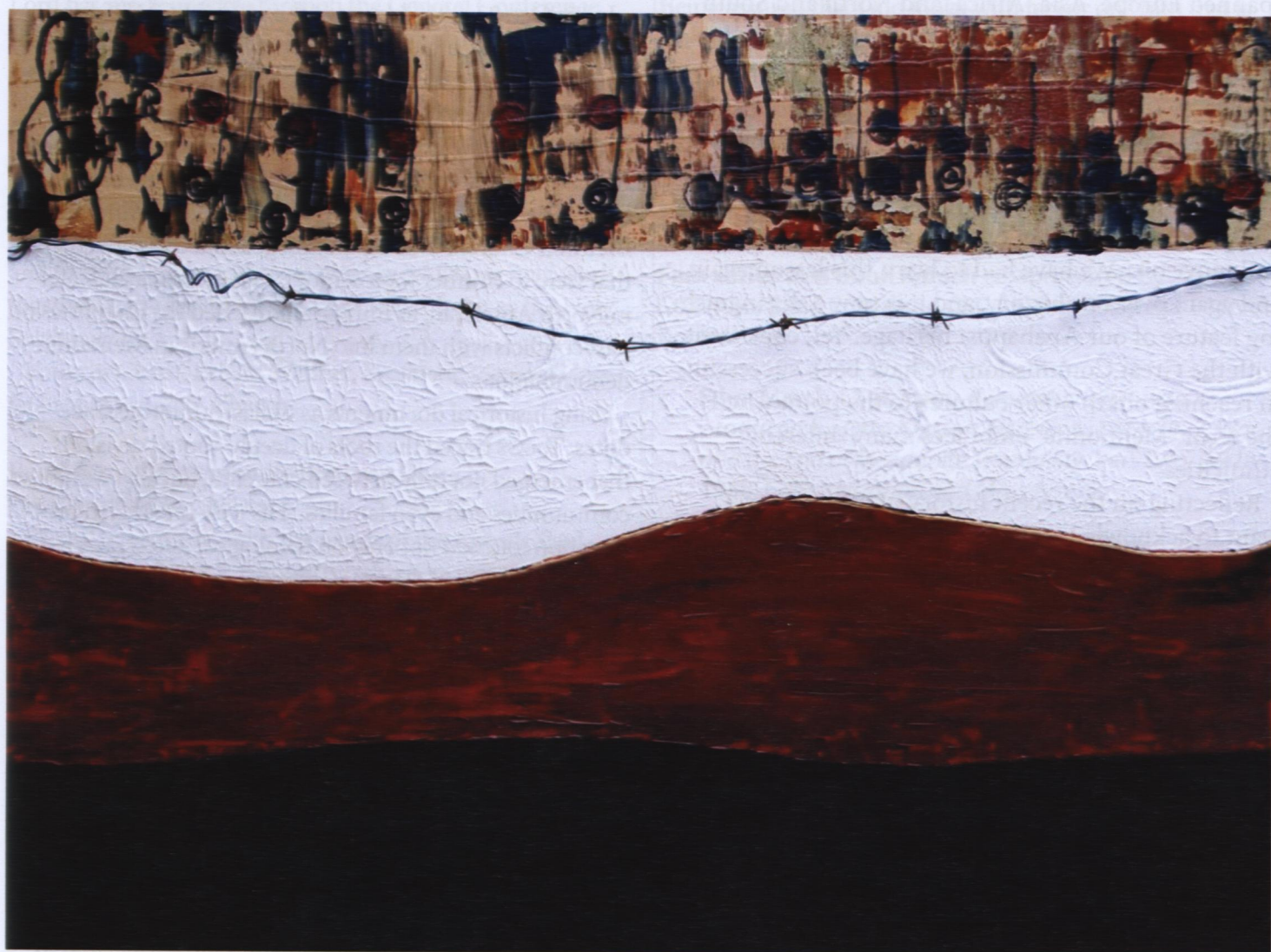


# Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

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

Psalm 78



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## Editorial — by John Konrad

In June of this year I retired as president of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC after holding this position for 13 years. I did so to make way for younger leadership. My successor is Richard Thiessen, who is well-known in this community. I offer my congratulations to Richard as he leads the Board in finding new ways of telling the Mennonite story.

Over the years, our Society has staged numerous events touching almost every area of Mennonite history over the several centuries of Mennonites' existence as a Christian community. This history has spanned Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America, areas where Mennonites have pioneered, prospered, and, at times, suffered loss of life and property. Mennonites have resisted assimilation, migrating instead to lands where they could live apart under a promise of isolation and self governance, only to see these rights eroded over time.

We have learned from our forbears to let go, forgive and move on. We have had to learn this lesson again and again over our history, and it is now a distinguishing feature of our Anabaptist heritage. Yet, consistent with the Great Commission, we have been successful in reaching out to other cultures to the point where the term "Mennonite" embraces many different ethnicities.

Reflecting on the recent history of our Society, I want to acknowledge the strong support from our constituency in attending our events and in funding our operations. Our generation has the interest and means to support the work we are doing. Our challenge is to draw in the next generation to continue this work.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of my fellow Board members who have committed time and resources to the work of our Society. Several members have recently retired and others will follow, making way for younger members with new energy and ideas.

Finally, I thank our staff and the twenty to thirty volunteers who work on a variety of projects on a regular basis. Little would be achieved without these faithful individuals. If you have never been to our archives, please drop by for a visit.

## PAST EVENTS

### Making Peace: Letters between the General Conference of Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren, 1959-1960.

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

The 1959-1960 exchange of official reconciliatory letters between the North American Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonite Churches was a historic event that signalled a significant thaw in the long-lasting tensions between these two well-established Mennonite denominations.

In his Oct. 23, 2010 lecture at the annual BCMHS fundraising banquet, entitled *The Mennonite Church and Mennonite Brethren Church: the Hundred Years War*, Dr. John B. Toews eloquently explored the causes and consequences of this conflict, which emerged when reformers within the *Kirchliche* Mennonite Church of the Molotschna broke away in 1860 to start the pietism-influenced Mennonite Brethren Church. This separation generated disagreements that were to simmer for a century, first in Russia and later in North America, as immigrants carried the memories of past conflicts with them into North American Mennonite denominations.

Using historical documents as well as humorous anecdotes, Toews traced the roots of deeply-rooted divisions that emerged not only between churches, but also within communities and even families. His well-researched presentation touched not only on theological differences but also on the cultural dynamics that ensured often unspoken tensions were passed on from generation to generation; it did not apportion blame but provided insights about the complex theological and human factors involved in creating, sustaining and resolving this conflict. Dr. Toews' informative and entertaining presentation mirrored the reality of the last decades – that currently the commonalities and desire to work together between these formerly divided Mennonite groups are greater than the differences that divide them.

**Letter from General Conference of Mennonites Church**  
Dear Brethren in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Christian greetings in the Name of Him who loved us and washed us from our sins by His own precious blood.

As we of the General Conference Mennonite Church gather for our centennial sessions at Bluffton, Ohio, August 12-20, 1959, we are mindful that you of the Mennonite



Brethren Church are also on the threshold of your own centennial. This unique circumstance in the history of our respective conferences prompts us to communicate to you our sincere appreciation for the contribution which your group has made to the life and witness of the larger Mennonite brotherhood in the world and to our own conference fellowship.

We have appreciated especially your emphasis on the imperative of the new birth in Christian experience, your zeal for evangelism, and your dedication to the cause of Christian missions. We have been deeply grateful for those areas in which it was possible for our respective conferences to cooperate in the service of our Lord especially in such programs as that of the Mennonite Central Committee.

While we are grateful for the work and witness which the Lord has made possible through the General Conference Mennonite Church, we also recognize that in the past and even now we have not always succeeded in fulfilling the will of God. It is our deep desire, in the spirit of penitence and humility, to move forward to higher levels of spiritual living and Christian witness. It is our earnest hope that in such further growth by the grace of God we may enjoy increasing fellowship with you as a sister Mennonite group and may find more and more areas in which we may work together in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit may lead.

Yours in Christ, Erland Waltner, President, General Conference Mennonite Church

### Reply from the Mennonite Brethren Church

Dear Brethren in Christ:

Christian greetings with the words of the Apostle Paul, when he said, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son" (I Cor. 1:9).

Pursuant to the official communications and greetings of your Centennial Conference of August 12, 1959, and the Centennial Study Conference of June 20-23, 1960, conveyed to us by your president, Dr. Erland Waltner, we accept your gracious words with a deep sense of humility and appreciation.

The joint efforts of Christian service of both conferences, your and ours, in the alleviation of suffering, of the peace witness, and of other services of common interests evoke in our hearts a response of gratitude to God that we are enabled to be "laborers together with God." Our desire reciprocates your expressions of concerns for a closer fellowship in the pursuit of these united ventures of faith with an increasing measure of love and understanding for one another.

