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Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

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

Harebell (Johann Toews) by Edith Krause, part of her *Through the Flowers* art series.

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Editorial

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

What is history? An echo of the past in the future; a reflex from the future on the past. (Victor Hugo)

Big sky, sunflower fields, bumpy roads, timeworn villages with walnut and fruit trees galore, scattered graves, repurposed Mennonite churches, young boys eager to speak English, crayfish candy in a tiny village store, geese scurrying on road fronts: these are some lasting impressions from my trip last September to the former Molotschna colony in southern Ukraine.

I was fortunate to be part of an eleven-day TourMagination Mennonite history tour that took us from three days in the capital city of Kiev to five nights in Zaporozhe, from where we toured the former Mennonite colonies of Molotschna and Chortitza, and ended in the cosmopolitan city of Odessa on the Black Sea. We were a varied group of thirty-two from five Canadian provinces and eight US states, all eager to visit our ancestral villages, the origins of stories passed down over generations. It was a delight to be with like-minded folks, all interested in exploring the Mennonite story within "the rich context of Tsarist and Soviet history, as well as present-day realities and challenges" (https://www.tourmagination.com/tour/2019-ukraine/), aptly laid out for us by our tour guide, Russian and Soviet history specialist Leonard Friesen.

But with so many exciting places to visit in the world, why choose to put so much time and energy into travelling to a distant land so far away in time and place? Why spend grueling long days on a bus rocking and rolling down crater-filled country roads just to see lonely worn-down villages, or in one case, the site where a fellow tour member's great-grandfather was massacred and buried? Or in my case, to find not even remnants of Mennonite life in the village from which my maternal grandparents left to settle in the far-off Terek settlement, inland from the west coast of the Caspian Sea.

For me, it was a time of reconnection, of strengthening my sense of from whence I have come, of making concrete in my mind places earlier only encountered through pictures and the imagination. In other words, it was an experience of history becoming alive through revisiting the landscape of family stories and memories – and of widening my understanding of my foremothers and fathers, as I walked on the ground on which they had trod and saw the horizons they would have seen: history become place and sense and sight and sound.

And I discovered that even silence and emptiness can speak in amazing ways. Having been prewarned that very little remained in Schardau, the ancestral village of my maternal ancestors, or in Alexanderthal, the location of the church where my mother was baptized and my widowed grandmother was buried in 1925 at the age of 46 (only a few years after her return to Molotschna after being violently forced to evacuate her home just west of the Caspian Sea), I narrowed my expectations. But just before entering the former Schardau area, a gaggle of geese crossed our path, immediately taking me back to my mother's many years of raising geese on our Greendale farm, both for food and for extra funds. I felt I had been suddenly visited by my mother's presence. And in Alexanderthal, seeing and photographing the foundations of the church – all that remains of a once vibrant congregation – I understood more fully the reality of my mother losing her last parent at 18 and how wrenching it must have been to leave behind all that was familiar as she and her siblings emigrated to Canada only a few months later.

Reflecting on my journey reminds me again of the riches we gain from encountering and experiencing our history. As Henry Steel Commager has said, "History … is useful in the sense that art and music, poetry and flowers, religion and philosophy are useful. Without it – as with these – life would be poorer and meaner; without it we should be denied some of those intellectual and moral experiences which give meaning and richness to life."

Accordingly, this issue of *Roots and Branches* features several articles highlighting women's experiences within a historical context where men's stories have traditionally been dominant, providing a different angle of vision that can only enrich our understanding of the many stories that shape our her-story/history.

Annual MHSBC Fundraiser

Royden Loewen: The Mennonite Farmer and the State: Friend or Foe in Global Context

September 23, 2018, King Road MB Church

Reported by Robert Martens

Dr. Royden Loewen (centre) with Jennifer Martens and Richard Thiessen. Photo: Julia M. Toews

The annual Mennonite Historical Society fundraising event opened with the pristine voices of the MEI concert choir, performing beautifully after only a few weeks of rehearsal. These young singers were a lovely preamble to a lecture by Royden Loewen, director of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

Several years ago, Dr. Loewen, along with a research team, undertook a study of how Mennonite farmers work and live around the globe. One outcome of the study, funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada, was a film directed by Paul Plett: *Seven Points on Earth*. Royden Loewen's lecture on 23 September 2018 was substantially based on the research study and film. Loewen is clearly at ease with this material, and his passion for his work is tangible.

Historically, said Loewen, Mennonites were "the quiet in the land" – "at least before they started building condos." In documents such as the Dordrecht Confession of Faith (1632), it was made quite clear that Mennonites should avoid intimate involvement with the ruling powers. Mennonites undoubtedly should respect the authorities, but there was to be "no dancing with the government." Yet the Mennonite story, Loewen argued, has indeed been a complicated "dance with the government," a relationship that has ranged from amicable to hostile.

White German-speaking Mennonites, Loewen pointed out, now constitute a small sector of the global community: there are far more Mennonites in Africa than in North America. His lecture, he said, would spotlight seven very different Mennonite farming communities scattered across the planet, and would focus on the relationship between Mennonite agriculturalists and the state.

1. Neubergthal, Manitoba

The first part of Loewen's lecture contained the most historical detail. The history of *Kanadier* Mennonites, those who immigrated to Canada in the 1870s, has often been interpreted as a story of struggle with the authorities. It is true that contention with the Canadian government over such issues as forced education of Mennonite children led to a mass exodus of traditionalist Mennonites to Mexico in the 1920s. However, Loewen argued that the Mennonite relationship with the state was generally friendly. Ottawa, in its efforts to "turn Canada into a little Europe," needed immigrants, and did its best to attract and retain them. An early Mennonite immigrant remarked that "Canada had come to rescue them" from bad government in Russia. And after immigration, government "ag reps," stationed in each village, worked closely with Mennonites to improve their farming methods and raise their standard of living.

Upcoming Events

March 17, Sunday, 2:30 pm, at Level Ground Church
"Church Business: Negotiating Mennonite Identity and Economy in Post-War British Columbia," with Brian Froese and special music. FREE.

April 5, 2018, Friday, 12 pm, Ricky's Country Restaurant, 32080 Marshall Road, Abbotsford
Mennonite Historical Society of BC Annual General Meeting and Volunteer Appreciation Lunch

April 14, Sunday, 2:30 pm, at Level Ground Church
"Searching for an Identity: Mennonites in Revolutionary Russia," with Aileen Friesen and special music. FREE.

June 2, Sunday, 2:30 pm, at King Road MB Church
"Immigrant Trauma and Finding Belonging in Community: The Story of the Post-World War II Mennonite Refugees," with Marlene Epp and Paul Born. *Faspa* and special music. $15.00

Saturday, Oct 5, 7:00 pm, at the Abby Arts Centre
Fall fundraiser: Menno-Comedy-Nite with Matt Falk. $35.00

2. Margorejo, Java
This Mennonite village in Indonesia began as a rice-based farm founded by European missionaries. Farmers here retain a collective memory of the ruthless occupation of their land by Dutch colonizers ("Don't remind them that Menno Simons was Dutch," said Loewen), and venerate the liberators of Indonesia. The Mennonites of Margorejo now speak "in easy tones" of the national government, which helped advance the Green Revolution and aided Indonesian citizens when disaster struck.


