



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

Trud Army Memorial	3
Russian Mennonite Wedding	4
Mennonites and Judenplan.....	6
Tolstoy and the Mennonites.....	7
Bakerview Hispanic	12
Muslim Mennonite event	17

Photo: Kalta-Minor minaret in Khiva

Editorials — by Louise Bergen Price & Connie Braun

This year marks a significant change in our society as five directors, John Konrad, Peter Neudorf, Louise Bergen Price, Connie Braun, and John B Toews leave the board. We are confident that the board will be energized by the addition of new directors and new ideas as they continue in this important work.

Over the twelve years I've edited *Roots and Branches*, I've had the privilege of working with a wonderful team of writers from Henry Neufeld, who first steered me in this direction, to Helen Rose Pauls, Robert Martens, Connie Braun, Maryann Jantzen, Anne Andres, Wilf Penner and Heather Pauls Murray. Thanks, all, and thanks also to Hugo and Jean Friesen who have copy edited most of our periodicals. It's been great fun working with all of you, and I've learned more than I could have imagined. Although my term as director of MHSBC is coming to an end, I will be involved in *Roots and Branches* for another issue or two until a new team is ready to take over.

Being a director of our historical society has been challenging and rewarding. For me, a "48er", the Sixty Years of Peace and Plenty event was especially meaningful.

To my fellow directors: although I don't like meetings, I'll miss the camaraderie around the big table in the board room. Thanks to all those who served with me on

the board, and a warm welcome to new members. May you also be energized and enriched by this experience.

Louise Bergen Price

At the close of my term as board member of the Mennonite Historical Society, I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation for the work of the society and for the commitment of all those interested in its work. The BC chapter of the Mennonite Historical Society is one-of-a-kind when it comes to the sheer effort of its volunteers, as I learned when I attended the Canadian annual general meeting in 2010. We are the envy of every other provincial society with our events, newsletter and committed volunteer base. On a more personal note, it was a highlight for me to participate in the 60 year celebration of Mennonite refugees to Canada. And I cannot say goodbye, without saying thank-you once more to the MHSBC for providing me with the historical resources to write and publish my book. I well remember the kindness of Erica Suderman, who showed me where to start looking. Thanks also to the *Roots & Branches* team, especially to Louise, under whose direction this has become such a fine periodical, and to Robert for researching and contributing so many of the insightful articles that comprise it.

Connie Braun

UPCOMING MHSBC EVENTS 2011

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| May 28/29 | Mennonites on the Silk Road. See back cover for more information |
| May 29 2:30-2:50 pm | MHSBC Annual General Meeting. CBC Chapel. All are welcome. Silk Road lecture will follow the meeting. |
| October 15, 2011 | MHSBC's Annual Fundraising Banquet. Speaker: Colin Neufeldt. Theme: The Experience of Mennonite Exiles at Siberian Special Settlements (1930-1933). Emmanuel Mennonite Church. |

In Memorium — Ruth Derksen Siemens

The sun blinds us. We strain to see the names etched in black. A man reads name after name of victims of the Trud (labour) Army. We hear Regehr, Duerksen, Dueck, Wiens, Wiebe, Friesen, Froese, Fast, Pauls and Wedel – over 300 names in the village of Friedensruh, near Issyl Kul in Siberia.

With the most active recruitment in 1941, men and women from age 15 to 60 were drafted into the labour army. Conscription was compulsory, but exemptions were made for women who were pregnant or had children less than three years old. These labour battalions supported the USSR's war effort. Under military supervision, workers were sent to barracks and given work assignments in mines, refineries, ammunition factories, industrial manufacturing and road construction. Conditions were similar to those in the Soviet prison camps throughout the Gulag. Guards with dogs watched their movements, search lights glared, movement was confined, and food was rationed as a reward for work. Those who could not work could not eat.

Although many socio-ethnic groups were conscripted (such as Polish Jews, Ukrainians and Byelorussians), the so-called "Germans" living in the USSR were the largest group serving in the Trud Army. In the small village of Waldheim near Friedensruh, 150 people died in the army; 50 of them were women.

The male voice reads on and on. The drone augments the horror and absurdity of the loss. We walk back to the bus in silence. The tour of villages near Omsk continues. We are hot and hungry but are assured of a meal and nights' lodging in Waldheim.



Memorial to victims of the Trud Army. Date: June 5, 2010. Place: Friedensruh, Siberia

Mennonites In Russia

A Russian Mennonite Wedding in Einlage, 1913

by Isaak Johann Reimer, translated and edited by Louise Bergen Price.

From *Einlage Kitschkas 1789-1943*, edited by Heinrich Bergen. Regina, SK, 2009

In Russian Mennonite villages like Einlage, young people got to know each other quite well. When a young couple came to an understanding, the prospective groom would visit the young woman's parents to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage. If the groom was from a different area, and especially if he was rich, he often arrived in a pompous manner with a coach and driver.

Maria Reimer had a suitor from Petersdorf, immaculately dressed and from a good family, who came wooing in a carriage pulled by three horses and with a liveried coachman. Maria's parents were happy with the prospective match, but Maria waffled since she'd had her eye on Gerhard Kasdorf from Chortitza Island. When the Petersdorf suitor came for the third time, Maria had decided in favour of Gerhard Kasdorf, and gave the Petersdorfer de kjiep, a ritual in which a large basket (kjiep) was attached to the suitor's carriage as a sign that he had been rejected, causing him great shame. It is unlikely that a kjiep was actually fastened in the Petersdorfer's case, for Maria's father thought very highly of the young man and would not have allowed it.

Now Gerhard Kasdorf came courting, first by ship from Insel Chortitza to Einlage, and then by foot from the Dnieper to the home of the Reimers. But Maria didn't accept Gerhard right away, either, and told him to come back another time. Gerhard didn't show up at the appointed hour, having decided to attend a wedding on Insel Chortitza instead. [Apparently Maria forgave, and accepted the next time he came.]

On the day of the engagement, a groom's friends liked to test his courage. In this case, they hid in the bushes along the way as Gerhard walked to the Reimers, firing into the air with rifles and revolvers. The groom was expected to walk calmly and pay no attention to the shooting. Since most Mennonites weren't practised in the art of shooting, it often looked quite funny. I remember [at another engagement] how Jakob Siemens stood behind a tree squeezing the trigger with all his might, likely more afraid than the groom!

The wedding invitation was sent out in good time and read something like this: "We invite you to the wedding, if God wills, of our daughter Maria Reimer to Gerhard Kasdorf, on 20 June, 1913, in our home. Johann and Elisabeth Reimer."

Before the wedding day, men drove from yard to yard collecting benches, chairs and tables. Women were busy cooking and baking. The barn had to be decorated, and the chairs for bride and groom trimmed with greens and flowers.

Although much was cooked and baked, the Reimers ordered most of the pastries from the Konditorei Gladkow in Alexandrowsk. Lejba Schief, the Jewish merchant, supplied beef for the roasts, and mutton for borscht. There was beer, wine and brandy, as well as cheese and sausage ordered from Alexandrowsk. Perishables were stored in the Reimers' ice cellar.

The Reimers' relatives arrived on June 19 and festivities began that evening with a Polterabend. The couple sat on decorated chairs in the barn while other young people wished them well with poems and older people brought gifts, mostly household items. In most Mennonite families in the Old Colony, the bride received a cow as well as a dresser built by Jakov Kaslowski from her parents; the groom, a wardrobe and a horse from his.

On the wedding day, the family sent their servant, Lavro, to fetch Ältester Isaak Dyck and his wife, and lunch was served to family and guests from out of town. The long tables in the barn could seat eighty, so there were two settings. After silent prayer (it was not customary to pray out loud before meals in the Old Colony) a table grace was sung. The meal began with an appetizer of bread, butter, cheese, sausage, etc. This was followed by meaty borscht, then roast beef with potatoes and gravy, pickles, and tomatoes. For dessert, either Plüme Mus (plum soup) or milk. During the meal, one or two small glasses of brandy or wine might be served – it was not customary to drink more before the ceremony.

By twelve noon, the guests would begin to ar-

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

rive, the men all in suits, white collars and ties that they would wear no matter how hot the weather. The groom wore a suit with formal jacket, a white shirt with tie and cufflinks, and a corsage on his left lapel; the bride, a long white dress with a train, a veil and wreath.

