like other settlements, Sardis is steadily growing, so that farms in the vicinity of Chilliwack are now also falling into entrepreneurial Mennonite hands. Most farms are bought by settlers from the prairies, who are paying relatively high prices.

On our return journey, we detour to make a quick stop at the Mennonite settlement in Mission. Here some have bought hilly land; others have rented berry farms once owned by Japanese families. In the first years, these deserted farms did not produce much, but now that they have been restored, they yield a good return.

Our travels have taken us on a 70-kilometre journey through the Fraser Valley and leave us with the impression that a peaceful [Mennonite] conquest is taking place. Involuntarily we think of the promise, "The meek shall inherit the earth." We know that these accomplishments have not been achieved by meekness alone, but through hard work and perseverance, always striving towards the goal.

Three hundred miles from Vancouver we find smaller Mennonite settlements near Oliver, Renata and Okanagan. Most people here have developed orchards. Sadly, we have no dates for these remote communities.

Some of BC's Mennonites have not settled on farmland, but have moved to Vancouver. We have no statistics on these, since many do not attend the two main churches. Opportunity to earn good money has enticed them here, where they join the masses and are lost to the Mennonite world. They will likely, once their circumstances improve, return to the land.

In conclusion, we turn to Vancouver Island. The trip on the CPR steamboat to Nanaimo takes two and a half hours. From here, we travel to Courtenay, the last station of the CPR railway, a distance of 75 miles. We then travel another 15 miles by car to reach Black Creek. This settlement is 12 years old and stretches along the highway for 3 miles. The first pioneer was Schulz, who opened a small shop which has since developed into a general store. After 1 1/2 years, three more families came; currently the community comprises 32 farm owners. All seem to be doing well. What they produce they are able to sell in the surrounding community. Many of the settlers also work in the logging camps in the area. The work can be dangerous, but brings in good money. Aside from this work, there are other opportunities for earning money. In time, the people of Black Creek will also become self-sufficient. This community is at a distance from other communities, but will likely grow in the future.

If we review what we have observed in the Mennonite settlements, we are under the impression that all are making headway. Whether this is also true in spiritual and intellectual areas we cannot say – this would be material for another chapter. If the tempo continues in the present fashion, one could expect that some settlers would soon become quite well-to-do, if not rich....

How do we now explain the mighty exodus of wealthy Mennonite farmers from the "ice cellars" of the prairies to British Columbia? Foremost, the mild and healthy climate. But aside from that, the advantage of enclosed colonies – as one could call them – and a better assurance of raising the next generation in a Mennonite spirit. Other advantages may also come into play. Be that as it may, in spite of the protests of native-born British Columbians, in spite of decisions in some circles to prohibit Mennonites from purchasing more land, and in spite of virulent attacks from the local press, the Mennonites will continue to arrive.

Black Creek MB Church

WEBSITE REVIEW

The WWW.YARROWBC.CA website

By Esther Epp Harder, Edwin Lenzmen, and Elmer Wiens

Wenn der Schnee ans Fenster fällt,
Lang die Abendglocke läutet,
Vielen ist der Tisch bereitet
Und das Haus ist wohlbestellt.

Mancher auf der Wanderschaft
Kommt ans Tor auf dunklen Pfaden.
Golden blüht der Baum der Gnaden
Aus der Erde kühlem Saft.

Wanderer tritt still herein;
Schmerz versteinerte die Schwelle.
Da erglänzt in reiner Helle
*Auf dem Tische Brot und Wein.**

Georg Trakl, "*Ein Winterabend*"

*loose translation
When snow falls on the window, and long tolls the evening bell, for many is the table prepared and the house put in order. Someone from their wandering comes to the gate on dark pathways. Golden blooms the tree of mercy from the earth's cool liquid. The wanderer stepped silently in. Grief turned the threshold to stone. There, in pure light, on the table, shines bread and wine.

The Yarrow, BC website developed by way of a happy confluence of events. In the summer of 2008, Yarrow pioneer Chester Brown came upon Elmer Wiens' Yarrow Scenes and Times webpage. Chester offered to contribute photographs and reminiscences of growing up in Yarrow during the 1920s and 1930s. This collaboration between Chester and Elmer resulted in the Yarrow Pioneers: Vedder River Flats and Majuba

The view of Yarrow from the top of Majuba Hill.

The Yarrow Grower's Cooperative until 1950.