The old and the new – windmills in a corn field in Friesland.
Photo: Julia M. Toews

3. Witmarsum, Friesland, Holland
Mennonite farmers in Friesland, Loewen remarked, have a "very close relationship with the state." The reason for this might be deduced by the number of Mennonites with names like Dyck, Dueck, Dueckman: Holland is largely a land protected by dikes, and a system of dikes demands government involvement. "Netherlands cannot do without rules," said one farmer. Farmers do complain, however, about bureaucrats in The Hague and Brussels: "They never want to take advice," was a common remark.

4. Washington County, Iowa, USA
Iowa, said Loewen, is the most cultivated state in the Union. The attitudes of farmers to the state generally tend to the libertarian, resulting in high support for figures like Donald Trump. "Farmers," said Loewen, "historically suspect the state" and "to a person declare that the state has overreached." Mennonite farmers in Iowa, many of whom are Amish, align with that attitude. "You don't take government assistance," said one, "unless you're almost dying."

5. Riva Palacio, Bolivia
Though Bolivian Mennonite farmers live in relative isolation – and often insist on cultural peculiarities such as rubberless tires – they have generally been "happily linked to the state." "The government is there to protect the innocent," said one Mennonite. "I think the government was always in favour of us," said another. Though various governments have talked about doing away with the Mennonite colonies, Mennonites remain commonly unconcerned, inviting state representatives to their villages and going on charm offensives. This holds true even under the current leftist regime of Evo Morales, which has issued some troubling statements regarding Mennonite privileges.

6. Matapos, Zimbabwe
This Matabele village, like Margorejo in Java, is the offspring of a mission farm, in this case established by Brethren in Christ. Loewen pointed out that the Matabele have been "twice marginalized" – first by the apartheid regime run by Ian Smith; and then by the Shona-based government of Robert Mugabe, which invaded Matabeleland and murdered some 20,000 inhabitants. As a result of the incompetence, corruption and brutality of the current government, some Mennonites here indulge in a nostalgia for the more prosperous days under Ian Smith. Current agricultural experts sent by the government, they say, "just want to sell fertilizer."

7. Appolonovka, Siberia
Siberian Mennonites, with the atrocities of the Soviet state still fresh in their memory, understandably have a nearly complete disdain for the state. After being forced into collective farming, Mennonites had to deal with bureaucratic callousness and incompetence. Orders were orders, no matter how idiotic. "My faith," said one Mennonite, "attempted not to conflict with the collective, but it did."

Respect for the state, said Loewen, decreases in order with each of the seven examples cited: on one extreme, Canadian Mennonites cooperated happily with mostly respectful state authorities, and on the other, Siberian Mennonites experienced nothing but suffering in their relationship with government. "But we are not here," he remarked, "to judge which Mennonites are the most faithful to historic tradition" – or to judge Mennonites by the Dordrecht Confession. Rather, he concluded, we should be aware that our "abstract ideal of a global Mennonite community consists of great diversity" – of "real people" living under varying conditions of sorrow and grace.

Caught in the Middle: Mennonite Boys in Stalin's and Hitler's Armies

2:30, Sunday, 4 November 2018

Reported by Helen Rose Pauls

Members of a Mennonite *Waffen-SS* squadron in Ukraine's Molotschna colony, 1943. Source: Harry Loewen, ed., *Long Road to Freedom: Mennonites Escape the Land of Suffering.*

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, many eager listeners filled the Level Ground Mennonite Church in Abbotsford to hear Dr. Hans Werner (University of Winnipeg) speak about the quandary in which Mennonite men in the Ukrainian Mennonite colonies found themselves during World War Two. A male quartet from Bakerview MB Church set the mood by choosing songs that reflected the uncertainty and the difficult choices that men from pacifist communities had to make once the war started. It is ironic that eventually "German soldiers were enemies that became allies; Red Army soldiers were allies who became enemies."

Large-scale conscription of Mennonites into the Soviet armed forces didn't start until the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939. Because they were educated, Mennonites often rose quickly in the ranks. However, in Stalin's paranoid totalitarian regime, Mennonites were perceived as ethnic Germans and thus possible enemies.

Photo of Peter Schroeder as a Polish soldier. Source: *Als Ihre Zeit Erfuellt War,* by Dr. Walter Quiring and Helen Bartel

Mennonite conscription into the Soviet armed forces ended with Operation Barbarossa, Germany's invasion of the USSR that began June 22, 1941. Russian casualties were immediately heavy and would eventually number in the tens of millions. After the invasion began, most Mennonites in Soviet forces were sent to the *Trud Armii* (work camp) unless they had special skills.

The German occupation was embraced by the Mennonites as it provided salvation from Stalin. Churches were reopened and a sense of safety prevailed. Mennonite men were conscripted into auxiliary forces or used as translators, local police, or watchmen. Others formed cavalry units to protect women and children in their colony villages. Dr. Werner emphasized that "[w]hatever branch they took, turning back was not an option and sometimes they were forced to do awful things."

When the Germans began to retreat in the fall of 1943, Mennonites joined them, moving westward by train and by trek towards northern Germany, now Poland. Once again, Mennonite men who made it out to the west were pressed into the army, this time fighting for the Germans. "Survive now and deal with conscience later" was the mindset, as wills were broken by brute force. Some Mennonites, knowing both Russian and German, served as interpreters, but many were forced into combat. Dr. Werner stated, "It is not natural to kill people, so you objectify them; you are consumed by hate for them, or you see only tanks, not those killed."

In the aftermath of war, Mennonite soldiers had no idea where to find their families, and although the Red Cross and Mennonite Central Committee facilitated reunions for some, gaps occurred in many families who were forever divided by closed borders. Mennonite soldiers knew only that they did not want to return to Russia. Many recreated their biographies and made compromises to get accepted into Canada, which allowed immigrants from Germany to enter after September 1950. Many of these men were our fathers, our uncles, our forefathers; and it was worthwhile for us, who have been spared the horrors of war, to hear more about the impossible choices they were forced to make – and of which they rarely spoke.

Companioned by my Grandmother

By Janet E Boldt

My grandmother, Emma Caroline Möllmann Suderman Enns, was a teller of stories. I remember curling up on my bed, wrapped in a warm quilt created by her hands, and listening to her retell her adventures as a deaconess at a small orphanage in far-off Ukraine. I had no idea at the time that diaries from this part of her life existed. Early in 2000 my mother and I located these diaries (often written hurriedly on scraps of paper) and began transcribing them from my grandmother's scribbled penmanship. My mother's sudden death in 2008 halted this work, but upon retirement I made it my goal to have these entries translated into English and made available to my family.

My grandmother wrote these entries when she was between the ages of 19 and 29, approximately 100 years ago. I came to be part of her life when she was already 58 years old, and she lived to celebrate her 97th birthday. My grandmother and I knew each other well; she called me her "soulmate." Discovering her diaries was a treasure for me. Yet diaries only reveal moments in time. When she snatched a few minutes here and there to record what was going on for her, she was seeking to dispel her fears or capture in some small way an event of significance that had shaped her. The years between 1914 and 1925, when these entries were written, were a time of significant upheaval and uncertainty in Ukraine. Her view of these events was limited, yet her intent was to record her personal longings and her prayers for God's assistance in the midst of physical and emotional trauma almost beyond human endurance.