The service began at one with the singing of two congregational hymns, followed by the wedding ceremony performed by Ältester Isaak Dyck. It was not customary to exchange rings at this time – rings had already been bought during the time the couple was engaged, and had been worn since then. There were no bridesmaids, but one or two small girls followed the bride to carry her long train. After the ceremony, everyone congratulated the couple.

At three, there was Faspa: coffee or tea and an assortment of baked goods, butter, vereneki, but no meat and no alcohol. Faspa was eaten in several seatings and lasted until five. Later, the older folks sat around to gossip. Young men left to do farm chores, and young women to milk cows and feed chickens and pigs. Those who had servants to do their work still had to supervise.

Around seven or eight, a few more songs were sung; then Ältester Dyck requested a ride home. "The young people want to have fun and dance. And they should have fun and dance, nothing is sin if it's not done to excess. But because they're in awe of me, they won't dance in my presence. Tomorrow you can fetch me again."

At nine, supper was served along with wine, beer and brandy. All could eat and drink as much as they wished. A brass band hired for the occasion played and young people danced and played games like Schlüsselbund. Everyone was joyful. There was no drunkenness and no fighting. It was not customary for young people to pair off and disap-

pear – that would have been a disgrace, and a girl who participated in this ran the risk of never marrying.

At midnight, the bride's wreath and veil and the groom's corsage were removed. The groom was blindfolded, and all single men formed a circle around him singing, "Wir weihen dir den Jungferkranz." (We dedicate the maiden wreath to you.) The groom turned around several times, then walked with the corsage on a plate towards the men in the circle. Whom-

ever he bumped into was the winner. The girls played the same game with wreath and veil. Of course, the result had already been planned and the blindfold not tied very tightly! The two winners were forcibly placed on chairs, side by side, and were lifted high to the shouts of "Gorko, Gorko" (bitter, bitter) until they kissed. Often one kiss was not enough and they had to repeat.

Fun and games often lasted until seven in the morning, when the cowherd was already taking the herd to pasture, and late night guests had barely left when guests arrived for the following day's No Tjast (afterwedding) celebrations. Reimer's servant Lavro fetched Ältester Dyck and his wife, and breakfast was served to guests from out of town.

Ältester Dyck delivered another short sermon. The young people danced and played games. Older men gathered around tables, gossiped and drank. After the noon meal, those who had travelled from other places left for home, and the few remaining guests left after Faspa. Supper was served only to closest relatives.

This wedding cost 500 gold rubles or the price of 8 tonnes of wheat.

Einlage Kitschkas 1789-1943 can be ordered for \$25 (includes shipping) from Heinz Bergen, 59 Richardson Crescent, SK S4S 4J2. Email: hbergen@accesscomm.ca



1907 wedding of Kornelius Braun and Helena Pauls

Mennonites In Russia

Mennonites and Jews in South Russia

by Wilf Penner

For many years visions of the *Judenplan* have whirled about in my head. However, not until my father wrote in his autobiography that Grandfather Penner was born in the Jewish village of Kreviples did I realize that my great-grandfather David Penner had been a *Judenplan* model farmer. For some years my imagination conjured up images of a wealthy country squire on a prosperous and well-appointed estate, advising wide-eyed Jewish peasants eager to emulate his success. Alas, further study has informed me that the Mennonite model farmers of the *Judenplan* were not the cream of the crop, but sons of poorer farmers or latecomers to the Chortiza colony.

Most Russian Mennonites know of Catherine the Great's invitation to Mennonites and other Prussian peasants to settle the vast steppes acquired through wars with Turkey, but few may have heard about the territories ceded to Russia by the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1769. While new German-speaking immigrants to Russia numbered in the thousands, the population of the newly acquired Polish-Lithuanian territories numbered in the millions, among them several million Jews.

From the 16th century the rulers of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were among the most tolerant of any in Europe. Hordes of persecuted religious dissenters, including Dutch Mennonites, flocked to the region, as did millions of Jews who found new homes within the so-called "Pale of Settlement."¹ As the Jewish population increased, and since they were limited to living within the Pale, most Jews ended up in either crowded ghettos in the large cities or in crowded smaller towns known as *shtetl*, where they eked out an impoverished living as servants, water carriers, porters, tailors, pedlars, but also as managerial agents, money lenders and merchants.

In the early nineteenth century, the paternalistic Russian Government instituted a program with the objective of alleviating this poverty by settling some Jews in agricultural villages. Ultimately there were approximately

40 such villages. After several decades, when the Supervisory Committee evaluated the settlement program, it noted that the failure of these villages to succeed could be attributed to tangled lines of planning and control, graft and oppression in village administration, and failure to provide instruction in agricultural methods to the inexperienced Jewish peasants.

The Committee, noting the efficient administration and economic success of the Chortiza and Molotschna colonies, decided that assigning Mennonite administrators and model farmers to the Jewish settlements might be an effective corrective for these flaws. With the endorsement of Johann Cornies, who at this time exercised wide-ranging governmental authority over Mennonite settlements, the plan went into effect by about 1850. In 1848, a notice appeared in the *Unterhaltungsblatt für deutsche Ansiedler im südlichen Rußland* (Periodical for German Settlers in South Russia), inviting German colonists and Mennonites to apply for positions as village overseers and model settlers for a new experiment known as the *Judenplan*. Prospective model settlers were guaranteed retention of their legal status as colonists. They were promised grants of 40 dessiatina (107 acres) of good land, long-term tax exemptions, and the right to maintain their own schools.

The site of the *Judenplan* experiment was a tract of good well-drained land about 10 kilometres square, 100 kilometres west of Chortitza colony. The market towns of Sofievka and Krivoy-Rog were nearby, and 70 kilometres to the southeast lay the Dnieper port of Nikopol. On this tract, six villages were established: two older villages, Kamianka and Izluchistaia in the early 1800s; the other four, created in the early 1850s, were named Novokovno (Kreviples), Novopodolsk, Novovitebsk, and Novozhitomir, after the provinces from which their Jewish settlers had come.

No information is available about how the newer villages were laid out, but Izluchistaia was a cluster village, very different from the spacious, linear layout of the Mennonite villages. Cluster villages (*shtetls*) tended to be crowded and confining, with narrow streets inconvenient for the transport of bulky agricultural commodities. The shops were small and crowded together. In

Continued on page 7

1 The area in Russia to which Jews were confined to live. Sometimes, exceptions were made for Jews of certain professions or crafts; this varied from one tsarist regime to the next. Jews were also excluded from living in a number of cities within the Pale. By 1897, the Pale covered an area from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and included much of Ukraine, Bessarabia, Belarus, and Lithuania and encompassed 4,899,300 Jews. ("Pale of Settlement," Encyclopedia of Ukraine [online], 2001.)

Continued from page 6

Izluchistaia, Mennonite farmers occupied one of numerous side streets that branched from the main road. This type of village arrangement discouraged any enthusiastic response from Mennonite applicants. Beyond that, the movement of some Mennonites to a mixed Jewish-Mennonite settlement did nothing to break down the growing class distinction in Mennonite society between prosperous landowners and poorer renters and labourers. However, there were a few ameliorating factors: a large enough contingent of Mennonite settlers (100 to 140 families) would make church and school development viable, and the area was relatively close to Mennonite home villages, preventing the new settlers from feeling completely isolated.

The register of persons living outside the Chortiza colony for 1852 reports fifty-two Mennonite families (355 people) as "living in a Jewish colony in the Kherson Province." The average age of the male heads of these households was 33 years; the youngest was 22, and the oldest, 57. The 1852 Molotschna list, however, shows no Mennonites from that colony residing in a Kherson Judenplan village.

What was life like in these Jewish villages in the 1850s and '60s? It seems that Mennonites and Jews, although living in close proximity, remained relatively segregated and isolated from each other. Little in the ethos of either group encouraged social integration. In business matters, especially in the first years, Mennonites and Jews were able to conduct business civilly, if not cordially. Not surprisingly, however, the Jewish citizenry resented being administered and instructed by Mennonite supervisors and model farmers, and from time to time heated altercations involving threats and counter-threats developed. The Mennonite farmers' greatest complaint centred around the fact that Mennonite and Jewish landholdings were intermingled. The Mennonites assiduously cultivated and cropped their land, while the Jews' lands were sometimes neglected and overgrown with weeds. When, in the early 1880s, the Supervisory

Committee ordered that these lands be segregated, relations between the two groups improved.