We, too, share your concerns that the separation of 1860

occasioned "many feelings, words, and deeds that were not brotherly." We deeply regret our failings and weaknesses of the past and hasten to say that we are motivated by the spirit of love to ask forgiveness where we have acted coldly and unbrotherly.

At a time when the world is torn with strife without and within, there comes to us the fervent plea and heart-throb of our Savior, when He prayed, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou has given me, that they all may be one as we are" (John 17:11b). Even though we have our distinct responsibilities, as separate conferences, we believe it is well-pleasing to God that we express our mutual respect, love and consideration for one another, and so strengthen our gospel witness in a world that is in desperate need of the salvation of God.

Being assured that God looks with fervor on "him that is poor and of a contrite heart" (Isa. 66:2b), we are fraternally yours in Christ.

Dan E. Friesen, Chairman, Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Film series and book launch** co-sponsored by Columbia Bible College, in CBC Chapel. See page 14 for book review.

- **Film. March 12 at 7 pm.** *Remembering Russia*, produced by Otto Klassen. Part One. 1914-1927: *War and the End of Mennonite Tranquility*. Part Two. 1928-1938: *Collectivization and Mass Arrests*
- **Film. April 16 at 7 pm.** *The Great Trek: 1939-1945*, produced by Otto Klassen.
- **Film. May 28 at 7 pm.** CBC Chapel. *Through the Desert Goes our Journey*, by Walter Ratliff.
- **Book launch. May 29, 2 pm.** CBC Chapel. *Pilgrims on the Silk Road*. Book launch and lecture with Walter Ratliff. See book review on page 14. This is a follow-up to the film, *Through the Desert Goes our Journey*.

**Storytelling.** the House of James Bookstore will be hosting *Telling Stories: The Mennonite Narrative in Letters, Poems, Short Stories and Film*. April 1 and 2 at 7pm. Free.

**Forum with Dr. Bruce Hiebert.** The University of the Fraser Valley is presenting "Genealogies and Social Issues" on Monday, April 11 at 7pm-9pm. To register, call 604-504-7441.



# STORY OF OUR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## From *Bankruptcy* (almost) to *Solvency*

By Edward Hildebrand

The original intent of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC (MHSBC) was to found a museum, similar to the one in Steinbach, depicting the development of Mennonite life in the Fraser Valley, and possibly some of the history that formed the character of our ancestry in their countries of origin. When this became an impossible task (for reasons that are not a subject of this essay), a new Board of Directors, under the leadership of the late Bill Riediger, struggled to find a new direction for the Society. The role finally chosen was to become a research centre for Mennonite history and genealogical studies, and to that end it bent its efforts. It would in fact live up to its much later chosen biblical motto, "What we have heard and known we will tell the next generation."

The Society purchased a share in the Peter Braun Archives in Zaporozhye, recently uncovered by Dr. Harvey Dyck, and participated in several research efforts into Russian/Soviet archives in Zaporozhye, Odessa, Moscow, and other localities as they became available. To house these documents, the Society took over the responsibility for the Archives from the Columbia Bible College, moving them to the nearby Garden Park Tower.

To share the knowledge gained from these research efforts, as well as historical material of general interest, the Society sponsored a series of heritage lectures by well-known speakers and researchers from Mennonite academia.

All of the above happened on the *Cost* side of the equation, but the *Revenue* side did not follow suit. This resulted in dire warnings from the treasurer of the time, Harold Klassen, that we could not continue spending more than we took in without the inevitable result – bankruptcy! When I became treasurer on the passing of Harold, it became my responsibility to continue the Cassandra-like warnings of the impending doom of bankruptcy if we continued on our present course. I made a preliminary calculation that we needed a minimum cash reserve at all times of \$10,000 to stay in business (\$15,000 would be better). I had several informal discussions with Board

members to that effect.

By June 30, 1998 our cash reserves had fallen to \$18,000, despite our best efforts at new and diverse fundraising projects such as the Memorial Wall at the Archives and revenue from a banquet for the Canadian Mennonite Historical Society, which was held in BC that year. Nothing succeeded at radically changing the net revenue side of our venture. Any reasonable projection of costs and revenues, including our annual fundraising banquet in October, showed that we would inevitably cross the critical \$10,000 line no later than March-April 1999. Obviously something had to be done, and soon.

Then something happened, or rather, three things happened, in relatively short order, that changed everything.

The first event was the Three Tenors concert of November 11, 1999. "Three Tenors" concerts were in vogue at that time. The fashion started with the three operatic superstars Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo, and José Carreras. These were followed shortly by the Three Irish Tenors, John Scott, David Martin and Declan Kelly, noted for singing their well-known Irish folk melodies. Soon many other groups came up with their own version of the Three Tenors, including, of course, Mennonites, with Ray Harris, Wilmer Neufeld and John Thiessen, known as the Abbotsford Three Tenors, performing a repertoire of semi-classical music, gospel songs, chorales and Mennonite *Kernlieder* (core hymns).

Jean Neufeld, a director of MHSBC at that time, with the help of Ernie and Mary Ann Quiring, organized the Abbotsford Three Tenors to perform a concert for the benefit of the Society. If the Society would sponsor all necessary costs, including publicity, church rental, and ticket sales, the performance would be free, and all revenues from ticket sales and from DVD, CD, and tape sales would be for the benefit of the Society.

The results from our point of view were spectacular. The immediate net gain on the first night was about \$7000, with additional income accumulating over



several years as we continued to sell CDs and tapes of this concert. Those numbers may seem small in today's terms, but to a starving fiscal patient they were like "manna from heaven." I recall John Konrad, our president at the time, saying, "It seems almost wrong that we should make more net income from such an event as this concert, that takes so little work on our part, than we net on our banquet, with all its attendant work and effort." (At that time a banquet netted about \$5,000.)

The next event came a few months later, in January 2000, with the establishment of the Endowment Fund. According to the Rules and Regulations of Canada Revenue Agency governing this type of fund, the capital of the Endowment Fund, although fully the property of the Society, could not be spent for ten years by the Society; only the income derived from the fund could be spent. With fairly aggressive management, the funds were invested in securities that over time yielded \$13,000 to \$16,000 per year. The directors elected to take \$12,000 per year (\$3,000 per quarter) into income, leaving the balance as a "rainy day fund" for the inevitable market downturns. To date this has worked well. The society has received \$12,000 per year for almost ten years as basic income for operating expenses, and in addition, the total Fund has had a net gain of about 11.5%.

The first event gave the Society a desperately needed "quick cash" injection. The second event provided the beginnings of a solid income base and some security. However, it was the third series of events that paved the way to future prosperity. They are also the hardest to describe because they do not have a dramatic single starting point. However, of the three, they are probably the most important and longest lasting, and continue to have the greatest impact on the success of the Society. It was the blending, or melding of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC with its support base, the Mennonite community. Some of the occasions in this series of events, in no particular order, include the

following.

Moving the Archives in 2007 from Columbia Bible College to the more convenient location in Garden Park Tower was a costly move, both in additional rent and the necessary furnishings and fittings that had to be acquired. Our reasoning was that this extra cost would be more than offset by greater interest and increased attendance at the Centre, resulting in more support for our work. This took several years to materialize but



The Three Tenors: Ray Harris, Wilmer Neufeld, John Thiessen.



finally seemed to come to fruition.

The increased data available at the Archives have made it a more useful place for research. Through the efforts of researchers and historians, and the outright purchase of items such as Grandma, Brother's Keeper, and EWZ files, many new collections were added to our genealogical and historical information database, enabling amateur genealogists and historical researchers to do their work at the Archives. (Most of this was not available here in BC when I did my own family research some twenty years earlier.) Genealogy, and the search for a family's roots, soon became a major activity at the Archives and eventually engendered its own annual workshop.

Volunteers have steadily grown in number and they, along with staff, have also increased their skills. They are available five days per week and stand ready to help as required.

The newsletter, *Roots and Branches*, is another major service, providing contact with our members. It has grown in style and quality into something far beyond its inception as a vehicle for the announcement of coming events, and is now a general interest publication, covering a wide variety of subject matter.

Our series of heritage lectures has been expanded well beyond the traditional emphasis on Mennonite and Anabaptist history. The work and knowledge of Dr. John B. Toews and his fellow members of Mennonite academia are vitally important to us, and in many ways form our *raison d'être*. However, their offerings have been interspersed with other events that widened their scope.

Inspired by the success of the original Three Tenors concert, a special subcommittee of the Board, chaired by Holda Fast Redekopp, developed several musical programs that were in all respects equal to the original, were well attended, and produced record revenues.

Our program has been further varied with arts and crafts events, such as a display of traditional quilting, and with films, such as Ruth Derksen Siemens' documentary on the correspondence of Peter Bargen, as it relates his relatives' stories from Stalin's Gulag.