As I worked with her writings, a number of significant themes stood out to me:

1. A longing to live a life of significance and usefulness.

When I was 18 I felt the calling to become a deaconess. I felt that my life had not yet fulfilled its purpose…. Then I said Yes to the Lord. And I've never regretted the call even when it was often difficult and full of sacrifice. (Diary, no date)
I became a nurse. I was allowed to serve the Lord for 10 years as a deaconess in his work. (Diary, no date)
Oh that I can meet the Lord as an intelligent young woman. (Nov. 27, 1916)
So often I wanted to lose courage and the hope that someday something useful would become of me. (Dec. 17, 1917)

My grandmother's longing for significance and usefulness is a recurring theme in the diaries. Perhaps being "useful" is not the language I would use today, but I can deeply identify with the longing for meaningful work, for making a difference in the world, for an enduring legacy of hope and compassion. Emma felt a significant calling to serve as a nurse. She began her training when she was 19 at the Morija Deaconess School (or Morija Deaconess Home) in Neu-Halbstadt, a village located in the Molotschna Colony of South Ukraine. She trained for three years and then worked as a nurse in the Ohrloff Hospital in southwest Molotschna. In addition to her hospital care, she also reached out in service to the community. During the last six years before emigrating to Canada she worked at the Grossweide Orphanage, also located in the Molotschna. Later she would tell her grandchildren how significant these years were for her.

2. The elusiveness of contentment even when her work was meaningful and useful.

If now I possibly go a different way, maybe many will say I am disappointed, and have disappointed others…. How have [my days] been? Difficult, full of a heated inner turmoil. Often I ask myself, "Am I the only one that has to experience this?" (Sept. 23, 1917)
Oh this heaviness. I have in my life had to deal with this often and yet I have not learned how. (Dec. 31, 1917)
Today I was again tormented by the enemy with worries about the future. He always wants to whisper to me, "You will not achieve your objective in your life because you are too poor…." (Nov. 16, 1917)
There are still so many personal wishes and longings there, especially now that I've been torn loose. I feel like a boat on the waves of the sea. (Jan. 6, 1923)

Emma knew her own mind. I knew her as a woman of strong convictions and opinions and she was not afraid to express these. Yet she, like myself, was often torn by the expectations of others. She hated disappointing others, yet could not simply yield to others' demands. She felt frustration, and even shock at times when her actions were misunderstood or deemed to be self-serving. Part of

Emma's struggle was an inner one – she was in love with a young man she had met in her teen years and yet she felt called to service that involved lifelong dedication. She longed to please the Lord, and to be unselfish, yet her heart still yearned for love and fulfillment. That restlessness and sense of incompleteness is an undercurrent in her diary.

3. A sense of never being good enough.

Oh, how am I so incompetent to all the good? … Often in the evening I am at a total end with myself. In the morning I decide to be better, and when the evening comes [and] I look back over the day, then so often the enemy has been successful in making me unhappy and unsatisfied. (Jan. 29, 1917)
Oh why is it so impossible for me to improve? Oh how often have I wept over the words I have said, but again I am always so careless. (Feb. 5, 1917)
Oh my life is so inadequate and of so little use. (Jan. 5, 1918) I am so inept and weak. (Nov. 4, 1918)
In the last while, the enemy has wanted to rob me of the joy in my work. He keeps saying this to me: "You are useless! There is no responsibility and work for you!" (Feb. 20, 1922)

Emma Möllmann (second from the left), age nineteen, attending a nursing class at the Morija Deaconess Home. Photo: courtesy Janet Boldt

Emma was a force to be reckoned with in my growing-up years. She could be domineering and critical, and my mother and grandmother argued a great deal. But for us grandkids, she was almost a saint: ever adventurous, ever engaged, ever loving us and longing for us to "please the Lord." When I read my grandmother's diaries, I grieve for that sense of never being "good enough." Instead of an acceptance of her humanness and a delight in her gifts and relationships, she struggles with inadequacy, incompetence and "sinfulness." Phrases such as "Oh, if I only I could…"; "Oh I should…"; "If only I was better at…" persistently show up. She experienced the impossible gap that so many of us experience between who we are and some external sense of who we "should" be. God's demands always seemed to exceed her ability to live faithfully. It's interesting and saddening to me to have seen this same inadequacy show up in my mother's diaries, and also in my own. Sadly, Emma never felt good enough to simply enjoy the love of God. But this was a woman who courageously went to nurses' training with a grade 6 education, who embraced "ambition" to be someone and do something of significance, who faced endless challenges and obstacles. When my grandmother told me stories of all that she had faced in Ukraine, including staring down a young Makhno bandit with a gun to her head, I saw her as an amazing, courageous woman. I wish she could have seen herself that way.

4. A deep distrust of personal longing.

I told her that often I say to myself, "You are not allowed to love." (July 2, 1917)
I pleaded (to God), "Take this love for him away," because I told myself, "I cannot call this fortune mine." (Sept. 23, 1917)
Often I think to myself, "Why do you love? You will not be united because the end of all things is nigh." (Nov. 19, 1917)

Emma thought that pursuing her dreams and longings was selfish. It was difficult for her to sit with longing and see it as a normal part of being human. Emma's boyfriend was the brother to her best friend, and hence she and Gustaf had spent much time together in their teen years. She was separated from him by hundreds of miles, and during the years of tumult in Ukraine their communication was limited at best. Emma loved Gustaf dearly, yet she often chided herself in her diary for how she felt. At some point there was a misunderstanding between the two of them, and she went back through her entries and crossed out those sections that mentioned him.

Parker Palmer writes in *Let Your Life Speak* about "a deep distrust of selfhood … the belief that the sinful self will always be 'selfish' unless corrected by external forces of virtue." Much of Emma's writings includes this type of corrective. While reading and translating my grand-

mother's diary I often felt I wanted to water down her religious language and enthusiasm. She was born to a German family, raised as a Lutheran by godly parents. At the age of 13 she was sent to work as a nanny for a Mennonite Brethren family and there she was "converted" and later baptized at the age of 25. Her diaries read like mini-sermons and she often saw events in strictly spiritual terms. I struggle with the spiritual terminology since my own spiritual journey has taken different forms and employs different language. However, what strikes me the most here is that my grandmother, though deeply Christian, found it painfully difficult to be accepting of her longings and her human experience.