Was the Judenplan successful? It seems that from the start the Mennonite settlers viewed living in a Judenplan village as necessary but not desirable, since when Mennonite "daughter colonies" such as Yazykovo and Baratov were developed from 1869 on, many Mennonite settlers left the Judenplan to seek greener pastures there. From the Supervisory Committee's point of view, the experiment was not successful enough to be replicated. In the 1880s, during a period of extreme Russian anti-Semitism, popular journalists declared the Judenplan to be a failure due to a perception of Jewish inability to adapt to any non-exploitative occupation. However, a significant Jewish study of the Judenplan by Julius Eck draws a diametrically opposite conclusion.

What became of the colony? With the clouds of revolution and war lowering, little was written about the Judenplan after the 1880s. However, the presence of Mennonites in the Judenplan region lasted until the retreat of the German armies from Russian territories in 1943.

What of Great-grandfather David Penner? By the time his son, my Grandfather Peter D. Penner, was born in 1862, the family had moved from Izluchistaia to Novokovno. David Penner died about 1867. Peter D. Penner, my grandfather, found work as a farm labourer in the village of Eichenfeld (No. 4), Yazykovo, where his sister Helena and her husband Peter Siemens also resided. An older brother, John, probably settled in Bergthal, since he and his wife immigrated to Manitoba in 1875. Records indicate that several of Peter D. Penner's sisters also married and immigrated to Canada.

References:

- 1 Dyck, Harvey. "Landlessness in the Old Colony: The Judenplan Experiment."
- 2 Gameo (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online): "The Judenplan."
- 3 Wikipedia. "Beyond the Pale: History of the Jews in Russia."

Tolstoy and Mennonites

By Robert Martens

Although Tolstoy and Mennonites lived alongside each other in the Russian Empire, there appears to have been little genuine contact between them. This may seem odd, as they shared some fundamental values. Both Tolstoy and the Mennonites honoured the ideals of communalism and sharing, based on

their reading of the lifestyle of the Early Church. Both professed a strong belief in pacifism, grounded principally on the Beatitudes. Yet in the writings of Russian Mennonites of that time, mention of Tolstoy is nearly absent. This was partly due to Tolstoy himself, who felt

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

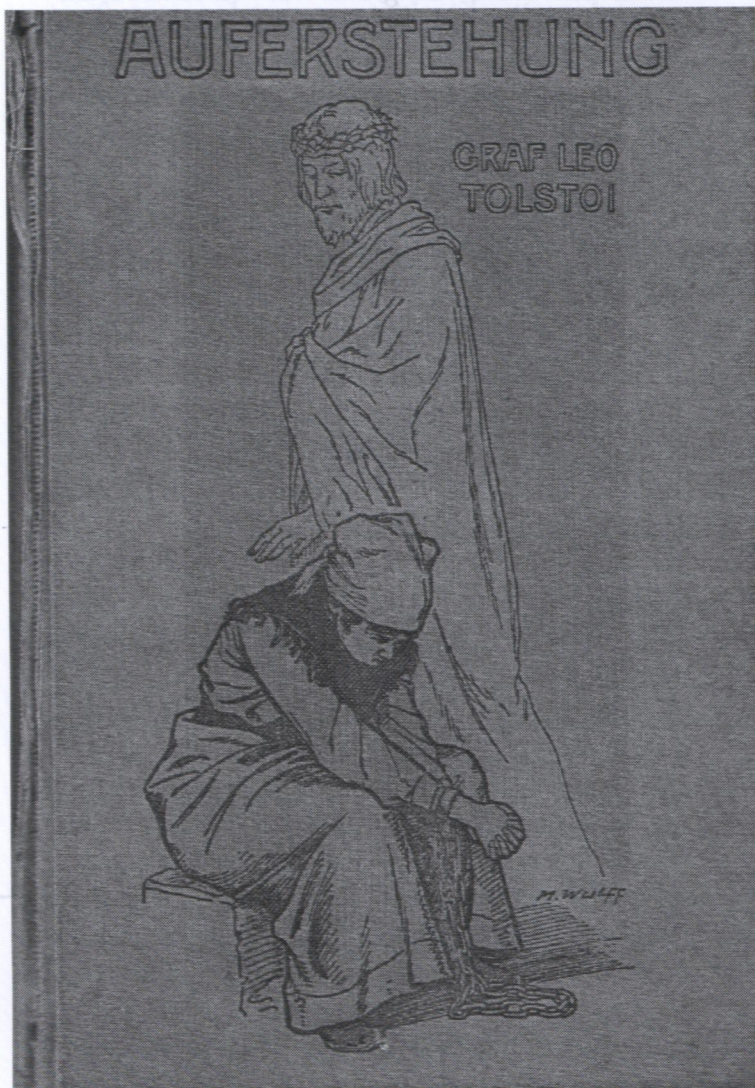
far more comfortable with Slavic groups such as the pacifist Doukhobors, and would have regarded Mennonites as foreigners; who scorned the wealthy elite, while Mennonites were growing more prosperous by the decade; and who dissociated himself from the decadent aristocracy, while Mennonites sought protection from the tsar. Mennonites, on the other hand, who strongly affirmed a conversion experience, would have been suspicious of Tolstoy's emphasis on ethics as a way to redemption. They would have also been suspicious of Tolstoy's precept, "The kingdom of God is within you." Early Anabaptists had preached the inner interpretation and truth of God's Word, but over time Mennonites had come to rely increasingly on external guidance from church authorities. And certainly Mennonites would have sharply disagreed with Tolstoy's

anarchism.

In Europe and North America, however, some Mennonites were taking Tolstoy quite seriously. Dietrich Rempel, writer and teacher, mourned the Russian novelist's death in 1910: "I was numb, I do not know how long, but I stopped eating ..." (Miller 165). American MB editor and writer JG Ewert translated some of Tolstoy's letters into German and had them published. Indiana's John Funk, editor of *Herald of Truth*, was profoundly influenced by the Russian novelist's principles of pacifism, and ran two long articles on Tolstoy in the *Herald* in 1896. In his essay, "Tolstoy and American Communists," Noah Byers of Goshen College concluded that the writer was a "convincing critic of the existing civic, social and industrial order" (Miller 168), but was not progressive enough for a rapidly changing western society. David Janzen, writing in the mid fifties for the Canadian Mennonite, declared that Tolstoy's ethics put "many a Christian to shame," but that "his tragedy was that he only saw Christianity as a moral teaching and not as a revelation" (Miller 171). John Howard Yoder wrote that Tolstoy was "second to none ... in his commitment to be critical of the oppressive misuses which have been made of Christianity ..." (Miller 173), but that the novelist was an impractical utopian. Historian Robert Friedmann declared that Tolstoy had first introduced him to Anabaptist values such as peacemaking: "The first awakening of my spiritual life I owe to Leo Tolstoy. I began as a Tolstoyan" (Miller 177). Finally, Seminary teacher Clarence Bauman admired Tolstoy's profound affirmation of the Sermon on the Mount as the crux of the Gospel, but found fault with the novelist's reliance on ethics rather than on a spiritual faith experience.

These critiques of Tolstoy were made, however, by an intellectual elite, and there was probably not a great deal of interest in him by the Mennonite grassroots. Even Mennonite teachers would likely have preferred Goethe and Schiller. Mennonite scholars also maintained some strong prejudices in their interpretations of Tolstoy, and some fundamental misperceptions were the result. But Tolstoy himself lacked a clear understanding of Russian Mennonites. In the following excerpts from his famous essay, "The Kingdom of God Is Within You," Mennonites seem to be more of a principle or ideal than flesh and blood individuals.

"Helchitsky [Christian leader in 15th century



Voskreseniya, (Resurrection) 1899, Tolstoy's last major novel, German edition. Tolstoy donated the proceeds from this novel to help pay for the Doukhobors' passage to Canada.