Volunteers at work in the Mennonite Historical Society office.

Another focus has been the heroic story, or should we say plight, of Mennonite women, who carried on and cared for their families despite the tragic losses of many of their menfolk.

The Mennonite Cemetery tour, chaired by a subcommittee organized by Lillian Toews, proved surprisingly successful. The tour of three of the original Mennonite cemeteries in May 2006 with commentaries on well-known people, complete with *Faspa* (light refreshments), was attended by about 250.

The two day festivities entitled *Sixty Years of Peace and Plenty*, organized by a special subcommittee of the Board, were another element of our recovery. This was not only a celebration of the 1948 Mennonite immigrants who were able to come to Canada (compared to an almost equal number who were apprehended by the Soviet authorities and shipped off immediately to the Gulag) but also a celebration of the hosts who received them. They were in most cases contemporaries, members of the same families, now being reunited. Among them was my own mother's younger sister, forcibly separated from her for a quarter century.

All of the above make up this third leg of the support of the Society. It is impossible to choose one over the other because all events have been singularly



successful: the specialty music events with more than 1000 attendees; the banquets with 400 plus participants; and other events with more than 250. These numbers are double what they used to be and, I am told, are the envy of our colleagues in other jurisdictions.

Although they have received substantial help from specialists as required, the main burden for most of the above has fallen to the Events Committee. They have always been the largest committee of the Board of Directors, and rightly so, because they have had to do the "heavy lifting" when it comes to the generation of ideas, the composition of the participants, and the execution of the details of producing and organizing the finished product. The five to seven directors and staff of the Events Committee deserve our special thanks.

I have avoided the use of personal names in according credit for participation and assistance, except for illustrative passages, for two reasons. First, repeating an exhaustive list here would require so much space that other narrative text would be crowded out, with the additional danger of omitting some noteworthy names. Second, individual credits have been given over

the past years in the newsletter, in our annual reports, and in the minutes of the Board of Directors.

But let me emphasize: to all directors, committee members, volunteers and staff, and to all speakers, performers, exhibitors, and supporters, your names are known and your contributions are appreciated, one and all. You have shared your time, talents and resources to build a Historical Society that is second to none.

It cannot yet be said that the Society is self supporting and does not require assistance from the community. A cursory study of the budget would show this to be far from a fact, and maybe it should stay that way. Hopefully, future leadership will have the wit and wisdom to implement progressive programs that will always require "a little more."

However, with total cash reserves as of December 31, 2009, of about \$70,000, plus the support and security of the Endowment Fund that is currently mostly free of restrictions, we are certainly *solvent*.



Local artists at "Mennonites and Art" event, 2006, with Ray Dirks of Winnipeg (back row, 3rd from left).



## STORIES OF OUR PEOPLE

# Not forsaken

By Helen Rose Pauls

*In 1930, when Agnes Sawatzky was twenty-one, her whole family was exiled to one of Stalin's labour camps, shipped to the northern reaches of Siberia in a cattle car. Agnes knew there was little likelihood she could survive the harsh conditions of the camp, so she decided to escape. This is her story as told by her daughter-in-law, Helen Rose Pauls.*

Death would come easily, I thought, as I sank into the soft inviting snow. A pleasant numbness, a sweet forgetting, and all would be over.

In the distance, I heard the clamour of voices from the train station. I shifted my starved and exhausted body in the snow. Only a week before, I had bid my despondent parents good-bye in the forest camp, retreating in the dark, and escaping into the cold silent woods.

Now I had walked thirty-five miles in the snow in sub-zero temperatures only to hear Control's cry: "Your pass, comrade, your pass! No one boards without a pass."

I had neither money nor a pass—as an exiled kulak, torn away from our lovely farm in Chortitza and shipped to the wilds of Siberia, I wasn't eligible for one. There was no way forward.

My escape from the prison camp had been pointless: without a pass, I dared speak to no one, I could not be employed, and I could not buy anything. Lack of a pass meant immediate imprisonment and I knew what that was like.

Surely God had forsaken me; had forsaken us as a people. For me there was no future. I waited in the snow for death to come.

A voice spoke. Was it inside me? Above me? The voice said, "You are my child. Get up and shake the snow off your clothes and walk to the place I will show you."

Dumbfounded, I arose. The station was behind me, the noises still clamouring in my ears. With my last strength, I walked past a few modest well kept homes set back from the street. My invisible guide seemed to point out one small yellow building where light still shone. I had nothing to lose. Prison meant death anyway, so I knocked.

A shuffling tread approached the door. Lights. Muted voices. The door opened slightly and sad, though kind eyes peered at me. The door opened wider and I was silently motioned inside.

Did I not know, the man asked, that he could be imprisoned for sheltering me? I looked down. He relented. His wife prepared a warm broth and my thin body tingled

with a pleasant pain as the life giving liquid reached every pore. That night, for the first time since leaving Chortitza a year ago, I had a soft clean bed, a pillow, warm blankets. I slept as if dead.

Before dawn the man shook me awake. Instantly my fears returned. What now?

"Get dressed and follow me," he said.

Warm dry footwrapping replaced my rags and we broke new snow as we walked to the station. Here he approached a friend. "This is your daughter for this trip," he said. "Be sure she lies well back in your compartment and pretends to be ill and sleeping. If anyone asks, tell them that she is part of your family, and travels under the authority of your pass."

Turning to me, he smiled kindly and whispered, "God go with you."

God. I had been experiencing God's help through his servants. God was with me! God was on my side! Joy welled up in my wasted young frame. God still loved me.

I crawled well back into the crowded compartment. Tears of relief flowed unendingly. God had not forsaken me.

With a jerk, the train left the station. Thousands heaved onto the tracks, clinging to ladders and couplings. But my desperation had vanished. I was inside the train and God was very near.

*Somehow, by sheer determination, and with the help of good people on the way, Agnes made her way back to Chortitza where she married Jacob Pauls. In 1943 they escaped the Soviet Union, arriving in Canada with their two children in 1948. Of the eight people in her family only she and siblings Katie and Helen survived—the others died in Siberia.*

*Agnes Sawatzky Pauls has just celebrated her 101st birthday and still enjoys telling stories of the past.*





## STORIES OF OUR PEOPLE

# Mothers and their children

By Brayden Sawatzky

In her eyes I see  
the light of life  
and deeper still the pain  
of senseless tragedy,  
and yet she smiles  
a smile of radiant joy  
for all her priceless blessings...  
Eighteen grandchildren,  
ten great grands and counting,  
a safe country, a safe home  
and food to spare.  
Ninety-one years and going strong  
"God is faithful, God is love,"  
born in eighteen ninety four  
in a distant other-world.

In her eyes I see the truth  
of all that have great meaning  
or importance, and most of all  
I see the peacefulness  
that can only come from walking  
in peace with her precious Lord Jesus—  
her dearest hope, her greatest joy—  
And when we sat and talked  
I'd feel and hear and see  
a living, breathing documentary  
of a happy carefree childhood,  
a Great War, the Whites, the Reds,  
the Revolutions.  
Famine, fear and Spanish Influenza,  
poverty and persecution,  
men disappearing in the middle of the night  
never to be heard from again.

But you just keep on going  
and make the best  
of the little that you have.  
A mother will do most anything  
for her children,  
and it's so very hard



Justina Sawatzky: August 27, 1894 - February 14, 1986.

to watch them dying from hunger,  
but little miracles do happen—  
life, against all odds.

Another Great War and finally, escape.  
New countries, new hope,  
new life and then  
a new continent—  
A dominion from sea to sea!  
A new mother for new children.  
a happy ending in her face,  
in her eyes, in her laughter,  
in her family, in her love  
for God and country.

From *A Trail of Light*, a new poetry anthology by Abbotsford poets Thurlow Gowan, Brayden Sawatzky, and Nicholas Roberts. For more information, see <http://poetspotpourrisociety.com>



## STORIES OF OUR PEOPLE

### Die Flugbrücke The Airlift

By Frieda Petko Fast

*The dramatic story of the rescue of 1,115 Mennonites from Berlin by train on January 31, 1947, is well known. At the end of the war, Germany was divided into English, French, American and British sectors. Berlin was in the Soviet sector, but was also divided up among the four Allies. Helping the large group of Mennonites escape from Berlin to West Germany was both difficult and dangerous—Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, who accompanied the refugees by train across the Soviet sector into the freedom of West Germany, called this escape a miracle.*

*But this rescue was not the final chapter of Mennonite refugee presence in the city, for refugees continued to trickle in. In the spring of 1948, Frieda Petko, her husband, Stefan, and their three children were stranded in Lichterfeld West, West Berlin, where they shared one room in a villa with the Schirling family with 4 children (2 of their own and 2 orphans) and two Foth brothers, both married. One of the Foth brothers was shell shocked, and just sat and stared.*

*The Petko family had very little, just a few boxes of egg noodles and dried beans that had been left behind by fleeing Mennonites the year before. No milk, meat, bread, fruit or vegetables. They lived like that for four months. Frieda Petko Fast continues the story:*

On June 24, Russia blocked all rail, water and highway routes through East Germany in an effort to drive Western troops from their sectors and to force people stranded in East Berlin to accept Communism. Before long, many people were starving. Our own small supply of noodles and beans was almost exhausted.