Passport photograph of Emma Möllmann with her husband and child. Photo: courtesy of Janet Boldt

5. An overwhelming need to be loved and to feel a sense of "home."

Today I had a fortunate moment with my boys (her charges at the orphanage) who showed me that they really love me. Oh how glad I am to be loved. (Nov. 19, 1917)
In the past week I received a letter from my faithful G.S. (her boyfriend) He made me so happy. It contained words of trust and intimate love. (Nov. 26, 1917)
Oh why the longing? That is what my heart so often asks. Today is my 23rd birthday. Oh that I had wings; I would fly to my parents for a couple of hours. How I long to see them again. (Dec. 10, 1917)
In the evening when I came into my room, I found a large pear with a note with the writing, "From whom?" It was proof to me that the children love me. It is not a small thing for a boy to sacrifice a pear. (Nov. 4, 1918)

My grandmother's entries are filled with longing. She was separated from her parents at the young age of 13 and sent far away to the Caucasus region to be a nanny. Her homesickness remained acute even into adulthood. In 1917 her entries indicated that she had not seen her parents or her siblings in almost ten years, and then suddenly, without explanation, she writes that her best friend has died. She had no news from her boyfriend for months at a time, and in the end she and Gustaf never reconnected. Emma severed the relationship for reasons that remain mysterious to the family. Then there was the traumatic ending to the Grossweide Orphanage. In 1922 the Communists took over; despite efforts to quickly find placements for all the children, 30 children remained. The house parents (Abraham and Justina Harder) were sent away, as were most of the Sisters who served in the orphanage. My grandmother and two others Sisters remained with the children but they too had to quickly find another place to go. My grandmother's heart was broken. She uses the word "convulsed" to describe these wrenching farewells in a time of such uncertainty.

In 1923 Emma left the orphanage; by late 1925 my grandmother had emigrated to Canada with a husband and a 4-month-old daughter (my mother). When I look at the passport picture, I see my grandmother's face. I think about all the loss and trauma and transition she had experienced in just a few short years and how deeply she longed for a sense of "home."

My grandmother ends her diary with these words which continue to inspire me with their courage and resilience:

Tomorrow I am to leave Grossweide, and with that, I leave all my heart has loved. Hope after hope is shattered! The parting almost breaks my heart. But God has allowed me to enjoy much love and goodness over the last six years. To Him be much heartfelt thanks. (Jan. 29, 1923)

Sources

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Janet E. Boldt lives in Abbotsford with her husband, Ernie Doerksen. She is recently retired after 25 years as a professor at Columbia Bible College and has been enjoying the challenges of digging into her family history.

Memorial to the Victims of Communism: Sod Turning Marks Beginning of Construction Phase

From *Tribute to Liberty Newsletter*, Volume 10, Issue 4, Fall 2018 (http://tributetoliberty.ca/)

On November 8th the Memorial to the Victims of Communism came another step closer to completion with a sod turning ceremony at the site of the memorial at the Garden of Provinces and Territories at the corner of Wellington and Bay streets in Ottawa.

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, was joined by Ludwik Klimkowski, Chair of Tribute to Liberty, and other dignitaries to mark the beginning of the construction phase of the project.

"The Memorial to the Victims of Communism – Canada, a Land of Refuge seeks to honour and remember those who have fled and suffered under communist regimes," said Minister Rodriguez. "We break ground today for this monument as we reflect on the fact that tomorrow, November 9, we will mark the fall of the Berlin Wall—one of the most notorious symbols of the Cold War. Next year, when the Memorial to the Victims of Communism rises on this spot, we will cherish and remember the many families that were torn apart by this world event, and the role Canada played providing refuge."

Mr. Klimkowski said in his remarks, "As we gather today on the eve of the 29th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, we pay tribute to all victims of communism. Mr. Klimkowski continued: "We make a solemn promise to preserve the stories of all who reached Canada's shores and remember those who never made it. This Memorial will be a lasting reminder that the freedom and dignity of life that we enjoy in Canada is never a given, and must be fought for and cherished."

During fall and winter the project will move forward by completing plans and securing the permits and approvals required for site remediation, constructing the base for the memorial, and landscaping. In addition, Paul Raff Studio will begin preparations for the construction of the "Arc of Memory," the main sculptural piece of the memorial. The memorial is scheduled to be inaugurated in fall 2019.

Antje (Anna) Brons: Writer and Activist in a Man's World

By Robert Martens

Women make rare appearances in the telling of Mennonite history. Although fundamental to the maintenance and growth of the Mennonite community, women generally "fly under the radar." This is not, of course, a problem restricted to Mennonites: society at large has scrupulously shut women out of the history books. German Mennonite Antje Brons may be the exception that proves the rule. Born in 1810 in difficult circumstances, Brons made a name for herself in both the scholarly and activist worlds, even while she professed no ambition to social recognition. Her troubled early life seems to have driven her inward: she devoured all the books she could find – and then wrote her own.

An unsettled childhood

Antje was the first child of Mennonites Jan ten Doornkaat Koolman and Antje Cremer, who had emigrated from the Groningen area of the Netherlands to Norden, Germany. Tragedy came early to Antje: her mother died several weeks after giving birth to her. Possibly for reasons of penury, or, conceivably, emotional devastation, Antje's father gave her away to his deceased wife's brother Sicco Doeden Cremer, a wealthy resident of Norden. And even though Koolman remarried and had six more children, little Antje was never welcomed back to her biological home.

Adding to her pain, Antje's new siblings regarded her as an outsider. Her school years were difficult as well, since her classmates sometimes ridiculed her for being a Mennonite, a Dissident, in a German social order where only Protestants (Lutherans) and Catholics were officially recognized. Antje became a dreamer, fantasizing about a mother watching her from the stars. Seized by strong self-doubt, she turned to Scripture and prayer, attending church services in both the Lutheran and Mennonite communities.

But her "salvation" may have come by way of books. Rather unusually for a time when women's education was not a priority, her uncle Cremer allowed her access to his ample library. By the age of 16, Antje was already writing meditations and journals, focusing on the spiritual life and "*die*

Vervollkommnung des Ichs": the perfection of the self (Beisser-Apetz 2). When she was baptized at 18 into the Mennonite Church, she wrote her own testimony of faith, stressing that the Christian path is governed not by the piety of dogma, but rather by an active faith. Antje Cremer ten Doornkat, as she was then known, was deeply cerebral. Remarkably, though, her passion for the intellect and the word coexisted comfortably with a strong social conscience.

Marriage and family: a domestic existence

In 1830, Antje married Ysaak Brons, a shipowner, merchant, and politician who resided in Emden, a city in northwestern Germany (he was a wealthy Mennonite who named a ship after his wife; the *Antje Brons* would serve as an immigrant ship to North America in 1845). The marriage, reportedly, had some "modern" characteristics: Antje declared that her life as a married woman would be as independent as possible. Still, domestic life was her preoccupation for many years. She bore eleven children, two of whom died young. She supported her husband in his career as an eminent politician and entrepreneur. Antje was also living the busy life of the privileged, and the couple even hosted King (later Kaiser) Wilhelm I in their home in 1869, two years before Germany was officially inaugurated as a nation state.

Antje Brons. Source: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* (1902), plate facing p. 103.

For this naturally vigorous woman, marriage unfortunately left little time for reflection or writing, but the union seems to have been a happy one. Both Antje and Ysaak were strongly committed to their Mennonite faith; Ysaak served as deacon and church adviser. They also shared political passions, and despite their belonging to a peripheralized community, joined the effort to unify Germany. Ysaak sat as a delegate to the Frankfurt Assembly of 1848, an attempt, after political upheaval in the streets, to forge a progressive new nation. The couple wrote letters to each other while Ysaak worked in Frankfurt; Ysaak wrote to Antje, "O God! O God! Germany! We must now come to an end, a unity" (qtd in Goossen 30).