Continued on page 9

Bohemia] teaches precisely what has been and is taught in these days by the non-resistant Mennonites and Quakers, and in former times by the Bogomilites, Paulicians, and many others. He teaches that Christianity, expecting from its adherents gentleness, meekness, peaceableness, forgiveness of injuries, turning the other cheek when one is struck, and love for enemies, is inconsistent with the use of force, which is an indispensable condition of authority. ...

There are people, hundreds of thousands of Quakers, Mennonites, all our Douhobortsi, Molokani, and others who do not belong to any definite sect, who consider that the use of force – and, consequently, military service – is inconsistent with Christianity. Consequently there are every year among us in Russia some men called upon for military service who refuse to serve on the ground of their religious convictions. Does the government let them off? No. ... except in the case of the German Mennonites, living in the province of Kherson, whose plea against military service is

considered well grounded. They are made to work off their term of service in labour in the forests.

But in the recent cases on the part of Mennonites to serve in the army on religious grounds, the government authorities have acted in the following manner: To begin with, they have recourse to every means of coercion used in our times to “correct” the culprit and bring him to “a better mind,” and these measures are carried out with the greatest secrecy. I know that in the case of one man who declined to serve in 1884 in Moscow, the official correspondence on the subject had two months after his refusal accumulated into a big folio, and was kept absolutely secret among the Ministry.”

References:

- 1 Miller, Levi. “Leo Tolstoy and the Mennonites.” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (1998): 163-180.
- 2 Tolstoy, Leo. “The Kingdom of God Is Within You.” www.kingdomnow.org

Lev Tolstoy and Clarence Bauman: Sermon on the Mount Affinities by Ron Dart

The year 2010 was an auspicious one: it was 100 years since Tolstoy's death (November 1910), 15 years since Clarence Bauman's death (1995), and 25 years since Bauman's magisterial book, *The Sermon on the Mount*. What unites Tolstoy to Bauman? Bauman considered Tolstoy's reading of the Sermon on the Mount to be a golden portal to an authentic faith journey.

Levi Miller's probing article, “Leo Tolstoy and the Mennonites” (*Journal of Mennonite Studies*: Vol. 16, 1998), is a fine overview of different Mennonite attitudes to Tolstoy both in Russia and North America. Miller makes it clear that Bauman, more than most Mennonites, was consciously indebted to Tolstoy's commitment to and interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount:

Clarence Bauman was an explicit Tolstoyan Christian. ... For Bauman, Tolstoy, often mentioned with the Anabaptists, is the measure for the practicability and relevance of the Sermon on the Mount. ... His [Bauman's] compelling and masterful study of the Sermon is imbued from beginning

to end with Tolstoy's literal *nova lex Christi* [new law of Christ]. (176-7) Miller has much more to say about Tolstoy, Bauman, and the Sermon and the Mount, but let us briefly turn to Tolstoy, his long journey to the Sermon on the Mount, and then Bauman's appropriation of Tolstoy. Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910) began his journey, for the most part, as a “cheerfully unreflecting Russian patriot,” and his earliest short stories, although not promoting war, are dispatches from his time in the military in the 1850s. The publication in 1855 of “Sevastopol in December,” “Sevastopol in May,” and “The Wood-felling” are not pretty tales to read. The larger Homeric epic novel, *War and Peace* (depending on the version used), ponders, again and again, the complex nature of war and peace. Pierre and Andrei, more than most in the novel, are groping towards something deeper, but it is Pierre who signals an implicit turn to the Sermon on the Mount. The marriage between Pierre and Natasha near the end of *War and Peace* is but

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

a primer for Tolstoy's novel, *Anna Karenina*. The complicated and tragic relationship between Anna and Vronsky in *Anna Karenina* can be easily compared to the deeper and more meaningful relationship, in *War and Peace*, of Levin and Kitty, who are much closer to the Sermon on the Mount than are Pierre and Natasha. Tolstoy's quest for a more solid ethical plumb line is obvious in these classic novels: the moral vision and graphic realism are unmistakable.

A distinctive shift occurred in Tolstoy's life from literary genius to prophetic reformer. This took place as he wrote his *Confession* (1879-1882). Tolstoy was now more than 50 years of age, and he was groping for an ethical vision to live by; merely to write about life was not enough; he was committed to live, and to live in a meaningful manner. Tolstoy lived with the demanding tension between writing about life and living that life for his final 30 years.

This complex and subtle interior struggle is summed up in both Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1893) and *What is Art?* (1898). Needless to say, these books did not please the literary high mucky mucks. The fact that Tolstoy turned to some of the harder ethical teachings of the New Testament (and attempted to live them) took him into the trying fray with his wife, family, literary elite, his followers called Tolstoyans, and the Russian state. The recent film, *The Last Station*, highlights some of these dilemmas, as does the recent publication of Sofia Tolstoy's autobiography, *My Life: Sofia Andreevna Tolstoya*.

There is no doubt, though, that Tolstoy attempted, in an imperfect yet committed way, to interpret in thought, word and deed the Sermon on the Mount. It was his ascetic and communal life style that brought Tolstoy into contact with Gandhi in the final two years of his life. Gandhi's first community in South Africa was called the Tolstoy Farm.

The fact that Tolstoy tried to faithfully interpret and live the Sermon on the Mount (rather than academically analyzing it to death, or merely dismissing it as an idealistic vision that could not be lived) appealed enormously to Clarence Bauman.

Clarence Bauman (1928-1995) grew up in the Abbotsford area, and is well known for the Hermitage he built at Camp Squeah on the outskirts of Hope in the Fraser Canyon. There has been a tradition within the historic Anabaptist-Menno-

nite community of holding high the Sermon on the Mount as the mark of an authentic faith life, in contrast to the Magisterial reformers (eg, Lutheran, Calvinist) who tended to minimize the significance of the Sermon on the Mount for public and political life. Bauman was committed to reclaiming the centrality of the Sermon on the Mount, and he was convinced that Tolstoy, more than most, knew how to do this. This is why Tolstoy is the north star in Bauman's *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for Its Meaning*.

The chapter entitled "Leo Tolstoy: The Moral Challenge of Literal Interpretation" is a must read. Bauman does not waver from Tolstoy's emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount for the formation of the human soul in its quest for meaning. Bauman is very much the modern disciple; Tolstoy, the sage and master. Bauman questions and dismantles numerous twentieth century scholars and activists (mostly German) who, through a variety of subtle and sophisticated means, sanitized and domesticated the Sermon of the Mount in thought and word, then dismissed its relevance in the world of deed and action. Bauman will have none of this, and constantly returns to Tolstoy as his sure footed guide in how to live more authentically. The Sermon on the Mount is a tour de force that deserves repeated reading. Clearly Bauman has thought deep and long about the quest for the meaning in life and about the best way of living out that quest, and *The Sermon on the Mount* is his apt response to these large ethical questions, with Tolstoy pointing the way.

Bauman has been mostly forgotten within the broader Mennonite community, but the more Mennonites return to Bauman's commitment to the Sermon on the Mount (and Tolstoy's approach to it), the deeper they will probe an important part of their more radical Christian tradition.

*Ron Dart has taught in the department of political science, philosophy and religious studies at University of the Fraser Valley since 1990. He has published a book on the Beatitudes called *The Beatitudes: When Mountain Meets Valley* (2006). Ron also organized a conference at University of the Fraser Valley on Tolstoy on September 22, 2010 to commemorate the centenary of Tolstoy's death. A lecture on Tolstoy and the Mennonites was included at the symposium.*

Tolstoy and the Mennonites II

By Brad Jersak

As part of the centenary (2010) of Lev Tolstoy's death, I have been asked to reflect on Tolstoy and the Mennonites. Levi Miller wrote a fine article on the Tolstoy-Mennonite connection twelve years ago,¹ reviewing those Mennonite leaders in Russia and America who interacted with Tolstoy's work. This article will rather compare and contrast the roots and reasons of Mennonite and Tolstoyan nonviolence.

1. New Testament foundations: We necessarily begin by considering the New Testament teachings that inspired both movements. Both the early Anabaptists and the Tolstoyans root their theology and practice of nonviolence in the New Testament Scriptures – especially in the practicability of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Unlike so many theologians who have used loopholes to negate Christ's commands to love one's enemy, turn the other cheek, and resist not evil with evil, Tolstoy and the Mennonites maintained that this is the very Way of Jesus on which we've been called to take up the cross and follow Christ. But again, they came to these Scriptures for quite different reasons, while affirming each other for doing so.