England, U.S.A., France and West Germany shattered Soviet hopes by organizing a gigantic airlift to supply the more than 2 million West Berliners with food and fuel. The airlift planes landed at Tempelhof airport at the rate of one every 45 seconds.

On September 9, the mayor-elect of Berlin, Ernst Reuter, stood on Kurfürsten-

dam Square, surrounded by a crowd of 300,000 Berliners. Stefan and I were there as Reuter lifted his arms into the air and said, *"Ihr Völker der Welt ... Schaut auf diese Stadt und erkennt, dass ihr diese Stadt und dieses Volk nicht preisgeben dürft, nicht preisgeben könnt!"* (People of the world ... look upon this city and see that you should not, cannot abandon this city and this people).

In the meantime, I had been trying to get our visas with the help of MCC worker Frau Lehman and a local policeman. One day, I had to appear in front of the secret police for interrogation. I was terrified but I answered the questions and the next day a thick envelope with our visas arrived.

Stefan, who had a lot of initiative and seemed to get things done even though he didn't speak the language, said to me, "Frieda, get ready, we're going to Deutschland Haus." That's where the war tribunal sat. We had read a notice in the paper that all those stranded in West Berlin would be flown out, leaving in empty airlift planes returning to West Germany.



American "Candy Bombers" drop treats to children in Berlin.



Although we had our documents in hand, facing all those highranking officers gave me the shivers. Still, when they saw our papers, they were all smiles, and told us to be at the Tempelhof Airport the next morning at 8. That was just wonderful! Frau Lehman, MCC's director, was happy for us, because Fräulein Krüger, the secretary, had expressed doubt as to whether Stefan would be allowed to leave the sector. Now it was Stefan who had arranged that all of us could escape.

We notified Susanna Janzen, another refugee woman with two boys, and she and several others went with Stefan to buy the tickets. We would never have dreamed about the marvellous way our Father in Heaven made it possible for us to get rescued.

When we got to the airport, the British officers carried our three-year-old son Walter, took all our bundles, and helped me to board. They were friendly, and even gallant.

Our airplane was small and dirty. It had been used to ship coal to West Berlin. Our flight to West Germany lasted one hour. Then we were loaded into a truck for a very bumpy ride to the railway station. When my girls looked at me, they burst into laughter. My hat sat crooked on my head and there were black smudges on my face and arms.

At the railway station, we waited until we could board the train to Gronau, Westfalia. Here we were welcomed and given a big fluffy white bread and a large sausage, and I made sandwiches. I thought this was the best food I'd ever eaten, and you should have seen the children eat!

Stefan and I moved to Canada with our children in 1950. "I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." Ps. 116:1-2.

*The Airlift that began in June 1948 officially ended on 30 September 1949. Together, American, British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African pilots flew 278,000 flights to Berlin, carrying 2.3 million tons of food, coal, medicine and other supplies.*

*The Soviet Union was humiliated by the success of the Airlift and on April 15, 1949, it announced that the blockade would end. After some negotiations, an agreement was reached. The first train from West Germany reached West Berlin on May 12. Allied planes kept flying for another 3 months in order to build up a surplus in case it would be necessary to restart the Airlift.*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin\\_Blockade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Blockade)

## STORIES OF OUR PEOPLE

### Glimpses into life in a Mennonite community during the Great Depression

Biographical information and translation by Wilf Penner

My aunt, Helene Penner, emigrated from Reinfeld, Yazykovo Colony as a two-year-old toddler with her parents, Peter D. and Susanna Penner, arriving in Gretna, Manitoba, on May 7, 1892. Two years later, the family established a homestead seven miles west of Rosthern, relocating to a large farm near Hepburn, Saskatchewan, in 1913. In 1918, Helene's parents had a house built in Hepburn, and retired there. Helene's sisters Maria and Susanna had since married, and her brother Jacob P. (my father) was studying to be a teacher and lay minister.

Helene was chronically ill throughout her youth and early adulthood and never married. She had little schooling beyond the primary grades, but in early 1929 she attended Bethany Bible School for three months – a highlight in her rather circumscribed life. Since she had a heart for children, and was involved in teaching Sunday school, she likely felt the need for some training in child psychology and pedagogy. Immediately after those three months, she began to keep a diary and continued to do so until shortly before her death in 1973.

According to entries in her father's diary, Helene was so ill in January and February 1921 that her family believed she was dying. The ministrations of Mrs. Odenbach, a naturopathic nurse, helped her recover but Helene continued to suffer from bouts of gastric distress and gallstones, and had several operations. With her painful illnesses came periods of despondency when she was anxious about her clouded future. She was, in her better times, loving and caring and ardently devout, and a friend and mentor to her 13 nieces. While she had a sense of humour, it showed itself infrequently.

After her mother died in December 1931, Helene became her father's main caregiver. Together, they gardened in summer, also keeping a milk cow and some poultry. They had three acres of land and a

...continued on page 12.



neatly kept small barn and garage. They also provided room and board for two or three Bible School students every winter. This seems to have been their main source of income during the 1930s.

Here are a few extracts from her diaries.

### **A Saskatchewan Snowstorm, 1930**

Wednesday, October 15: Monday we had a very pleasant day. In the evening Mary Ens and I went to Fasts. The star-studded sky and the colourful northern lights made it a very pleasant walk. On Tuesday Father and I travelled to Saskatoon with the Hinzes.... Today a tremendous blizzard is raging. At night I had my window open, and this morning my clothes were covered with snow. In the morning it was 4°C, but it is getting colder: the windows are already frosting over and the storm is still raging, and the howling wind is frightening. We are harbouring two stranded Ukrainian women overnight. ...

Thursday, October 16: The weather is even wilder today than it was yesterday. This morning it was 8°. It is completely winter. As a consequence our house guests are still here. ...

Friday, October 17: The storm was still raging this morning, and the temperature had dropped to 4°C. However, the sun soon started to break through, and even the wind died down. Now everything is still. Lena Warkentin (a next door neighbour) slept with me last night, so we had five guests for breakfast. Will Warkentins are here at the parents. There a baby son has arrived. Our Ukrainian guests left for the train station as soon as we had had dinner, bidding us farewell in order to take the train home. They have left their car here. However, they'll have had to wait at the station a long time. The train got stuck in the snow too, and didn't get to Hepburn till evening. Yes, it's amazing to see the huge drifts of snow the wind has blown up. ... I'm very sleepy and am soon off to bed.

### **A Thanksgiving Celebration, September 30, 1934: A day on Tabor's heights**

Jake and Tina came by in the morning and took Father and me to Dalmeny for the semi-annual celebration (*Halbjahresfest*). The weather was fine and the tent was not erected, so we were concerned that it would be crowded, but I found a good seat. For an introduction, brother John Buller read a portion from Psalm 107, and invited the congregation to participate with extemporaneous prayers of thanksgiving. After that Brother Lepp spoke briefly, followed by brother Johann Harder from Borden ...[who] spoke about two classes of people: those who will receive a blessing, and those who will not receive a blessing. Those who live holy unto God and are content are the blessed ones. In the morning the theme was Thanksgiving, so we were challenged to be content and thankful that we have food and raiment. The final speaker of the morning was teacher Johann Toews from Coaldale. He read the first section of Luke 5 and spoke about harvest-blessing, but from a different point of view: First, what a blessing to have the forgiveness of sins. Second, the blessing of mothers when they tell their young ones stories of Jesus and the harvest that follows as those children accept Jesus. Third, the singers – what a rich blessing their beautiful songs are to the hearers: the harvest comes even as

their songs touch, comfort and strengthen the hearers' hearts. Finally, the [blessing of] the preachers, with their blessed words from God and their harvest.

Yes, how wonderful, when the Lord gets us to the place where we say with Apostle Peter at the miraculous catch of fish, "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man!" It was a wonderful sermon, and I believe the harvest followed immediately: that had struck home in many hearts! Yes, I was happy to hear another sermon from my beloved Bible School teacher. After all, it is through him that I have received so much rich teaching and comfort. At the conclusion of the morning an offering was

taken.