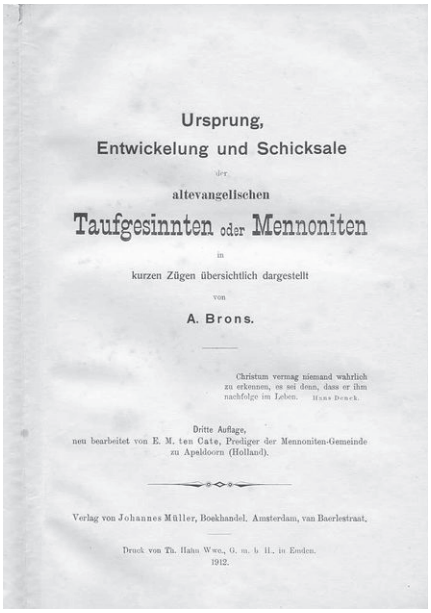
The marriage would last 55 years. Though prosperous, their lives were touched by trouble. Ysaak returned from Frankfurt a broken man, aged and nearly blind. In compensation for his inability to use his eyes, Antje now read to her husband. Among the books they shared were scholarly histories. Antje's latent interest in history and religion was rekindled, and a new career was emerging: at 51 years of age, she wrote her first book.

Protestantische Freiheit

Antje's childhood experiences of exclusion and rejection may well have fortified her interest in the Mennonite community, which had first suffered persecution as Anabaptists, and then was officially sidelined in Germany and labelled as Dissident. Her husband had also felt the lack of social acceptance when he was denied an official position in Hanover because of his confession. Antje, though no pacifist, and certainly no anarchist, nevertheless admired the resistance of her religious ancestors to state authority. Now she wished passionately to see the marginalization of Mennonites eliminated. In Antje's Germany, only Protestants and Catholics were officially recognized. But Antje Brons believed that Mennonites were the true bearers of *protestantische Freiheit*, Protestant freedom, and should be accepted as a third sanctioned confession in Germany. Mennonites, as she understood them, were the renewed lineage of the early church, a distinct group that, while it should not be fully assimilated by an emerging liberal German state, would nevertheless welcome full participation in a new

democracy.

Brons felt that German Mennonites had neglected – and forgotten – their own historical heritage. When archivist (and non-Mennonite) Ludwig Keller praised the Anabaptist tradition in his book, *Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer* (Apostle of the Anabaptists), Brons wrote to him, "It was as though the martyrs, killed for their faith more than three hundred years ago, and now made to live again as if through the touch of God, were looking around to ask, 'Do we find recognition among the current generation?'" She wrote that Catholics and Lutherans "perceive us as only marginally Christian" (qtd in Goossen 65). On one occasion, her grandson showed her a program of festivities at his high school (*Gymnasium*) that listed the confessions of faith of participants as Protestants, Catholics, Dissidents, and Jews. Affronted with the designation of Mennonites as Dissidents, Brons fired off a letter to the school's director, who promptly corrected the wording in her favour (Goossen 53, 62).


Ursprung,
Entwickelung und Schicksale
der
altevangelischen
Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten
in
kurzen Zügen übersichtlich dargestellt
von
A. Brons.
Christum vermag niemand wahrlich zu erkennen, es sei denn, dass er ihm nachfolge im Leben. Hans Denck.
Dritte Auflage,
neu bearbeitet von E. M. ten Cate, Prediger der Mennoniten-Gemeinde zu Apeldoorn (Holland).
Verlag von Johannes Müller, Boekhandel, Amsterdam, van Baerlestraat.
Druck von Th. Hahn Wwe., G. m. b. H., in Emden.
1912.

Source: GAMEO

A "career woman"

Antje Brons signed her first book as Th. B. She would write four more books, all anonymously, and each signed "*von Frauenhand*" (by the hand of a woman). The reasons for publishing by the "pen name" of *von Frauenhand* remain mysterious: was this self-effacement as a female writer? or a symbol of defiance, since women were not expected to be so assertive as to publish in the nineteenth century? Whatever the motivation for this, Brons wrote her books, not to attract the recognition of scholars, but to advance the knowledge of Mennonite history and awaken pride in its heritage. She coyly wrote that her books were "*die Frucht der Mußestunden einer Großmutter*": "the fruit of a grandmother's leisure hours."

In 1884, while in her mid-seventies, Brons wrote her masterwork, *Ursprung, Entwicklung und Schicksale der Altevangelischen Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten* (Origins, Development and Destiny of the Old-Evangelical Baptism-minded, or Mennonites). The manuscript is online at www.chort.square7.ch/Buch/Brons.pdf. The book would remain the standard for Mennonite histories for many years, and the recognition from scholars that she had not sought was given her anyway. Meanwhile she was contributing to a paper, *Mennonitische Blätter*, authoring more books, and actively supporting a Mennonite collective consciousness through organizations such as the *Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennoniten* (German Mennonite Union) founded in 1881. Brons watched with admiration as new churches were established, such as the one in Berlin.

She was worried about maintaining the distinctiveness of the Mennonite community. Brons called it *altevangelisch*, an "old-evangelical" nonconformist movement dating back to the early church. "The greatest danger," she wrote, "threatens our congregations through mixed marriages" (qtd in Goossen 78). Yet she was a committed individualist, writing, "*Jeder einzelne Mensch kann zu einer selbstständigen Individuum entwickelt werden*" (Each person has the capacity to develop one's own independent individuality) (qtd in Beisser-Apets 4).

A flawed activist?

As cerebral as she was, Antje Brons possessed a social conscience that impelled her to assist the poor, sick, and oppressed. She established a soup kitchen for the poor of her city, Emden; helped open a kindergarten – perhaps she was motivated by her own anxiety-riven childhood; supported abused women; and helped fundraise for veterans of Germany's frequent wars. She also was instrumental in creating a girls' school of higher education; she joked that doing this was a struggle that caused her "as much stress and effort as had the unification of Germany for others" (*ähnlich viel Not und Mühe machte wie anderen die Einigung Deutschlands*) (qtd in frauenORT 1). Her activism, however, was blemished by prejudices: she also inveighed against Jesuits and Ultramontanists.

Antje Brons, preceded by her husband in 1886, died in 1902 at age 91. The Brons epitaph reads, "*Gott hat uns das Pfand des Lebens, den Geist, gegeben*" (God has given us the pledge of life, the Spirit) (qtd in Beisser-Apets 7). That epitaph rings with confidence, but the self-assuredness exhibited by Antje Brons was marked by the shadow of her troubled childhood – indeed her sufferings may have motivated her remarkable energy. Whether her efforts were valuable to the Mennonite

Church is also debatable. Certainly, Brons helped recover a history that had nearly been forgotten and aided in restoring the pride of a fragmented community. She had a colossal intelligence and was a superb organizer. But the Mennonite community that she helped reconstruct in Germany largely ignored the peace tradition. It also bound the confession to an emerging German nation state, and though Brons's intentions were "liberal," by the time of Hitler's appearance, few Mennonites even considered withdrawing their support for the authorities.