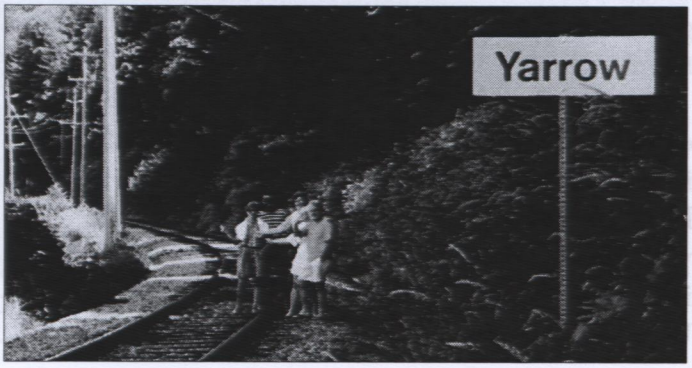
Hill webpage, published by the Vancouver Sun in its "BC150: Celebrating Our Diversity Series." Early in 2009, Ed Lenzmann and Esther Harder, who had also contributed pictures and recollections, joined Elmer as editors and writers to construct the Yarrow Pioneers and Settlers website.

A website is an open and continuing medium, allowing for corrections, revisions, deletions, and additions as the website develops with its editors and contributors, and existing symbiotically with books, magazines, newspapers, journals, websites, and oral discourses with common areas of interest. As such, the Yarrow website shares a direct legacy with Agatha Klassen's *Yarrow: A Portrait in Mosaic*, and the Yarrow Research Committee's *Yarrow, British Columbia: Mennonite Promise*. These works confirm the importance of Yarrow to many of its former and present citizens, and invite readers to identify with the Yarrow of their authors' memories, often Mennonite identities embraced, avoided, or even rejected.

While the text of a hard medium like a book determines its discourses, a soft medium like a website opens to new discourses as authors add their memories. A website can argue against the power of the hegemony of the past as readers and contributors reclaim their own past identities, and construct their present and future identities. Although the contributors and editors of our website have a common heritage, their diverse viewpoints and experiences can obtain its historical and literary integrity. We want it to be a truly collaborative effort. This is something that is really important to us, to include everyone with links to Yarrow. The wonderful thing about a website is that we can insert stories and photographs exactly where they fit, chronologically and by subject.

We organized our website to show Yarrow's growth as a community. It is divided into the following sections: Pioneers, Settlers, Public Schools, Mennonite Schools, Churches, Biographies / Obituaries, and webpages that establish Yarrow's chronology, geography, and demography. Drop-down-menus and frames facilitate navigation about the site. At the present time, we are collecting biographies and obituaries of people who lived in Yarrow at one time or another. Contributors are welcome to send text and pictures of the lives of family members to Esther Harder at the email address: aeharder@uniserve.com. If you have clipped German obituaries from *Der Bote* or *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* of Yarrow people, please send these too, as Esther is happy to translate them.

Esther, born in Yarrow, and Ed and Elmer, born in Chilliwack, BC, all grew up in Yarrow and attended the MB Church. Esther moved to Greendale in 1959, and lives in Sardis, BC; Ed moved to Winkler, Manitoba in 1959, and lives in Winnipeg, while Elmer moved to Vancouver in 1966. Esther focuses on Yarrow people and their links; Ed's expertise is Mennonite institutions; and Elmer, the webmaster, writes, drawing on the non-Mennonite community.



ART REVIEW

Monument unveiled to 30,000 Mennonite Victims of the Soviet Inferno

From a report by Anne Konrad

In Zaporizhia, Ukraine, on October 10, 2009, a sunny Saturday afternoon, 300 Ukrainians and foreign visitors solemnly dedicated a major monument to "Soviet Mennonite Victims of Tribulation, Stalinist Terror and Religious Oppression." The memorial consists of three life size silhouettes: a woman, a man and two children. The base quotes the scripture: "Blessed are they who mourn." Inscriptions are in English, German, Russian and Ukrainian.

This monument is the first within the former USSR to memorialize all Soviet Mennonites. As a place where Mennonites can mourn and contemplate, it draws attention to the human costs of the Stalinist totalitarian system, a story of tyranny, suffering and oblivion.