After many warm greetings and handshakes we enjoyed the [noon] meal with good appetite. Then we took our places again to hear about missions. Teacher Heinrich Regehr spoke from Isaiah about the Cornerstone of Zion. That was very interesting – if the Cornerstone is ours, then we must also be stones fit for the building. After that teacher Toews read



*Helene Penner as a young woman.*



from Haggai chapter 1, where the prophet tells the people of Israel why God is causing them to suffer. He came upon the topic of stewardship, how hard it is for us to give, yet how everything we have really belongs to Him. The final speaker of the afternoon was teacher Jacob Redekop from Herbert. He emphasized that we are all to be missionaries, and told us about the wonderful leading of God, how we have another good harvest, while those in the south have had their fifth crop failure in as many years, and yet the Lord has cared for them. He told us how in the previous year they had been totally overwhelmed by the grasshopper infestation, and how the government had sent men out to the local schools to instruct farmers how to deal with the grasshoppers. Then in spring, carloads of grasshopper poison had been supplied, yet the harder the farmers worked, the more the grasshoppers multiplied. In desperation they had called the people and assembled to pray that God would lift the plague of grasshoppers. Soon thereafter the ditches were full of dead grasshoppers: no smaller a miracle than had occurred in Egypt in the time of Moses.

After that another offering was taken. Now we had reached the end of the service. The choir did their part for the glorification of God. ... One song was more beautiful than the last, and one sermon was more blessed than the one before. Yes, we gained much, but also became responsible for much. Besides, the Lord had given us a glorious fall day.

### **Beggars, 1934**

Tuesday, August 14: Most of the binders in the area are busy in the fields. Yes, it's harvest time again. We had an Englishman in for our noon meal: he tells us that in their region they have not had a harvest in the last six years! I've done some cleaning.

Wednesday, December 5: The weather is still quite mild about 12° or 13°. This afternoon I walked downtown and looked in a bit at Thielmanns. There I was given a message to take to Mrs. Enz, our neighbour, that her Mother has died in Russia. Also, there was a beggar at our door today. He had a few small paper flowers to sell. I bought two little ones for ten cents. Then he asked if I had an old dress for his wife, so I gave him one.

### **Medical Costs, 1934**

Tuesday, January 16: In the morning the temperature was 10°, with a strong wind. Tina [her niece] was back on her feet today, but I'm not feeling so good. Today it is exactly one month since I came home from the hospital. I received the bill from Doctor Neufeld today. The doctor's fee is \$90, and the hospital cost is \$157 [She was hospitalized for 7 weeks]. It is a large amount in this depressed time!

Friday, November 16: Today heavy clouds hang in the sky, and the air is cold and raw. My thoughts have been skulking in the past these last few days. Today it is one year since my last operation, and when I think back how I lay there helpless and weak, I have to say, "The Lord has done great things!" He has delivered me from the awful pains I suffered, and I can now do my work again. I owe my thanks to Him. Also, this is the time three years ago, when Mother began to suffer. Our Susie [a Bible School student whom they had taken in] went home for the weekend today.

Friday, November 30: Heavy fog again. The trees stand thickly mantled in hoarfrost. I received a warning letter from Doctor Neufeld today. I feel badly about it, but I have nothing with which to pay the debt. I went over to sister Froese's, and also to the store. When I got home again, our Susie was in the middle of packing up, so everyone is gone. Menno went home this weekend, so the house is very empty and quiet. In the evening our electric light faded out, so we had to get the kerosene lamp into service.

Thursday, December 6: Was very busy today, baking, cooking and ironing. Added to that I had an experience – something I've never experienced before. Collectors for Doctor Neufeld paid me a visit. I was shocked, but everything turned out well. I did what I could: I was able to give them \$3.00, and invited them for supper. They accepted, and added 75 cents for the meal to the payment. So they left as friends.



## BOOK REVIEW

### *Pilgrims on the Silk Road: a Muslim-Christian Encounter in Khiva.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010.

By Robert Martens

*Where is this last gathering place of the true church? The answer: It is to be in the desert. But where? Perhaps, yes very likely in one of the lands of the rising sun. Thither God will rescue the little company of his own, the little flock for the times of the last judgments.* (81)

So wrote Martin Klaassen, a Mennonite schoolteacher in the Trakt colony, in his book, *History of the Defenceless Baptism-Minded Community from the Time of the Apostles to the Present*. This polemic, written in 1873, was immensely popular among Mennonites. Millennialist expectations were running high. A century earlier, a German writer, Johann Jung-Stilling, had predicted that the End Times were near, and some German Pietists had moved into Russia, where they believed God would provide them a Place of Refuge from the Antichrist. Numerous Mennonites were infected with these apocalyptic hopes.

Claas Epp, also living in the Trakt settlement, emerged as a leader among these millennialists. Napoleon, he wrote, was the Antichrist, and the Catholic Church was Christendom's greatest enemy. Epp turned to the Book of

Revelation for answers. Those few who live in pure faith, who practise nonresistance, who cling to the hope of the imminent return of Christ, were the Church of Philadelphia as described in Revelation. Epp implied, in fact, that he was one of the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11 who would prophesy to the world during the tribulations of the Last Times. When war and plague swept the globe, Epp wrote, the Lord would return to reclaim his chosen ones. And Christ would return in a specific place, at a specific time, somewhere in Central Asia. Epp proposed a trek of the faithful to this Place of Refuge. God would demonstrate to his pilgrims exactly where that place was.

In his book, *Pilgrims on the Silk Road*, Walter Ratliff vividly brings the story of the Mennonite Great Trek to life. The narrative ranges widely, leaping backwards and forwards in time, as well as simultaneously focussing on peoples and individuals far removed from each other. The story is also told within the context of great wars between western empires and Islamic civilizations. This clustering of various histories can sometimes be bewildering – the reader might ask at certain points, what does this all have to do with the Great Trek? – but Ratliff's superb storytelling eventually demonstrates the fundamental connections between differing times and places.

In 1880 the first wagon train left the Trakt colony, bound for a point yet unknown, somewhere in Central Asia, where Christ would return to collect his faithful. In all, three wagon trains would make the journey, a migration marked by tribal hostilities, hunger, thirst, desert deprivations, dysentery, and child deaths. To the surprise of these Mennonite pilgrims, Claas Epp accompanied the third wagon train. It had been expected that he, as one of the Two Witnesses, would travel to Jerusalem to await the Second Coming. The first migrants were met by the Russian general Kaufman, who had waged war with Muslim khanates in Central Asia, and who had encouraged Mennonites to settle somewhere in the region, promising them exemption from military service. He soon died, however, and the migrants were suddenly faced with the possibility of conscription into the Russian army. For Claas Epp, this was a divine signal that his flock should leave the Russian Empire and cross over into Muslim-ruled territory. "Defencelessness" was absolutely essential for the chosen few.

The pilgrimage was a troubled one. Some of the Mennonite migrants left Aulie Ata, located within the boundaries of Russia, and built the village of Ebenezer in the Khanate of Bukhara, but it was soon demolished by hostile Bukharan authorities. The Mennonites found a temporary refuge in Serabulak, Turkestan, and then moved on to a wilderness settlement in Lausan, located in the Khanate of Khiva. Their time here was plagued by robbery and murder at the hands of local tribesmen, who found these non-



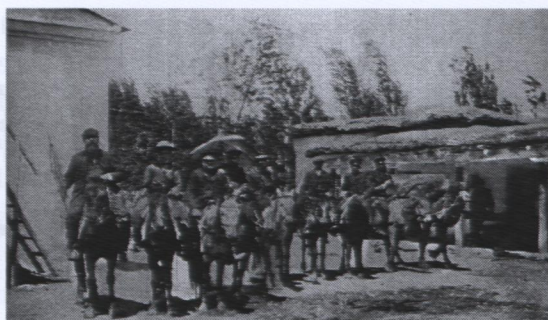
Claas Epp Jr. and family.



resistors to be easy targets. The young, tempted to take up arms in defence of family and home, were strongly repudiated by their elders, who were even reluctant to ask for help from Khivan authorities. It was consequently a time of great struggle. The misery only ended when the Khan of Khiva, now aware of the ongoing difficulties, invited the Mennonites to settle in a protected walled garden called Ak Metchet – named after a nearby white mosque. The Khan had also discovered that these Mennonites were superb craftsmen, and he hired them to build a parquet floor in his palace.

There had been dissension among the trekkers from the start. In part, this was due to Claas Epp's insistence on lay leadership and communal decision making. The majority went on to Ak Metchet, but at this point a substantial minority emigrated to the United States. Epp's authority was slowly crumbling. In 1889 he prophesied that he would be raised to heaven, but a long day's wait did not see the anticipated transfiguration. Eventually he was even prohibited from preaching. His own son moved to America. In 1894, on the day of Pentecost, Epp proclaimed that he now sat on the left hand of God, and that the congregation would hereafter baptize in the name of the Father, the sons – a designation that included Epp – and the Holy Spirit. The shock of this proclamation was too much for some, and Epp's personal following dwindled to a very few. In 1913 both he and his wife died.