Brons, often plagued by self-doubt, recognized her infirmities, writing in a poem that "*Die Kraft eines Menschen ist auch seine Schwäche*" ("The strength of a human being is also his/her weakness") (qtd in Beisser-Apetz 1). Her achievements, however, performed in an age of near-total male dominance, are nothing short of extraordinary. Some have called her a proto-feminist. Whatever the truth of that, Antje Brons was one of those rare individuals with the capacity to combine intelligence and activism, cerebral power and compassionate humanism.

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Mennonite Midwives

By Robert Martens

> A remedy prescribed by Dr. Wilhelm Toews of Rosenthal [Chortitza, Ukraine] for women when their monthly period does not occur. Take 1 quart of yellow muscatel wine, 1 nutmeg, 1 loth [about 13 grams] star aniseed, ½ loth seasoned cloves, 2 solotnick [about 4 grams] fine cinnamon, 1 loth yellow ginger, 2 spoons horse radish roots. Mix this together in a jar and bury it in horse manure for 24 hours. Then drink 2 kopecke [1 ruble=100 kopecks] whiskey glasses of it, morning and evening with brandy (qtd in Stoesz 105).

For over a decade, archivist Conrad Stoesz of Winnipeg puzzled over what this recipe might mean. Eventually his research paid off: the recipe is a means to abort a fetus in the first trimester of pregnancy. In fact, writes Stoesz in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, until quite recently it was established opinion in developed nations that the fetus did not constitute a human life until the second trimester. Consequently, abortions – including among Mennonites – could be sanctioned during the first three months of pregnancy. Mennonite midwives, writes Stoesz, would have been involved in "restoring the monthly period" – induced miscarriage – in cases where it might be thought the lesser of two evils. Only when childbirth became medicalized, and midwives were pushed to the side and out of sight, did a new perception emerge that life begins at conception.

Though recipes such as the above might have been used by midwives throughout the industrialized world, Mennonite midwives occupied a unique role within their ethnic communities. The position of midwife in Mennonite society, writes Stoesz, offered "prestige, mobility, and specialized knowledge that at times was subversive to the community leaders' understanding around female fertility" (118). At the same time, mid-

Morija Deaconness Home in Neu-Halbstadt, Molotschna, where some of the Mennonite midwives who immigrated to Canada had trained. Source: *https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/publications/conrad-grebel-review/issues/winter-2010/*

wives were used by Mennonite leaders as a hedge against the "outside world"; the practice of midwifery lingered longer among Canadian Mennonites than in society at large. Perhaps it is this paradox – that Mennonite midwives occupied a powerful position and yet were manipulated as a bulwark against assimilation – that has intrigued researchers in recent years. [Disclosure: my own grandmother, Margaretha Klippenstein Enns, served as a midwife both in Russia and in Canada.]

In Marlene Epp's seminal paper (2007) on Mennonite midwives, her empathetic and anecdotal style of writing puts a human face on the women she is researching. Epp points out the great diversity in the personality and character of Mennonite midwives; some were even young and single, very different from the stereotype of the "granny" midwife. She writes that childbirth was so dangerous, especially in isolated rural villages enduring the harsh Canadian climate, that pregnant mothers would prepare themselves for possible death. She writes, "[K]nowing that a skilled midwife lived only a few farmsteads away, would come instantly when summoned, and would stay for as long as required to ensure the comfort of mother and child would have eased the inevitable fear of childbirth experienced by rural immigrant women" (330).

Epp also describes the complicated relationship, by no means always hostile, between doctors and Mennonite midwives. [My own grandmother midwife does not seem to have encountered hostility from local doctors; on the contrary, they enlisted her help and supplied her with a medical bag.] However, by the mid-twentieth century, midwifery in Canada was for the most part despised by the medical establishment and sometimes prohibited by the federal government. The practice of midwifery lingered longer among immigrant communities such as Mennonites, where geographic isolation, strong kinship ties, and the desire for separation fostered traditional ways. In the long run, though, traditionalist midwifery was doomed to extinction.

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Excerpt from "Tirelessly Working to Dispense Her Own Wisdom: Mennonite Mothers and Scientific Motherhood"

This essay appeared in *Mothering Mennonite*, edited by Rachel Epp Buller and Kerry Fast, Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2013, 217-235. The excerpt is reprinted with permission.

By Tracey Leigh Dowdeswell.

Dowdeswell's provocative essay challenges the notion of "scientific motherhood" that is "closely associated with urbanization, industrialization, the medicalization of childbirth, and the increasing popularity of artificial formula that characterized its rise during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time of significant Mennonite resettlement in Canada" (217).

Is it not appalling to think that woman, in the most perilous hours of her life, should be left to the tender mercies of uneducated and as a rule superstitious and dirty persons, instead of being assured the benefit of every means that science offers for her protection and the amelioration of her suffering (Dr. Herman Reinking "On Midwives," President's Address to the State Medical Society of Wisconsin in 1899, qtd in Borst 90).

Throughout the nineteenth century, Mennonite women in Canada made widespread use of community midwives for childbirth and perinatal care. However, by the late nineteenth century, the decline of the community midwife in favour of the licensed medical professional was underway even in rural communities. This was a process that took place gradually and unevenly. In rural Manitoba, for example, "the speed with which childbirth came under the domain of licensed medical doctors was uneven, and was tempered by ethnic politics," as Mennonite communities initially resisted the intrusion of foreign doctors (Werner and Waito 1). From World War I until the 1950s, the medicalization of childbirth resulted in an increasing variety of healthcare options available to rural mothers, including community midwives, convalescent homes, physician-assisted home births, and an increasing number of hospitals in and near rural areas (Mitchinson 70). The increasing professionalization of medicine and the growth of the healthcare industry led to the gradual

displacement of Mennonite community midwives. By 1950, midwives virtually ceased to exist, and most Mennonite mothers now gave birth in a modern hospital setting and under the direction of a physician.

Katherina Hiebert, who became possibly the first midwife to serve the pioneer women of southern Manitoba after emigrating from Russia in 1875. She was mainly self-taught, ordering medical books from Germany and the United States as well as receiving advice from aboriginal women. Source: *https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/publications/conrad-grebel-review/issues/winter-2010/women-who-made-things-right-midwife-healers-canadian*

The Mennonite community midwife was a local woman, usually a mother herself. She served the women in her community by delivering and caring for their infants, in addition to her other duties as wife, mother, and labourer within a farming household. Midwives provided ongoing care to the mother and infant, often staying with the mother for a lengthy period of time during her convalescence, cooking for the family, doing chores, and caring for the infant (Werner and Waito 2). Marlene Epp states that "[a] midwife who shared the ethnicity of the mother would have known exactly how to prepare the foods that would have comforted and nourished the woman and her family in the aftermath of her birth, as well as particular cultural and religious norms that influenced how one expressed the physical pain and extremes of emotion that accompany childbirth" (Epp, "Transnational" 212). Midwives fostered ethnic cohesion, self-reliance, and provided essential health care (Epp, "Transnational" 212). Accordingly, midwives held an important and respected role in Mennonite communities. As Royden Loewen states of Mennonite midwives in the East Reserve and Cab Creek in Manitoba in the late nineteenth century, "[t]he only women to have a public profile in Mennonite society were the midwives and female lay doctors practising herbal medicine," a capacity in which they were highly respected (364). As Werner and Waito state, "although these were niche roles and the women who filled them were valued by the community, they were disdained by the professional medical community that emerged as modernization came to Manitoba" (5).