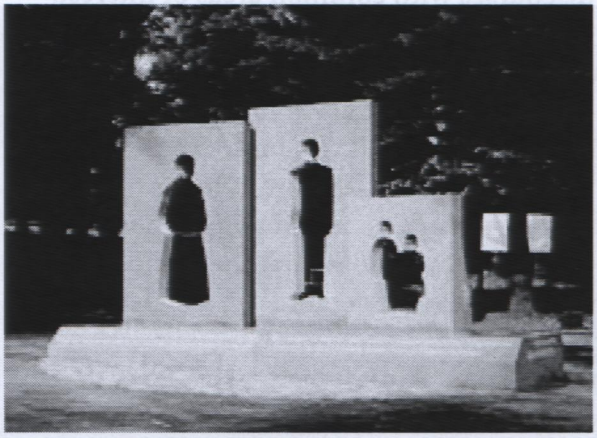
After a decade of planning, the monument was erected by the International Mennonite Memorial Committee for the Former Soviet Union (IMMC-FSU). The city of Zaporizhia was a full partner in the installation. Others assisting were the Mennonite Historical Society of BC and the Mennonite Heritage Cruise. The memorial was funded by donations from Mennonite conferences, historical societies, private individuals and groups.

The monument is a collaborative project. Designer Paul Epp and project organizers, Harvey Dyck and Walter Friesen, Canada, were helped by engineer Boris Letkeman and interpreter Ludmilla Kariaka of Ukraine. The fabrication of the granite monument was done locally, with stone from a former Mennonite quarry.

The site is a public park with a newly built children's playground, tall trees, and paths radiating from the monument site. Symbolically, it is located in the heart of the one-time Mennonite village of Khortitsa and is surrounded by buildings erected by Mennonites and still in use by Ukrainians, including the former *Mädchenschule* (girls' high school).

"The story of 30,000 Soviet Mennonites should not be lost," said Harvey Dyck, main project organizer. "It chronicles a tragic past and opens us more fully to the suffering and heroism of Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, peoples of Siberia and Central Asia and people around the world."

Other speakers at the event included Peter Klassen, co-chair of the Memorial Committee; Jacob Tiessen, now pastor of the Mennonite Kutuzovka church; and Valeri Kozyrev, Chairman of the Committee for the Protection of Historical Monuments, Zaporizhia Oblast. Prominent Ukrainian historian Fedor Turchenko spoke of a "sacred duty of remembering the past … ensuring it never happened again."



Paul Epp, designer of the monument, commented at the opening: "The memory of our loved ones is important to all of us. We cherish their pictures as a way of remembering them. … But what if the people who are being pictured had vanished? What if they had disappeared? I have suggested this by using only their outlines. They are not identifiable. The individuals have disappeared, leaving a void. Instead of a picture of someone, we have only a silhouette, a representation of loss. When we look to see our loved ones, all we see is an empty space. Where we expect something, there is nothing."

Report from Ukraine: Saturday, August 7, 2010

By Ben and Linda Stobbe

One of the areas of noticeable difference in Ukraine since our first coming as North American Directors in 2005 has been the general improvement in the conditions of the orphanages and treatment of children with disabilities. This generalization is only based on the orphanages and programs we are aware of, here in the Molotschna area. The state-run orphanages such as the one at Prischib and the one near Melitopol have certainly improved their facilities with new windows, better floors, chairs, and even food.

The state appears to have made a major investment in these facilities. This Monday we went to Kalinikovka, the site of the Steinbach estate on the southern end of the Molotschna colony. Significant renovations and facility improvements have occurred at this institution for physically and mentally challenged children aged 5 to 18. However, we have been told that the capital costs for the improvements have been supplied by non-governmental groups, not the state. Here again, we were very impressed with the conditions we saw, particularly for the younger children. The renovated rooms were clean and bright. Compared to conditions at the adult psychiatric hospital in Molochansk, this facility was a vast improvement.

Compared to our North American practices, Ukraine still institutionalizes far more children on a per capita basis. While the long term plans should be to integrate them into as normal an environment as possible, at least on the short run we are pleased to see improved facilities. In walking amongst the young children in the former Steinbach estate we were struck by two things: the need and desire of children for human contact and the fact that an estate which once showed prosperity and success can now be used to show care and support for the most needy of children. We just stood among the children and allowed them touch us. They grabbed, snuggled, and rubbed our hands. We did not come out of there feeling despair, but had a new sense of what can be considered beautiful. Staff were very encouraging to the children and encouraged us to be with the children. It is good to see how the original Jacob Dick and Nicholas Schmidt buildings continue to be used for the good of the community and have not been allowed to

"Sometimes when you improve buildings you also give hope, joy, and good health to those whose lives have been filled with fear and despair."

disintegrate like so many others. We were guided through the buildings by Yulia Romanova, one of our scholarship students who was doing summer volunteer work there. Yulia, who speaks good English, has a better understanding of Mennonite history than 99% of North American Mennonite young people her age and is a model of the new Ukraine.