Meanwhile, however, the Mennonites of Ak Metchet were settling in, for the most part living amicably with the local Muslim population. They introduced sewing machines to the local textile economy, built carriages, worked on royal projects such as hospitals, imported high yield cotton seed from America, and even promoted photography. Hard times followed, as secularists battled with Islamic traditionalists in Khiva, and then as Bolsheviks usurped power after the Communist Revolution of 1917. Even so, the Mennonite community of Ak Metchet survived, and even thrived. Because of the village's extreme geographical isolation, it was largely ignored by Moscow, and eventually became the last functioning Mennonite community in the Soviet Union, with its own ethnic school and church. Ak Metchet had finally become a true refuge, although not in the terms predicted by Claas Epp. In 1934 the fiftieth anniversary of Ak Metchet was celebrated. For the occasion, Gustav Toews wrote a long Jubilee Poem in the style of local Muslim literature. In it, he described the Mennonite trekkers as the Lord's defenceless:



Above left: Mennonites at Kaplanbek during trek.  
Above right: Hermann Jantzen family, Ak Metchet.

*Often wandering, outcast, they followed  
As a poor pilgrim through the world.  
Like their Lord, the Great Divine,  
They had no shelter and no tent.  
But they sang wonderful songs.  
The cottages were filled with harmony.  
Enemies dropped their weapons  
When the sound penetrated their hearts. (244)*

But this peaceful existence could not last. Communist authorities were eventually informed of the uncooperative Mennonites, and in 1935, after an attempt to arrest the males of Ak Metchet failed due to physical resistance by women of the village, the entire community was deported to Tajikistan. Even here, however, the Mennonites eventually thrived on the vast collective farms, and a few in fact survived to move to Germany during the last days of the Soviet empire.

In 2007 several descendants of Claas Epp visited Ak Metchet. They were delighted to learn that Mennonites are still remembered with fondness by local Muslims; and they were stunned to discover that villagers pray annually to Mennonite spirits for a good harvest. To western Mennonites, "the Great Trek of Mennonites to Central Asia is often taught as a cautionary tale against End Times fanaticism" (237). Claas Epp has been regarded as an aberration and a historical embarrassment. But Epp was not a paranoid leader in the stereotypical sense: his vision of community was based on defencelessness and on communal leadership. He once remarked that the Mennonites of Ak Metchet did not bother with a "national nor our own civil government, but always treated each other with the same love and courtesy central to the Christian faith" (185). In a sense, Walter Ratcliff's fascinating book is a welcoming back of Claas Epp into the Mennonite fold. Pilgrims on the Silk Road urges understanding across the Muslim-Christian divide. It also asks us, as broken human beings, to practise love and tolerance for those at the fringes of culture.

Walter Ratcliff has also produced and directed the documentary, *Through the Desert Goes Our Journey* (2008), on this topic.



## MENNONITE ORGANIZATIONS

# The American Mennonite Relief Organization and the birth of MCC

Selections from *Die Hungersnot*, translated by Louise Bergen Price

*Ninety years ago, while Ukraine was reeling from the effects of war and the epidemics and famine which followed, the American Mennonite Relief (AMR) organization, a branch of the newly formed Mennonite Central Committee (September, 1920), finally received permission from Moscow to send aid to Mennonite villages.*

*In his booklet, "Die Hungersnot," (The Famine), G.A. Peters of Halbstadt, Molotschna, provides a first-hand account of the famine and the effort it took to get American relief to the starving Mennonite – and non-Mennonite – population in South Russia. (Peters, G.A. *Die Hungersnot*. Winnipeg: Rundschau Publishing House, 1923.)*

Disaster did not come to our villages in one fell swoop, and yet, it came too quickly. Disaster always appears too quickly. Even if one has anticipated its coming for a long time. It began to near our villages in July 1914. We saw it approaching, slowly, very slowly, but surely, so surely.

And we shuddered. Are you surprised?

We fought against it with all our might, with legal and illegal means. We often fought in despair. And often to our own loss. Nevertheless, we had to surrender. And yet: if it had appeared all at once, it would have been so much worse for us. Many would have despaired.

At first, we tallied that which was stolen from us; then only that which remained. Finally, only life itself was important, no matter how difficult it had become.

In those days, our sister colony, Chortitza, was already experiencing great tribulation. She was the first of our colonies that needed help from other colonies. Like a cyclone that destroys all in its path, the bandit army raged through Chortitza's villages leaving a trail of misery, despair, apathy, sickness, hunger and death. Cries for help came to those in the Molotschna Colony, who responded. At that time, we were still able to help. But in the confusion of the civil war with its constantly changing front lines — as Reds, Whites and Anarchists battled for power — getting help to those in need was extremely difficult.

One day, in the fall of 1920, something unexpected and new: two delegates of the American Mennonites [Orie

Miller and Clayton Kratz] arrived via Constantinople with the news that American Mennonites were willing to help. Was that ever good news!

Some families [in the Molotschna] already had little to eat. This was especially evident in those outlying villages which had been in the direct path of the battlefield for weeks.

The arrival of the Americans and the news they brought raised the spirits of our colonists and encouraged the work of our [local relief] committee. But the uncertain situation with the Whites, who might have to withdraw from the area at any time, was worrisome. For if the Whites withdrew, the Americans would have to leave.

[The Whites then advanced 100 kilometres to the west, to the Old Colony. Immediately the American relief workers Miller and Kratz took advantage of the more stable situation to travel to Chortitza. Shortly thereafter, the Reds pressed forward and regained control. Miller returned to Sevastopol to prepare for the relief shipment to arrive, but Kratz, although warned by other Mennonites to leave, chose to stay. He was arrested, freed, then arrested again, and disappeared. He was never heard from again.]

In the meantime, the Red sweep extended to the Crimea. The Whites had been routed. Miller and Slagel (another American worker who had joined the team) withdrew to Constantinople.]

Again, a long time went by with no connection to the outer world. And yet the world around us did not ignore us. One blow followed another. And we saw it coming: An end with terror in a terror without end.

One day in the spring of 1921 a friend from the Kuban in the Caucasus came to Halbstadt and reported that ... an American ship had arrived in Novorussik. Two American delegates, Mennonites, had come to discuss relief work with the Soviet regime. But again they had to leave without achieving anything.

Summer came into the land and left again; autumn arrived, and winter followed. No help arrived. In fact, it seemed that any possibility of help reaching us was



becoming ever more remote. We tried to give a hand here and there where the need was greatest. We could have done more. But in view of the uncertain future, we began to focus only on that which directly affected us, and we became less and less willing to reach out to others. Often, though, we still saw touching examples of people helping one another.

By Christmas the situation in our villages was grim. In some places, people ate carrion and all kinds of unbelievable substitutes for food. Early cases of death from starvation were being reported.

[Then] a circular from Brother Miller arrived in the Mennonite colonies. "Endure a bit longer! We'll soon be there. Help will soon arrive!" was the gist of his long letter.

We endured ... had to endure.

One day in February 1922 the word raced through Halbstadt and the surrounding villages: in Schönwiese-Alexandrovsk the first transport of American products for Mennonites has arrived via Odessa. Other trains will arrive via Kharkov.

Scouts were sent out. And – a miracle! Help had arrived in Alexandrovsk! Only a few more days, and it would arrive in Halbstadt as well.

One day, as the inhabitants of Halbstadt were eating

their meagre lunch, and many were hoping that the help so close at hand would arrive, they heard the blast of a train whistle from the station nearby. A locomotive! The Halbstadt people hadn't heard a locomotive whistle for a long time. Had help finally come?

In a short time, a large crowd gathered at the station. Four box cars of American products had arrived! Help was finally here.

But many, especially among the older Mennonites, who remembered the vanquished glory of bygone days, could not let themselves be carried away by enthusiasm, couldn't quite come to terms with it all, even as they rejoiced at the arrival of help. ... How far we have fallen. Have we not become beggars? Beggars! From well-to-do people, who only recently believed that to give is more blessed than to receive. Why the downfall? Did God want to preserve us from an even deeper fall?

We have often not understood God's love. Have often not seen it. But we have never abandoned it.

So the great relief work came into being. Through a huge effort, the American brothers had finally achieved the wished for result.

*During the three years of AMR work, kitchens provided meals for 25,000 people a day. The total cost of this relief effort would come to \$1.2 million.*



Hungry children wait to receive food from the American Mennonite Relief, South Russia, 1920s. Photo courtesy of MCC.