Mennonite midwives received their training from a variety of sources. A midwife might be apprenticed to a more experienced midwife or a physician, or have been taught by an experienced midwife who travelled to the community for the purpose of training local women; in other instances, they may simply have relied upon their own experiences, which caused them to be called upon to assist neighbouring women at their births (Mitchinson 71). Formal training for midwives as a whole was much better established in Eastern Europe and Russia than it was at that time in North America, which held much more hostile views regarding the practice of midwifery (Borst 37). Mennonite midwives who immigrated from the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s often received a high level of formal medical training there, and they brought these skills and knowledge with them when they settled in Canada (Epp, "Transnational" 203). Epp states that professional midwifery was brought to Canada by Russian emigrants in the 1870s, as well as the 1920s ("Transnational" 205). Such midwives often had a high degree of formal medical training and professionalism ("Transnational" 209).

During the early development of the medical profession that began in England in the eighteenth century, doctors did not – indeed were not permitted to – engage in the low-status occupation of "baby catching" (Rhodes 85). Up until the mid-eighteenth century in Britain and Ireland, the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons refused to admit obstetricians (Rhodes 85). As Rhodes states, a member or fellow of the Royal College would be expelled for the practice of the female and low-status trade of midwifery (128). However, the practice was gradually subsumed into the scientific paradigm, and proved to be such a lucrative aspect of physicians' practice that by the mid-nineteenth century the law began to *require* that all physicians be trained in labour and delivery before they could qualify for a medical licence (Rhodes 128).

Canada's own medical system became even more hostile to midwives than its predecessor in Britain, and did not permit licensed midwifery. This may be because, in Canada, midwives were particularly associated with ethnic and immigrant communities. Whereas many European countries were formally training and licensing midwives by the end of the nineteenth century, Mitchinson writes, the training and licensing of midwives was not considered to be a particularly "Canadian" solution by some of the physicians who advocated against midwives (97). As Wendy Michinson states, the general view of the

medical profession was that "[m]edical attendants at birth was the Canadian way, and immigrants had to learn this" (102). By the late nineteenth century, midwives in Canada were increasingly prohibited from assisting other women during childbirth. For example, an early ordinance of the North West Territories in 1885 held that only doctors were legally entitled to charge for maternity services (Langford 155). The passing of similar ordinances in other provinces followed suit, and were in effect in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta when those provinces were created (Langford 155). In Manitoba, one of the first laws of the new province was the *Medical Act* of 1871, which outlawed midwifery and placed childbirth in the hands of licensed physicians only (Werner and Waito 7). Physicians had taken over the lucrative function of delivering babies, while Mennonite midwives were confined to the role of caring for the mother and infant after the birth and performing domestic chores. This new division of labour did allow some space for many Mennonite midwives to continue their practices without adverse interference from the authorities, so long as they did not tread upon the doctor's functions (Epp, *Mennonite Women* 83). As Werner and Waito state, "[i]ndividual doctors, while believing their training could offer superior healthcare to the community, were motivated more by the difficulties of competing with midwives and traditional healers for the community's available resources" (9).

Midwives were relegated to a curious historical artefact by the mid-twentieth century, as the hospital "birthing room became an arena for demonstrating the goals of the new scientific professional" (Borst 1). Mitchinson states that "[s]cience was what doctors had to offer, and in the modern world it was superior to any kind of experiential wisdom offered by midwives" (103). Borst, who has studied midwives in a variety of ethnic and immigrant communities in nineteenth-century North America, states that the scientific motherhood offered by physicians directly confronted, and eventually overtook, midwives' traditional knowledge and practices (2). Midwives in immigrant communities exhibited a lack of professionalism according to the middle-class criteria of mainstream society; they lacked a standardized process of admission to their practice, as well as autonomy over standardized training and testing; they had strong ties to family, husbands and children, and a valued role in their traditional culture (Borst 4). This distinguished midwives from nurses, who better fit the mould of middle-class professionalism, and who had an established place below that of doctors in the medical hierarchy (Borst 4). Unlike Mennonite midwives, who were often ethnic middle-aged women with children, nurses were often young, middle-class women, who would leave service upon marriage (Borst 40). The replacement of midwives by nurses as physician attendants at births thus fit into the post-industrial division of public versus domestic labour in which nurses were expected to retire from their profession to engage in child rearing (Borst 40).

The professionalization of medicine, and the consequent de-professionalization and devaluation of midwives, led to the obsolescence of Mennonite midwives and lay doctors as the health care industry took over the functions of childbirth and perinatal care. By the mid-twentieth century, community midwives had disappeared completely, and even rural Mennonite women were left with little option but to undergo a physician-directed hospital birth.

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Tracey Leigh Dowdeswell grew up in Edmonton, Alberta. She studied science at the University of Alberta and then law at McGill University. She practised refugee law before completing a master's degree in Arts and Law. At the time of writing, Dowdeswell was a doctoral candidate at Osgoode Hall Law School and had three young children.

Genealogy Column: The Ties that Bind

The 2018 Genealogy Workshop

Reported by Caroline Thurley

The Annual Genealogy Workshop, hosted by the Mennonite Historical Society of BC, returned to Abbotsford on November 9-10, 2018. I have attended past genealogy workshops and have always gleaned new facts and ideas for my continued family research. This year was no exception.

Friday night's speaker, Dr. Tim Janzen, a medical doctor, specializes in DNA for genealogical purposes. In his first presentation, he described and explained the results of DNA autosomal testing in four major companies, *23andMe*, *FamilyTreeDNA*, *Ancestry.com* (Ancestry.ca in Canada), and *MyHeritage*. (An autosomal gene is a gene located on a numbered chromosome and usually affects males and females in the same way.) Using examples from his own family, he demonstrated navigation and utilization of each company's website and indicated their respective advantages and disadvantages. Dr. Janzen recommended testing the oldest generation, and as many relatives as possible, to enable chromosome mapping and the discovery of additional genetic cousins.

Caroline Thurley (left). Photo: Jennifer Martens

In his second presentation, Dr. Janzen briefly explained the technical terms, Y chromosome DNA, mitochondrial DNA, autosomal DNA, and X chromosome DNA. He then explained when Y chromosome DNA and autosomal DNA are used, and how each type of data is interpreted. (Males have one Y chromosome and one X chromosome, while females have two X chromosomes. Mitochondria are the cell's energy-producing organelles.)