2. The roots of Mennonite nonresistance: During the Radical Reformation, any group (however different) practising 'believers' baptism' (versus 'infant baptism') was labeled 'Anabaptist.' Thus, even the non-violent groups in Holland, Switzerland and Germany were persecuted along with violent insurrectionist groups like the Muensterites. But the major Anabaptist groups were nonviolent from the start. They declared, "There will also unquestionably fall from us the unchristian, devilish weapons of force – such as sword, armour and the like, and all their use (either) for friends or against one's enemies – by virtue of the Word of Christ. Resist not (him that is) evil."²

Menno Simons was a Catholic priest who converted after his Anabaptist brother was martyred without defending himself. Many of these nonviolent Anabaptists were gathered up under his name and composed the original generations of those Mennonites who made their way to Russia.

As with communalism, Mennonite nonviolence answered a specific practical question: How to live through persecution? Do we defend ourselves? Do we

mount a guerrilla insurgence? How do we resist evil? Their question was not whether 'just war' is ethical, but rather, how to survive and respond to magisterial pogroms without escalating the bloodshed even further. Most of all, they asked how to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel as they faced the sword. They navigated the question by turning to the Sermon on the Mount as the Way for a Christian community to live and respond while under dominance and military occupation and oppression.

Tsarist Mennonites followed in that tradition for the most part. Having established their agreement to avoid military service with Catherine II, they maintained their stance of rendering nonviolent alternative service to the government, though Tolstoy reminds us that they came under increasing backroom pressure during his day.

After World War I, there was a period of anarchy and civil war, such that some Mennonites were targeted as 'kulaks' for their conspicuous wealth. In 1919, many of their villages were destroyed. Some developed self-defence forces but Rev. Peter Bartel tells me that the villages that activated these typically experienced much more severe oppression.

When Stalin gained power, crops, then land, then men were confiscated. There was little choice but flight and thus began the Canadian migration. Again, any commitment to nonviolence was tied to the practical reality of being a persecuted minority.

3. Tolstoyan nonresistance: Tolstoy's nonviolence, by contrast, begins with his traumatic firsthand experience of war and grows out of sensitivity to the slaughter of conscripted soldiers. He saw the muckymucks in Moscow expending innumerable peasants as fodder in conflicts that had nothing to do with them.

So Tolstoy turned to Christ's Sermon. On that foundation, he used all his literary gifts to call humanity to evolve beyond the insane destruction and wasted sacrifices of war. But Tolstoy's nonviolence was not only a call for Christians to refrain from serving as magistrates or as soldiers – it was a call for the dissolution of governments and armies themselves. Not only is there no just war, there is no just military, no just national government, no just national church. His communities would make central authority redundant, so much the better because then the state could

1 Levi Miller, "Tolstoy and the Mennonites," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 16 1998.

2 Schleithem Confession, IV.

Continued on page 12

not create wars or demand the people to fight them.

In other words, Tolstoy taught that Christ's Sermon on the Mount does not just teach us how to be good Christians apart from the world, but rather, how to be good humans who transform the world. He universalizes the Sermon as the Way for people to live together justly. It is not restricted as a local pattern for believing colonies, but as an alternative way for the nations.

Summary

Tolstoy and the Mennonites certainly knew of each other and shared some ideals around Christ's call

to nonviolence. However, the roots and reasons for embracing these ideals are also quite different. While they sought answers to different questions, what we see in Tolstoy and the Mennonites is more than coincidental, because their very unique journeys led both parties to one and the same source: the practicability of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, a challenge that twenty-first century Christians ought to heed once again.

Brad Jersak is an author living in Abbotsford, BC. He was grafted into the Mennonite world by marriage to Eden (Edith) Wiebe, by ministry through ordination with BC Conference of Mennonites, and by moral commitment to Christian nonviolence.

OUR CHURCHES

Bakerview Hispanic

by Robert Martens

Each spring thousands of migrant farm workers from Mexico and Central America arrive in the Fraser Valley to do the hard work that native-born Canadians are no longer willing to do. Some are well treated, but in spite of government regulation many labour under harsh conditions, are allocated the minimum wage, and must pay rent from their meagre earnings. Migrant workers are vital to the local agricultural economy but are nearly invisible to the media. They are not invisible, however, to the caring congregation of Bakerview Hispanic.

Abbotsford's Bakerview Hispanic began in 1987 when Sally Schroeder Isaak, a retired missionary from Ecuador, started a Spanish Sunday school class at Bakerview MB. The church grew over the next years under various interim leaders. Bakerview Hispanic is currently ministered to by fulltime pastor Rubén Zuñiga and his wife, Celina. Rubén was born in Mexico City, where he grew up, received a good high school education, and married in 1972. In early childhood he attended an evangelical church, until his father pointed out that a Mennonite congregation was meeting much closer to their home. At the age of eight Rubén began his affiliation with Mennonites – despite the fact that this congregation was ethnically Caucasian. Rubén went on to become one of the first Latin Mennonite pastors in Mexico, and to this day he maintains contacts with the Mennonite colonies there.

His years in Mexico City were not easy. Rubén worked as a tailor, a pastor, and the director of a shelter for refugees fleeing the brutal civil wars of El Salvador and Guatemala. Meanwhile, he was living with Celina and their three children in lodgings above the Mennonite church: "It was beautiful for me," he says, "and sometimes for my wife, but not for my kids." The family needed a break. In 1990, Rubén received a Canadian resident visa, partly because of his work at the refugee shelter. He was sponsored by MCC and the Mennonite church, which had maintained vital links with the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City.

A temporary break in Canada turned into permanent residency. Rubén worked initially as an electrician in the Abbotsford area and, when the job market was slow, joined Celina in an MCC project in which they helped individuals with special needs; Celina is still employed there. But Rubén's heart remained "back home" in Mexico. When the Franconia Conference invited him to return there and work under their auspices, Rubén was deeply tempted; however, family constraints held him back: "The kids said if you go, we stay here." Then in 1998-9, Bakerview Hispanic was searching for a pastor. Rubén prayed and waited for the call: "I didn't want to invite myself," he says. He is now fulltime pastor there.

Bakerview Hispanic has a special vision for the

Continued on page 13

Continued from page 12

migrant farm workers of the Fraser Valley. In 2008 six individuals, including Rubén and Harry Heidebrecht, met to discuss what could be done to address the challenges of this transient labour force. One result was the Friendship Centre, a social gathering for migrant workers, which takes place twice monthly on Saturday evenings at King Road Church in Abbotsford. The social always begins with dinner, followed by a devotional, English language instruction, and a game of soccer. Including kitchen staff and hosts, attendance at these gatherings ranges from 100 to 130. There are, says Rubén, about 3000 migrant workers in the Fraser Valley, including 150 Mexicans and over 100 Guatemalans in Abbotsford.



Rubén Zuñiga

Guatemalans, says Rubén, are paid less than Mexicans due to an inferior contract. Reuben remarks that for migrant farm workers, “depression is an issue, being alone. Part of the ministry is to be friends.” Ideally, he says, “we’d like to have visitors in every house, but the church is not big enough to cover.” Rubén also assists migrants with problems such as job searches, and helps to organize a large annual soccer tournament for these single men.

Bakerview Hispanic has a membership of 40, with usual attendance around 60 but rising to 80 or 100 in the summertime with the influx of migrant workers, who are always reminded at socials that they are welcome to worship with the congregation. Rather ironically, the attendance of regular members sometimes dips in summer, as Latin Canadians return to their home countries for visits with friends and family: “Now we are Canadian,” laughs Rubén. Services, which take place on Sunday evenings, are in Spanish, with occasional English translation. The young speak English more fluently and willingly than they speak Spanish. “It is a problem,” says Rubén; the church might plateau “like German Mennonites unless the Hispanic population grows. It’s very important to keep the culture,” he continues, “Our dream is to see a bilingual church, otherwise we can’t grow, the kids

will run away.” Bakerview Hispanic, however, is vigorous enough that it is currently involved in planting a daughter church in Chilliwack.