## MENNONITE ORGANIZATIONS

# Mennonite Foundation of Canada: a Foundation like no other

By Dave Kroeker, former consultant at MFC in Abbotsford,  
with additions and updates by Darren Pries-Klassen

"The purpose of the [Mennonite Foundaton of Canada] was to provide stewardship teaching and responsible use and disposition of accumulated possessions." (GAMEO)

Two unique features that Mennonite Foundation of Canada, a federally-registered public charitable foundation, brought to the world of foundations in Canada were the deliberate purpose of operating as a charity that was and remains largely donor advised, and the investment of a large portion of its assets back in its supporting community through loans to churches and related organizations.

This means, on the one hand, that most of the funds distributed by the Foundation to charity (any registered charity in Canada is an eligible beneficiary) are done so upon the recommendation of donors themselves. On the other hand, depositors and donors are assured that while their funds are under Foundation management, a significant portion of the investments are used directly in the church community from where they originate.

Mennonite Foundation of Canada (MFC) received a federal charter in December of 1973. It was formed through a merger of Comeca Foundation of Manitoba and Mennonite Foundation of Ontario. The two fledgling charitable foundations were both founded in the late 1960s by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (now Mennonite Church Canada) and Mennonite Conference of Ontario. The first board chairman of the merged entity was David P. Neufeld (1974-1976), who later became pastor of Olivet Mennonite Church in Abbotsford.

Since 1973, other church conferences have joined through official service agreements. Currently, MFC's constituency includes about 60,000 members in 470 churches across Canada in the following groups: Mennonite Church Canada, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (a 1988 merger of Mennonite Conference

of Ontario, Western Ontario Mennonite Conference, and Conference of United Mennonite Churches in Ontario), Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, Northwest Mennonite Conference, Chortitzer Mennonite Church, and Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada (a 1993 merger of The Missionary Church and The Evangelical Church).

The Foundation, from its head office in Winnipeg and its regional offices in Abbotsford, Saskatoon, Calgary, Kitchener, and St. Catharines, continues to solicit donated and revocable funds through a variety of agreement options. These investments can come in short or long-term agreements and can even be perpetual in the case of donated funds, if that is the donor's wish.

Donations are accepted in all the following ways: cash, real estate, shares, mutual funds, life insurance – any property with real value. The Foundation offers assistance with estate and gift planning and with seminars and sermons on money management and Christian stewardship themes.

Reasons for the emergence of a foundation such as MFC in the context of the Anabaptist community in Canada can be found in an historical emphasis on mutual aid that goes right back to the 16th-century beginnings of the Anabaptist movement. Early leaders of the movement understood that the Christian church ought to be a covenanting community in which members would follow the example of Christ in their daily living and offer support to each other as well as to those in need around them. They believed that they were not only obliged but privileged to share their gifts in grateful response to God's gift of love and his provisions.

It is in this tradition of sharing and mutual aid that Mennonite Foundation of Canada finds it reason for being. The first detailed history of MFC was published in 1998 as a 25th anniversary project. The title given to the history was *A Foundation Like No Other: Mennonite Foundation of Canada 1973-1998*. The title was



chosen to highlight the fact that MFC had been and remained a unique creature of the Mennonite church in Canada without parallels at the time.

Most of MFC's services are provided gratis to constituent members by stewardship consultants in its six offices across the country (the Abbotsford office is at Garden Park Tower in Abbotsford). There are 17 staff members, and assets under management at the end of 2009 totalled about \$117 million. Last year \$10 million was distributed to 561 different charities through the generosity of donors across the country.

MFC's mission statement sums up the Foundation's

primary identity: It encourages and facilitates the faithful stewardship of financial resources, believing that all resources are a gift from God. The tagline used in public promotional literature is "Faithful Joyful Giving." Consultants are available in all provinces to work with individuals, groups, and congregations to teach, counsel, and facilitate their stewardship aspirations.

The Foundation's website contains a full menu of MFC's offerings and personnel contacts, at [www.mennonofoundation.ca](http://www.mennonofoundation.ca). The stewardship consultant in the Abbotsford office is Arnold Friesen: 1-888-212-8608.

## BOOK NOTICE

# Benjamin H. Unruh (1881-1959)

By Harry Loewen

Unruh, Heinrich B. *Fügungen und Führungen: Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, 1881-1959. Ein Leben im Geiste christlicher Humanität und im Dienste der Nächstenliebe* (Acts of Providence and [God's] Leading. A Life in the Spirit of Christian Humanity and in the Service of Compassion and Charity), Detmold, Germany, 2009.

Few Mennonites will have not heard of the man who before and after World War II helped many Russian Mennonites escape the Soviet Union and find new homes in North and South America. This hardcover biography of Benjamin H. Unruh (BHU), written by his son Heinrich B. Unruh in an academic German, contains 509 pages and numerous photographs. It was published by the *Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Kulturerbes des russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums* (Society for the Preservation of Russian Mennonite Culture).

Author Heinrich B. Unruh, who died before the book was published, was obviously trying to create a worthy monument to his father's life and legacy. The portrait that emerges is of a man who gave his life to the service of his people at a time when Russian Mennonites experienced great hardships, first in the Soviet Union, then during the war years in Germany and subsequent settlement in the Americas. Heinrich shows his father to have been a dedicated leader, an effective teacher and scholar, and a statesman able to work with politicians, including Nazi government officials, in the interest of his mission

of rescue and resettlement. While his cooperation with German politicians during the 1930s and 1940s found little understanding among Dutch and North American Mennonites, many Mennonites in Germany and South America have remained grateful for Unruh's efforts on their behalf.

Heinrich Unruh does not provide many details of his father's activity during the time of the Third Reich (1933-1945). However, that period is ably dealt with by Peter Letkemann in an 80-page epilogue (*Nachlass*). With the assistance of Unruh's relatives, Letkemann was able to access many letters and other sources written by BHU. What emerges is a man who in the 1930s and '40s saw Adolf Hitler as the only force who could defeat the Stalinist regime. In the meantime Letkemann has begun working on his own biography of BHU. While the German biography written by a loving son is valuable and interesting, a biography written by a more detached researcher promises to be more objective. And for English-speaking readers a biography of this somewhat controversial Mennonite statesman in English will be most welcome.



## BOOK REVIEW

### *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*

edited by Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, Karl Koop. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010.

By Robert Martens

This collection of papers presented at a Winnipeg conference in 2008 is a testament to the turbulence and rapid changes of our times. Our era, in which the very existence of Christianity seems precarious, presents huge difficulties for both analysis and predictability; and in this volume of essays on the Believers Church, the range of perspectives is enormous, indeed frequently contradictory. It is not even entirely clear what defines the "Believers Church." The introduction, as defined by the great socialist Max Weber, points out that this terminology refers to a historic movement of dissenting free churches, that now includes Baptists, Brethren, Friends, Pentecostals, Mennonites, and others. In one of the early papers, however, Gordon Zerbe remarks that "Believers" might be too individualistic a term for institutions that prioritize practice over theology: "[I]n a context where 'belief' is increasingly a private matter, but in symbiotic codependency with patriotic allegiance to a liberal democratic state, the term, Believers Church, increasingly lacks meaning" (47).

In Part I, "Biblical Perspectives," Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, the opening plenary speaker at the CMU conference, tries to pull together some of the threads by arguing that the church, although "many," is also "one," a community existing in the here and now and not in some "pie in the sky." Gordon Zerbe follows with an intriguing reading of Romans 11: Paul, Zerbe contends, is preaching a universal hope of salvation, a future unity when the "enemy" will be reconciled with the church. Soon after Paul's death, Zerbe argues, the church was routinized into distinction: that is, it became an officially sanctioned organization which excluded non-members from the salvation story. According to Zerbe, Paul's messianic language of lowliness, simplicity and peace, all ideals of the Believers Church movement, clashes with the "worldly" obsessions of power and wealth.

In Part II, "Dynamics of Denominationalism," Bruce Guenther maintains that denominationalism, despite its disparagement in some circles as divisive and as generating a consumer mentality, can on the contrary provide a forum for healthy and respectful debate.

John Friesen's analysis of the evolution among Manitoba Mennonites from the commonality of *Gemeinde* to the administrative nature of conference concludes that Manitoba Mennonites today may nevertheless be more communal than their theology of salvation implies. Doug Heidebrecht finishes this section with a well-told narrative of the women's movement in the Mennonite Brethren Church. The initial preoccupation with consensus on this issue coincided with a breakdown of community, says Heidebrecht; he cautions that this appeal to consensus was partially based on "uncontested assumptions and the status quo of common practice" (89).

Part III, "Reviewing Assumptions," is a battleground of opposing opinion. Fernando Enns distinguishes between a "believed church" and "experienced church," between the ideal and the reality. Karl Koop argues strongly against restorationist theology which appeals to the principles of the early church. Believers Churches, he says, have been guilty of divisive behaviour when they misinterpret and idealize the early church community, and should rather turn to a unitary, catholic vision of Christianity. In the following essay, Brian Hamilton expresses the polar opposite, finding in Anabaptist leader Michael Sattler's writings a strong voice for divisiveness, a turning from the "world." Finally, Scott Holland's refreshing and accessible essay presents the greater individuality of Pietism as a healthy alternative to the legalism of Anabaptism. Pietism, he says, allows for solitude, meditation, and a mystical, joyful theology. He cites the poetry of Pietist theologian Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714):

Let not your sense scatter this and that;  
Your spirit must be completely gathered in God.  
Soul, if you are to rejoice in a deeper peace  
Enter continually into the One.