On Wednesday we went to another old estate, this one not Mennonite--Count Popova's castles in Vasilievka. Here we saw an estate consisting of several old castles built in the 1800s. These big buildings also depict wealth, status, and living conditions of the nobility in Tsarist times. Unfortunately they are not really being used and while the state appears to be trying to prevent further deterioration of these buildings, one senses that much more could be done here to make them a centre that would serve the community.

On Thursday, after a particularly long afternoon, we were just ready to go home when two rather dignified-looking women came into our office. They were sisters, and one was a former teacher in the Mennonite Centre which once was a school. Both women would have been pensioners in Canada but they did not reflect the stereotypical babushka look of Ukrainian grandmothers. In fact, we have also noticed how that look is increasingly changing as Ukrainian women are beginning to carry their natural beauty and class into their senior years. These women came in confident and smiling. "We want to thank you for being here," one of them said. "I am so delighted that this building is now being used to provide care for the community. My sister just got new glasses here. Those of us who can remember the war years often have nightmares and the best cure for me is to come to the Mennonite Centre and sit on the benches because this is a place of peace. We have a nephew in Toronto. He is coming to visit us next summer and we will bring him here to show him that we have a little piece of Canada right here in Molochansk."

Sometimes when you improve buildings you also give hope, joy, and good health to those whose lives have been filled with fear and despair. Thank you to all our supporters.

To read more of Linda and Ben's blogs, go to LindaandBen.blogspot.com

REMEMBERING FRIENDS

Erica Suderman Memorial Fund

By Peter Suderman

To honour Erica's dedicated and passionate contribution to the Mennonite Historical Society of BC (MHSBC), our family set up the Erica Suderman Memorial Fund to continue the work of InMagic, an archival management software program. It is designed as a finding aid to archival records.

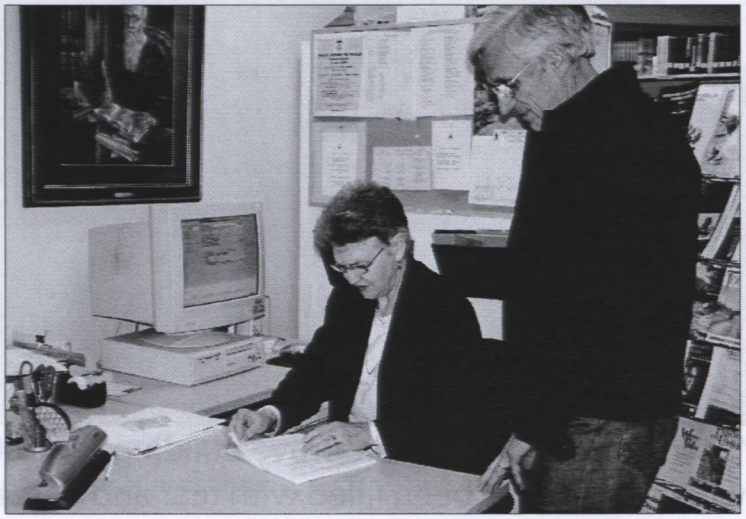
The Fund is designated to the completion of the InMagic project, particularly to provide training to volunteers and to purchase necessary equipment. Erica's goal was to install InMagic as a way of making the Archives' collection electronically searchable to future generations.

Linda Wills, Archives Consultant from Vernon, has been retained, and has conducted two training sessions to current volunteers and personnel at MHS.

Recently a 10-drawer 38x50 inch map and photograph steel cabinet has been purchased by the Erica Suderman Memorial Fund and donated to MHS. It will be very useful, especially for storing large maps and pictures.

I would like to personally thank those who have contributed so generously to the Fund. We hope Erica's legacy will carry on.