Rubén Zuñiga is passionately evangelical. “Out here I don’t talk much about being Mennonite, I talk about beliefs,” he says. On the other hand, “I really like the Mennonite idea of no violence, I like the way the Mennonite Church helps anybody; we need to love.” In Latin America, he says, people “identify more with Anabaptist than with Mennonite.” It is a way of “going to the roots, who we are. Where we come from is very important.” Rubén is profoundly grateful for his Mennonite, his Christian journey. “Those seven years working with refugees were the best years of my life,” he says, “they taught me what compassion means, how to listen.” The journey can also be difficult. “Sometimes we don’t understand, it’s hard,” he says, “but we are here, we are servants.”

References:

- 1 Klassen, AJ, ed. *The Church in the Heart of the Valley, 1892-1992*. Abbotsford: Abbotsford Printing, 1992.
- 2 Harry Heidebrecht, email communication, August 3, 2010.
- 3 Rubén Zuñiga, interview, July 27, 2010.

BOOK REVIEW

This Hidden Thing

Dora Dueck. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Helen Rose Pauls

Most of us have heard vague stories of Mädchenheime (homes for girls) and aunties or grandmas working as maids in the big city, but little has been written about the very important role these young women played in the survival of families just off the boat to Canada. Even less has been said about their vulnerability and innocence, and the compromising situations they found themselves in as powerless immigrants.

In Dora Dueck's novel, *This Hidden Thing*, nineteen-year-old Maria sets out with her uncle to find a position as a domestic, just three days after arriving in Winnipeg from the Crimea in 1926. Hired on a trial basis, the first English words she learns are "sweep" and "dust," and her pay packet is sent to her family,

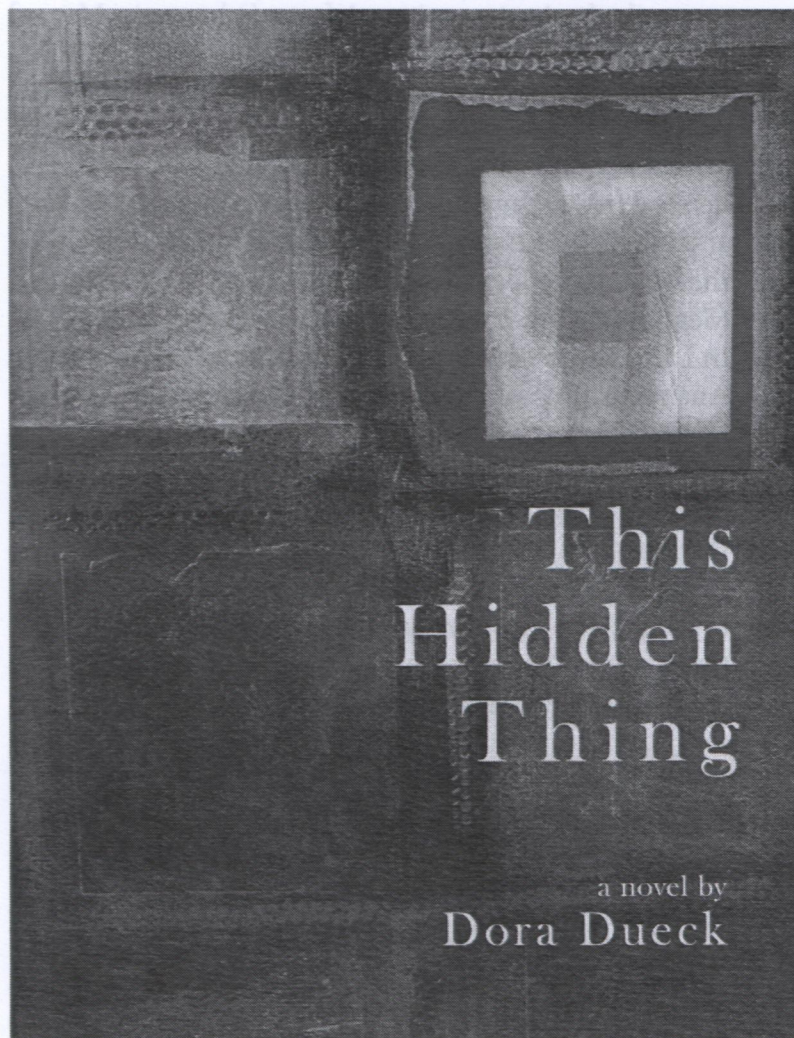
who have settled into a two room shack with relatives near Winkler. The work of Maria and her two sisters, also in domestic service, will help their family survive the winter and establish them on a small farm. Hopefully, some money will also go toward the immigration travel debt.

Good looking, skilled, intelligent and used to prosperity before the troubles in Russia ended it all, Maria must learn to be submissive, to listen, learn and fit in. Hope that her suitor in Crimea will come to Canada and take her away from all this is extinguished when a letter concerning his marriage arrives at her parents. Loneliness and longing fill Maria's days, and she can only look forward to meeting other Mennonite girls at the Thursday socials at the Mädchenheim. During devotions, the Matron gives oblique warnings of improprieties but Maria is too naïve to understand.

Uninitiated, uninformed and lacking in confidence in her new world, Maria cannot sort out the inappropriate advances of the eldest son, home from law school in Toronto. When Maria visits home in her silk stockings and dressy hand-me-downs, this only widens the gap of trust between her and her ailing mother, and any hope of sharing confidences is gone. Upon finding herself pregnant, Maria guilelessly believes she will be married.

The problem is solved by her employer, and Maria's secret is safe, but her whole life becomes burdened by the "hidden thing." Ironically, the only person she feels she can share this secret with is her Uncle Peter, the one who has strayed from the confines of church and Mennonite village. Even when Maria finally has the courage to contact her grown son, she keeps the secret hidden.

Dora Dueck has created genuine and engaging characters and deserves our thanks for bringing this piece of Mennonite history to our attention. The sacrifices made by Mennonite domestics for their families need to be known, understood and applauded.

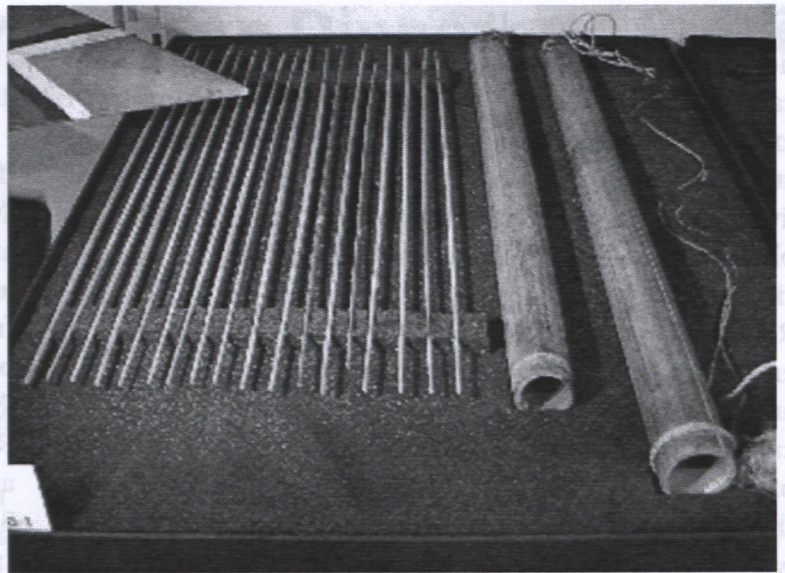


A Cultural Legacy

by Gladys Loewen

Jacob A. (Jake) and Anne Loewen, my parents, arrived in Colombia in 1948 to work with the Wounaan indigenous people in Noanamá on assignment from the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions. Their assignment was to learn the language of the people in the Chocó region; the Wounaan territory extended from the Colombian Pacific Coast to the Darién forest in Panama where their relatives, the Empera lived. Jake's personal goal was to assist the Chocó nations of Colombia and Panama in maintaining important values and social traditions, enabling them to be valued and respected in their own society as well as in their local and regional environments (Neufeldt). He hoped that by listening to their stories and studying their rituals, he could learn the language and support their culture at the same time. In fact, this study of their language became the focus of his dissertation.