There you will find an altar and temple to  
contemplate.

There the priest stands continually before God.  
Leave yourself and your self-centeredness  
And you will in the world be freed from the world  
(170).



The next two sections of the book explore more specific issues. In Part IV, "Trinitarian Foundations," Fernando Enns claims that the Trinity is a prototype for *koinonia*, community. Arnold Neufeld finds a parallel between the sending of the Holy Spirit and the missional mandate of the church. In Part V, "Ceremonies Reconsidered," Andrea Salton refers to the writings of Pilgram Marpeck, who taught that Communion reflects Christ's material humanity while validating the inward Spirit. The ritual of baptism, laments Irma Fast Dueck, is increasingly rejected by youth as non-essential, and consequently needs to be redefined.

The final section, "Recent Trends," constitutes a lively debate on the nature of the Believers Church. Jonathan Wilson lists recent trends, including liturgical services, ecumenical projects, the Emergent Church, the Missional Church (which critiques western culture), and the New Monasticism, in which small groups of individuals live communally at the fringes of society. In contrast to occasional moments in this volume in which good ideas seem nearly to disappear under the verbiage of academicism, Gareth Brandt's essay argues lucidly and passionately on behalf of the Emergent Church, the new and fluid congregations which dismiss denominationalism as peripheral or irrelevant. The Anabaptist movement, argues Brandt, was very similar. For Anabaptists, the rite of baptism was a subversive, countercultural act. Anabaptism was communal: "Jesus came not so much to save individuals but to create a people" (280). And despite aberrations such as the Münster uprising, it was devoted to peace: "People cannot live in the way of Jesus or live in community without practicing an active non-violent love" (282). The Emergent Church, Brandt writes, just like the early Anabaptists, "is erasing, crossing, and transcending old modern dichotomies such as conservative-liberal or evangelical-mainline" (283). It emphasizes the practical theology of following Jesus, a lifestyle of difficult discipleship, and de-emphasizes doctrine. The Emergent Church proclaims a welcoming and inclusive community as a counter to individualistic consumerism. It also sees all life as sacred: "The modern church," writes Brandt, "created the secular-sacred divide" (287). This ideal of the sanctity of all life, Brandt contends, is a parallel to Anabaptist/Mennonite peace principles.

With the vertiginous rate of global change, however, nothing is absolutely clear. Paul Doerksen's argument in the following paper is the polar opposite to Brandt's. The Emergent Church, he says, is hypo-

critically individualistic and unknowingly modern in its claim to "newness"; and its critique of "in/out," its inclusiveness, results in the abandonment of the church as a distinct contrast to our prevailing culture. But in the final essay in this book, "The Southern Shift in World Christianity," George Pickens strikes an optimistic note. Although the majority of church membership is now south of the equator, he writes, and despite the natural misunderstandings that result, the Believers Church, he argues, should see this demographic reality as an opportunity. The Believers Church has a narrative of marginalization, preaches the doctrine of Christian practice based on the Book, and advocates a restorationist theology: the "struggle to restore the original simplicity, purity, discipleship, and dynamism of the earliest church, while also keeping the ancient faith meaningful" (314). These are all characteristics shared with the Christians of the South. The Southern shift, urges Pickens, "requires that all Christians begin to view Christianity in all its wonderful variety" (322) – and the Believers Church, he concludes, "is strategically placed to serve as a broker across the emerging North-South Christian divide" (323).

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## IN MEMORIAM

# David Ewert, 1922-2010

David Ewert, well-known teacher, preacher and author, died on April 23, 2010, in Abbotsford, BC. He was born in Ukraine in 1922, emigrating with his parents to Canada in 1926. After graduating from high school, Ewert pursued studies in theology, graduating from the University of British Columbia (B.A.), Wheaton Graduate School (M.A.), Central Baptist Seminary, Toronto (B.D.), Lutheran Seminary, St. Paul (M.Th.), McGill University (Ph.D.), and M.B. Biblical Seminary (Doctor of Divinity, Honorary). In 1944 David married Lena Hamm, and in 2009 the couple celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary.

Although David touched many lives as a teacher, his influence went well beyond the classroom. Dora Dueck, former editor of the *MB Herald*, writes, "My larger gratitude concerns David Ewert's place in our denomination, where he was known not so much personally as broadly, by all of us, for his many contributions. He was born in 1922, served the Mennonite Brethren and wider church some 70 years: 25 years at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, and also as professor at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia, at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, and as visiting teacher in other schools in North America and internationally. He preached in many churches, and wrote more than 20 books. ... May the work and memory of David Ewert continue to be blessed among us." (<http://doradueck.wordpress.com/2010/04/27/in-honour-of-david-ewert>)

## The late David Ewert: a friend, and true

By Leonard Neufeldt

Impeccably dressed, he was leaving the classroom as I entered for the first time. David Ewert had just completed chalkboarding the outline of his opening lecture on Old Testament history, and he smiled a little nervously at us on his way out. I had arrived early, took a seat near the lectern, and waited for the buzzer. Before it sounded, he returned with a military bearing: ramrod straight and quick-step. The moment the buzzer turned silent, he commenced, rapid-fire, to deliver his introductory lecture. I wanted simply to watch and listen to him perform, but I found myself taking notes at a speed I have not since exceeded. I still have those notes. When he offered seven different ways of interpreting the creation story in



the first chapter of Genesis, an older male student asked which of these views was "the truth." Ewert smirked for a moment, then stated that they all, including evolution, had something going for them, and left his response at that. I was taken with his answer.

What really established our life-long bond, however, were his lectures on the history of the writing, compiling, transmitting and editing of the various parts of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and his four-semester series of courses in Hellenistic and Koinē Greek. His love for Greek language study and the science/art of textual editing was contagious in my case. The two of us went well beyond the exercises in lexicon, grammar, and translation required in the Greek courses, often exploring ancient Greek as a window on the regional and larger cultures of the times. A few years later, when I briefly assisted G. Blakemore Evans with his new Houghton Mifflin edition of Shakespeare's works, I was surprised that the editorial principles and practices of this undertaking were identical to those that Ewert had made familiar to me.

Ewert confided to me more than once that he wished he had been able to proceed without a break to the PhD as I had done. And were he given the opportunity to redo his studies, he would have become a linguist (like one of his daughters, who once told me that although she was more liberal than her father on theological and cultural issues, this never presented a problem to him). That is the person I have known over the years, a wonderful, open-minded scholar and teacher whose initial magisterial presence edited itself so naturally into mutual love and loyalty.



## Roots and Branches

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## ARTIST BIO

# Hilda Janzen Goertzen

I am a self-taught artist, born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was here that my interest in movement, music and art was fostered. I began painting with acrylics on canvas in 1998 and found that I enjoyed this medium the best. It is in the large abstracts where I am able to express my deepest emotions by swirling, pushing and pulling paint across the canvas with palette knives, my fingers/hand, large combs or whatever happens to be around. My paintings are often highly textured, which I achieve by adding cement, sand, flakes, or gel to paints. My art has been described as being eclectic, joyful, full of movement and colour. With each piece that I paint, my aim is to create joy and energy for the viewer and the buyer.

My most recent interests have been in researching my family genealogy, collecting family stories and translating my father's journal from German into English.

Thanks to Ruth Derksen's encouragement, I did a series of gulag paintings focusing on the suffering of the Mennonites in Stalinist Russia.

My other interest is travelling, which has allowed me to see some of the great art galleries in Europe and South America.

Peter and I live in Rosedale, BC. We have two grown children, Michael (lives in Istanbul, Turkey) and Andrea (Wpg. MB), son-in-law Byron Neufeld and two grandchildren, Zachary and Cal.

*Hilda's website can be found at: <http://hilda-goertzen.artistwebsites.com/>*





# POEM

## The Letter

Art and poetry by Hilda Janzen Goertzen

I wrote a letter to my kin  
And on the way I dropped it  
A Russian peasant picked it up  
And put it in her pocket  
A plea for help, Remember us  
As we remember you  
Our clothes are torn, our shoes are worn  
The soup is thin, the bread's all gone  
I'm sawing timber, rolling logs  
The days are long and hazardous  
The mines are deep and wet and cold  
I'm dragging sacks of coal and ore  
It's very late, I'm tired and sore  
I'll say farewell and plead once more  
Please send us parcels filled with bread  
Remember us... as we remember you