The work is not finished, so we invite you to contribute in Erica's memory to the Fund. It will remain an open account with all designations going toward the completion of these projects. Mark your donations "Erica Suderman Memorial Fund," and send to MHSBC, 211-2825 Clearbrook Rd., Abbotsford, BC V2T 6S3



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EVENT REVIEW

Getting things done

By Helen Rose Pauls

On May 8, Level Ground Mennonite Church in Abbotsford was the venue for a presentation by author and historian Marlene Epp. Organized by The Mennonite Historical Society of BC, Epp's lecture was based on the material in her new book *Mennonite Women in Canada: a History*. Her primary focus was the amazing capacity of Mennonite pioneer women to get things done – to efficiently and skilfully complete a plethora of domestic endeavours that sustained the lives of their often impoverished families.

Those of us who can remember this era will vividly recall our well-organized mothers working continually from first light until late in the evening. Often able to turn a cast-off dress inside out and reshape it into one every bit as pretty as the dresses featured in the Eaton's catalogue, a Mennonite pioneer woman might also be a gardener who planted food for a family of twelve and preserved it for the winter. Many a woman kept chickens and milked the cow, making butter, yogurt and cottage cheese. She bleached flour sacks and sewed them into sheets, curtains and clothing. She nursed the ill and cared for the needy, in spite of seeming to give birth every other year.

Set against a backdrop of displays of pioneer linens, utensils and quilts, Epp's lecture highlighted Mennonite midwives and healers who got things done. These women moved silently through the community as needed, often at great inconvenience to their own families. Although some had formal training, many had learned their trade by helping other experienced healers. Some midwives delivered a thousand babies during their career, and were also called on to help the ill and injured in the community. Some even became undertakers.

Epp also spoke of the culinary abilities of Mennonite women who fed huge families, countless guests and large threshing crews. Of women who were prepared on Sunday to feed anyone and everyone who showed up at their tables. Of competition among women over the best cakes and the softest *Zwieback*. She cited the growing number of iconic cookbooks created by Mennonite women: the 1950s *Mennonite Community Cookbook*, which originated with the Old Order Mennonites; the 1960s *A Mennonite Treasury*, which included bulk recipes for conferences along with ethnic recipes and sold 350,000 copies; the 1970s *More with Less*, which sold 825,000 copies and tried to teach Mennonites to eat responsibly; and the more recent *Extending the Table* (2003), which features global recipes coming out of MCC contacts, and *Simply in Season* (2004), which

Getting things done, continued...

The event celebrated the crucial work of Mennonite women who sustained their families and communities.

emphasizes local foods and has won numerous awards.

As part of the event, the church work of these pioneer women was honoured by Veronica Thiessen, past chair of B.C. Mennonite Women in Mission, who told stories from the early years. She told of how women in sewing circles banded together, determined to send parcels to those left behind in Russia. The 1929 minutes of the Maria-Martha Verein record that these women were so poor that they collected only a total of two dollars in two separate offerings. This money was sent to Eaton's with a request for two dollars worth of materials for sewing. When Eaton's sent ten dollars worth of fabric, the women were ecstatic and began to sew children's clothing, embroider pillow cases and tea towels, and crochet dresser scarves. They held an auction (*Ausruf*) of their finished products that netted $140 to be used for aid. Helen Rose Pauls added the story of pregnant Anna, who picked raspberries for the neighbours with her small child at her side to earn cash so her family could have a berry farm of its own.

Other highlights of the evening included Peter Goertzen, accompanied by Dorothy Fast, leading the audience in two fitting songs, "Work for the Night is Coming" and "Children of the Heavenly Father." The theme song of many women's sewing circles, "The Work is Thine, Oh Christ" was also sung. A song entitled "Canada, Our New Home" that Hilda Goertzen had composed for the occasion added humour and local color to the evening. In addition to highlighting Marlene Epp's important work on Mennonite pioneer women in Canada, this important event was an appropriate tribute to the often unnoticed but crucial work of these Mennonite women in sustaining their families and communities through the work of their hands.

Will you consider supporting the work of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC through a financial contribution?

We are a non-profit society formed to foster awareness of Mennonite history and culture, and to collect and preserve valuable historical records. Our non-profit society consists of directors and a dedicated team of volunteers who sort through, enter, and maintain genealogical data and archives, plan events and lectures, guide the work of the society, and produce this periodical. Your donations to the Mennonite Historical Society of BC allow us to continue to provide you, our readership, with three issues of Roots and Branches annually, in addition to holding special events and carrying out various research projects related to Mennonite history.

Or, give a subscription to the next generation.

The society's motto is "...we will tell the next generation." As one philosopher has said, "to remember someone's history is to ensure them a future."

Thank you, from Roots and Branches