Jake and Anne Loewen collected many items and took numerous photos, documenting the Wounaan culture during their work in Noanamá and the Darién. Their collection includes items such as baskets, canes used by medicine men, cloth, jewellery, wooden carvings, a blow gun, beaded waistband, and wooden earplugs. In 2002 they donated this collection to the



Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia. The donation included over 300 photographs, articles, books and stories that supported the use of the artifacts in the Wounaan society.

While the MOA focuses on BC aboriginal artifacts, it also collects items from other indigenous societies. Its South American collection was limited, so the Loewen artifacts were a welcome donation for the museum. Museum staff catalogued each item, supporting its use through photos from the Loewen collection, and published articles documenting the Wounaan culture (Mayer & Radermacher). The artifacts are on display in the new research centre at MOA, and can also be accessed through the Reciprocal Research Network (www.rrnpilot.org) which offers global access to the collection.



Jake Loewen in pith helmet

Currently the Empera and Wounaan people are under threat of losing their culture through long-term or permanent displacement. The Darién area is threatened by the construction of the Transamerica Highway, as well as by large scale deforestation projects; in Colombia, violent disputes between armed guerrilla groups, drug cartels, and the National Army have forced entire indigenous communities off their land.

Dr. Ulrike Radermacher, MOA (personal communication)
Continued on page 16

Continued from page 15

tion, Feb. 8, 2010), reported that "the material in these cases [museum display] is testament to the Wounaan's existence and traditional way of life on their ancestral lands." Jake's goal of preserving the Wounaan culture lives on through the visibility given to the artifacts and photographs at the MOA, even while traditional territories are under threat.

Radermacher, who interviewed Jake and Anne Loewen (MOA, 2007) on the cultural background of the artifacts and slides, noted the importance of "cross-cultural understanding and respect for the values of people.... [T]he objects are best when viewed in the context of their origin, and their history – if you were to just look at them by themselves, you might miss their meaning. I think the work I did with your parents was of utmost importance for understanding not only the objects, but the people who made and used them" (personal communication, Feb. 8, 2010).

The work of MOA is furthering Jacob Loewen's goal of valuing the Wounaan culture and promoting its place within the larger society.

References:

- 1 Mayer, C and Radermacher, U. "The missionary anthropologist: Publication of South American collection." MOA, UBC: 2010. Retrieved Apr. 2, 2010 from www.moa.ubc.ca/collections/current_research.php
- 2 Museum of Anthology. "Annual report 2006-2007." Retrieved Apr. 2, 2010 from www.moa.ubc.ca/pdf/annualreports/MOA_AR2007.pdf
- 3 Neufeldt, H. "The legacy of Jacob A. Loewen." International bulletin of missionary research.
- 4 Overseas Ministries Study Center, July 2008. Retrieved Feb. 27, 2010 from goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-8082755/The-legacy-of-Jacob-A.html

GAMEO Appoints Managing Editor, Releases DVD Edition

Press Release

Richard Thiessen of Abbotsford, BC was appointed managing editor of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) at the annual meeting of GAMEO's Management Board on November 20, 2010 in Akron, Pennsylvania. Thiessen's term will follow that of Sam Steiner, whose term ends this year.

Thiessen, who is Library Director at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, and Board Chair of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC, has been serving as Associate Managing Editor of GAMEO since November 2006.

A DVD edition of 200 copies of GAMEO was released in March 2011, targeting the conservative Anabaptist groups who utilize computers but do not access the Internet. Some copies may also go to Mennonite groups outside North America where Internet accessibility is limited. This edition will be provided without cost, though donations will be accepted.

After extended discussion, the Board approved formation of an international panel of consulting editors who will advise on larger subject areas like theology, history, sociology, and the arts. Steiner noted current subject articles in GAMEO are 20-50 years old. The editors will review existing articles in their area of expertise and recommend updates or rewrites. Barbara Nkala (Zimbabwe), Gerhard Ratzlaff (Paraguay) and

Hans-Jürgen Goertz (Germany) are among the international consulting editors named.

GAMEO has also obtained permission to translate into English selected content from the Mennonitische Nachschlagewerke (MennLex V), an ongoing project of the Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein in Germany, and the Lexikon der Mennoniten in Paraguay, published by the Verein für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay in 2009.

Work continues on expansion of GAMEO to include multiple languages. Two French-language articles are presently included, but fundraising towards creating a functional multilingual site continues. Steiner said about half of the required \$20,000 has been raised.

GAMEO is a project of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, the Historical Committee of Mennonite Church USA, Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite World Conference. All work is done by volunteer staff, editorial boards and writers. It is freely available at www.gameo.org. It includes over 1,800 contributors and 14,750 articles.

For further information on GAMEO contact: sam-steiner@gameo.org.

A Muslim Mennonite Friendship Dinner and Public Prayer for Peace

From reports by Mona Chin, Peace Mennonite Church

On April 9, about 100 Mennonites and Muslims gathered for dinner at Peace Mennonite Church. After Iman Esmail Al-Khaliq and Pastor Erwin Cornelsen blessed the meal, Mennonite and Muslim friends shared stories about their lives and their faith. Mennonites shared what it means to live as a follower of Jesus (Isa in Arabic) and of Christ's message of love and peace. Muslim leaders shared that the person of Jesus was of great significance in both Islam and Christianity, and spoke of building mutual understanding, friendship and peace between cultures. Mennonite pastors present were Ingrid Schultz (First United Mennonite Church), Henry Krause (Langley Mennonite Fellowship), Erwin Cornelsen (Sherbrooke) and Tim Kuepfer (Peace Mennonite Church).

The evening ended with the making of placards and posters for "A Joint Muslim-Christian Public Prayer for Peace" to take place April 16 in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Over one hundred Muslims and Christians gathered for the prayer vigil. After a number of messages and prayers from various religious leaders, and readings from the Bible and the Qu'ran, Pastor Craig Thiessen (PMC) and Michael Symons (Az Zahra) led in peace chants derived from slogans on the posters: Pray for peace, act for peace; Two faiths, one common cause; War didn't work, let's try peace.

Like a stone cast into a lake, the ripples it creates spreading in ever widening circles, may the tiny "ripples" from our circles of peace here in Vancouver spread throughout our global village so that all peoples can live in shalom. Amen.



*Iman Esmail al-Khaliq,
Erwin Cornelsen, Tim Kuepfer*

BOOK REVIEW

Leaders Who Shaped Us

Various authors, ed. Harold Jantz, Kindred Productions, Winnipeg: 2010.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

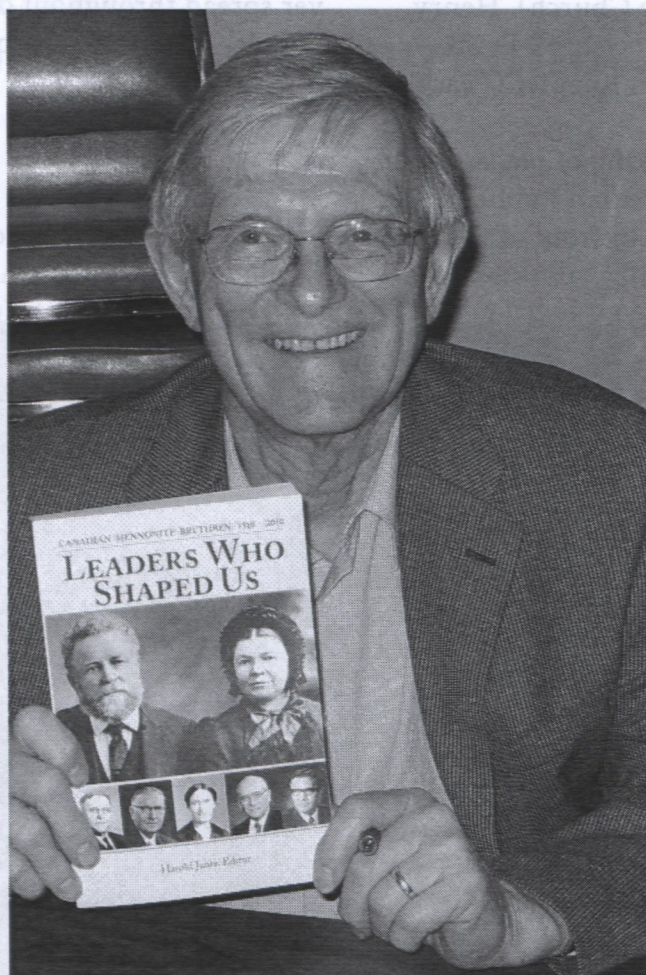
The early Canadian leaders of the Mennonite Brethren were formed by the brutal upheavals of the Russian Revolution. "Many a young man fell by the wayside as these events unfolded; others, however, had their character formed as they rose above the cauldron of their time.... Those who came through this hell and reached the other side with life and faith intact were men of strong character, who ... having made the hard decisions in their youth, became natural leaders in later life" (Abraham Friesen 171-2).

Leaders like AH Unruh, who overcame his lack of proficiency in English with fierce intelligence, persistence, and a sharp sense of humour; he once remarked that he readily believed Balaam's ass could speak, as "I have already heard many asses speak in my lifetime" (quoted by Dan Unrau 78). Or BB Jantz, uncharismatic and homely, who acted so passionately on behalf of Mennonites both in Russia and Canada before settling into a rather doctrinaire old age. Or like Anna Thiessen, director of the Mary Martha Home in Winnipeg, who, when met by Conference indifference to her work among young Mennonite women, appealed over the heads of delegates to the females in the audience and won their support. *Leaders Who Shaped Us* tells the stories, with vary-

ing degrees of success, of twenty-five prominent Canadian Mennonite Brethren. At times the characterization of MB leaders as humble, persistent, and pious seems somewhat clichéd; on the other hand, the clichés are often, ironically, remarkably true to history, and the stories are intriguing. A greater problem of this book is gender imbalance. A conventional model of top-down leadership predominates, as opposed to a grass-roots perspective in which the community shapes

leaders, and one result is that few women's stories are told. For example, the fine sketch of Katie Funk Wiebe seems to encounter, in the context of this book, the overwhelming pattern of male emphasis that she has resisted for a lifetime.

The MB Church was born in 1860 as a counter to a moribund and inward-looking Russian Mennonite community, and from the start was enthusiastically missional and evangelical. This new vitality, however, had its drawbacks as well, sometimes concentrating so heavily on individual conversion that community Christian values might be overlooked. *Leaders Who Shaped Us* skilfully charts this MB ambivalence. An early MB leader, Henry Voth, for example, came north from America to evangelize among tradi-



Harold Jantz, editor of *Leaders Who Shaped Us*, shown at the book launch. Photo courtesy of Dora Dueck's weblog at <http://doradueck.wordpress.com>

Continued on page 19

Roots and Branches

is a publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC and is mailed three times per year to those who donate \$25.00 or more per year. All donations will be receipted for tax purposes.

Your contributions are needed to further this work.

Editor: Louise Bergen Price

Associate editors: Maryann Tjart Jantzen, Robert Martens

Editorial Committee: Connie Braun, Wilf Penner, Anne Andres, Heather Pauls Murray

Staff: Mary Ann Quiring, Elisabeth Klassen

Copy editing: Hugo Friesen, Jean Friesen

Design: Heather Pauls Murray

Directors: Jim Baerg, Connie Braun, Maryann Jantzen, Arnold Klassen, John Konrad, Robert Martens, Peter Neudorf, Wilf Penner, Louise Bergen Price, Richard Thiessen, John B. Toews, John Van Dyck

Mennonite Historical Society of BC
211-2825 Clearbrook Rd.
Abbotsford, BC V2T 6S3
Phone: 604-853-6177
Fax: 604-853-6246
Email: archives@mhsbc.com
Website: www.mhsbc.com
Hours: 9am-4pm Monday-Friday

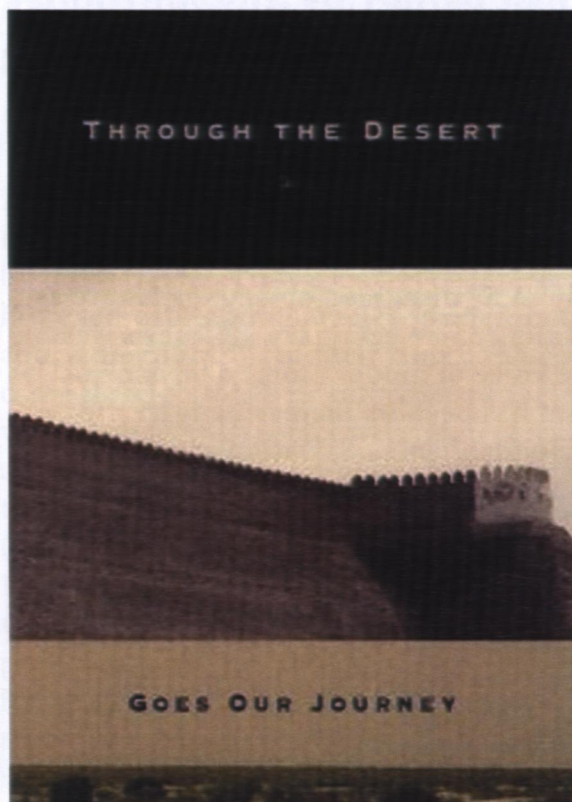
tional Mennonites on the Canadian prairies, and was somewhat resented for it. AH Unruh, on the other hand, walked a middle road, emphasizing ethics over doctrine, and warning against a harsh legalism. JB Toews, unrelenting in his advocacy for an "Anabaptist" Christianity that emphasized the practice of the gospel, cleaned house of faculty with whom he disagreed during his tenure as president of the Fresno seminary. JA Toews was an articulate voice of moderation: "The bane of Protestantism has been its increasing identification with individualism.... Salvation always begins as a personal, individual matter, but if it remains an individual matter, it is not biblical" (quoted by Rudy Wiebe 167).

The MB evangelical/Anabaptist debate continued through succeeding generations. Katie Funk Wiebe's "experience growing up in Blaine Lake provided her with a unique mix of theologies ranging from a forthright Mennonite Brethren evangelicalism, which focused on crisis conversion, missions and eschatology, to the less confining views of the United Church, which centred around loving God and doing good" (Doug Heidebrecht 286). Later MB leaders such as Nick Dyck, Herb Neufeld and David Poon, in reaction to the stifling impact of a German speaking, self-focused Mennonite church, fervently embraced the values of personal conversion, church planting and membership growth. These values are now being reappraised. More recent leaders like John Redekop and Walter Unger have argued for greater balance, with Redekop affirming an "evangelical Anabaptism." But this debate seems to be part of the MB genome and will certainly continue. *Leaders Who Shaped Us* is an energetic and accessible account of that debate, as well as a fitting tribute to the women and men who so devotedly helped develop the Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada.

Leaders Who Shaped Us is available for sale at the Mennonite Historical Society office.

Mennonite Historical Society of BC & Columbia Bible College Library present

Mennonites on the Silk Road: Film, Lecture and Book Launch, May 28 and 29.



**Through the Desert Goes Our Journey: a film
by Walter Ratliff**

In 1880 and 1881, five wagon trains of Mennonites left Russia for Central Asia where they hoped to await the Lord's coming. Although many disasters overtook the group and numerous individuals became disenchanted and returned to home villages, others persisted. For many years, the trek was viewed as foolish, and those who participated, as misguided. Yet a new narrative now emerging sees the migration not as a shameful and disastrous episode but as generating an example of peaceful, long-term cooperation and friendship between Christians and Muslims.

May 28, 7pm, Columbia Bible College Chapel

**Mennonites & Muslims on the Silk Road: A New Look at the Great Trek to Central Asia.
Lecture by Walter Ratliff.**

How did Mennonites and Muslims, two such disparate cultural and religious groups, manage to co-exist and cooperate in Khiva for over 50 years? What can we learn from this experience today? Award-winning journalist Walter Ratliff, who holds a Master's degree in Islam and Christian-Muslim relationships, and whose ancestors participated in the trek, will discuss the research that resulted in his book, *Pilgrims on the Silk Road: a Muslim-Mennonite Encounter in Khiva*.

**May 29, 3:00 pm, Columbia College Chapel
(A book table will open at 2:30 pm and after the lecture)**