Dr. Janzen's final presentation of the evening included an explanation of *Promethease* and health issues, and *Genomelink* and behaviour. He demonstrated how *DNA Painter* and chromosome mapping paint a visual picture of ancestry and ethnic composition on an Excel spreadsheet. *Promethease* and *Genomelink* allow for additional information in DNA testing. *DNA Painter*'s chromosome mapping illustrates the chromosomes that an individual has in common with another individual in their genetic family tree. (*Promethease* is a computer program developed by the *SNPedia* team which allows users to compare personal genomics results against the *SNPedia* database. *SNPedia* is a wiki investigating human genetics.)

While the Friday night seminar dealt with the technical side of DNA, the Saturday seminar provided insights about investigating Mennonite genealogy. Dr. Glenn Penner described his love-hate relationship with the GRANDMA database (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry). According to Dr. Penner, it is a very large database that contains much unsourced information and many inaccuracies. Users can make GRANDMA more accurate by correcting known mistakes, by adding more complete information, and by proper sourcing of information.

Dr. Penner then identified newly transcribed archives relevant to Mennonite genealogy. Much of this information is not yet in the GRANDMA database. He also made participants aware of articles he has written in the *Mennonite Historian* concerning DNA, church records, and genealogy, and gave a brief update of websites available for Mennonite genealogy.

In his final lecture, Dr. Janzen compared and demonstrated *Ancestry.com* and the *MyHeritage* websites. Even though *Ancestry.com* is subscription-based, many public libraries offer a library edition, easily accessed with a library card. At the conclusion of the lectures, participants were invited to share their difficulties, or "brick walls." Shared insights and collaboration with others lead to success in research.

The 2018 Genealogy Workshop once again offered its participants valuable information about the complexity of DNA and its usefulness in genealogy. I left feeling enriched and encouraged. I look forward to the Genealogy Workshop of 2019 and hope you will join me.

Lectures at the Workshop:

Janzen, Tim. "*Ancestry.com* and *MyHeritage* Websites." 10 Nov. 2018.

---. "Interpreting Y Chromosome and Autosomal DNA Data." 9 Nov. 2018.

---. "*Promethease*, *Genomelink*, *DNA Painter*, and Chromosome Mapping." 9 Nov. 2018.

---. "The Four Autosomal DNA Testing Companies." 9 Nov. 2018.

Penner, Glenn. "My Love-Hate Relationship with GRANDMA, or Don't Always Believe What GRANDMA Told You." 10 Nov. 2018.

---. "What's New in Mennonite Genealogy." 10 Nov. 2018.

Log Building in Siberia

By Vic Janzen

All photos courtesy of Vic Janzen

An unexpected chain of events led me to Siberia, first in 2009 to teach in a Pentecostal Bible school in the city of Gorno-Altaisk, and two years later, to build a log church in the remote village of Onguday near the Mongolian border. Log buildings abound in this vast area and are easily the most common form of building in all of the thirty some odd villages I have visited. With rare exceptions, these building are poorly built. To the uninformed traveller, the fact that log houses are so common is not easily evident, since the solution to poor workmanship and deterioration has been to cover up the buildings with some form of wood siding, plaster or even vinyl siding.

While working in the bayous of Louisiana with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) after Hurricane Katrina in 2008, I spent an evening with Paul Unrau, who, among many other roles, is a kind of spiritual director for MDS. I told him that the last country in the world I would ever visit would be Russia, owing to a lingering resentment of the suffering experienced there by my forebears. Paul encouraged me to change my mind, saying it would be redemptive for me to visit the country. I had no intention of doing so until, while I was sitting around a campfire with Carrie Peters, the wife of Pentecostal missionary and long-time friend Ralph Peters, she said, "Vic, I would like you to go to Siberia with Ralph. His partner is unable to go and I don't like him going on his own." I remembered Paul Unrau's exhortation and immediately agreed to accompany Ralph on this expedition. My

teaching assignment was eschatology, small business management, and family relations. I was qualified for none of these subjects; however, "In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."

After visiting the village of Onguday on a weekend speaking trip in October of 2009 and leaving a copy of my do-it-yourself book, *Your Log House*, as a memento of my visit, I found myself committed to building a log church there. The pastor of the church chose one of the house plans from my book because it looked much like the roof style common in this area and easily produced lots of second-floor space.

At first, I tried to do this project by remote control, fundraising in Canada and the United States and having my interpreter and Siberian Pentecostal missionary Alexei Pankov spend a week at my farm in Columbia Valley, BC, learning the basics of the craft in the building of a highly scaled-down version of the proposed building. The plan was for Alexey to return home and ramrod the project with local volunteers. But he lacked the confidence and sufficient skills to take on a much larger building and so I was importuned to return. The logs, of excellent quality and dimension, were delivered to the site in the winter of 2010. I had expected Siberian pine but instead they were larch, reminding me of Douglas fir, but being, I think, a harder and heavier wood.

I had a vision. I would run a regular log building course of about three weeks for the local people, during which time I would teach them to fit logs, make floor joists, build the second storey next to the main building, leaving them to install the plate logs and ceiling joists

and roof structure with the help of a hired crane. In the meantime, the student builders would have acquired the useful skill of building log houses with trees from the Siberian forests. I sent three chainsaws, peeling spuds, drawknives and scribers, and indelible pencils to Siberia. I asked that the logs be peeled in advance and that there be some sort of lifting device on site for which I and my supporters in this mission would pay. I also required a foundation.

Upon my arrival, I found the foundation to simply be heavily creosoted large short logs laid diagonally on the boggy land at each corner of the building as well as at the corners of the intersecting middle wall. I was assured by the locals that this technique was customary and that it works.

I quickly discovered my vision and the reality had no intersection. A few logs were peeled. There was no class to teach, but on the site were rather only myself and Alexey and the pastor's family, of which only the women were available during the day. I had had the foresight to buy a 30-foot rope in the town of Gorno-Altaisk on my way to the village and it proved to be our chief piece of log-shifting machinery. Assorted groups of volunteers from faraway villages showed up for three days at a time and left just about when they were beginning to acquire skills. One group of retired "old guys," some even older than I, were cheerful workers content to peel logs and build scaffolds, but were too old to learn new tricks. Two did, however, nail down the main floor, which was a great walk-around convenience, since there was no possibility of taking logs back to the ground to saw notches and lateral grooves. We resorted to the pre-machine age when we simply walked on the parallel last log to cut the lateral and teetered on the corner to cut the notch. Most log builders today have never done this and wisely so.

Log building in Siberia in 2011 was much like log building in Canada back in 1968 when I was first introduced to the craft by Uno Beck, a Swede-Finn builder who had apprenticed in the trade in the 1920s before emigrating to Canada, where he spent most of his working career as a faller in the rain-drenched forests of the Queen Charlotte Islands (now Haida Gwaii). He built himself a house in hewn dovetail style late in the Depression and helped three families, including my own, build their first houses.

I was thankful for the low-tech methods I used as a professional builder in the mid-1970s when there were perhaps three or four of us in all of Canada using the scribe-fit method[1]. I placed the logs on my first house by parbuckling[2], using actual horse power, since my neighbour had a draft horse that got little exercise. I soon shifted to the modern technology of a 1954 Ford pickup truck. This prepared me for the ancient Soviet-era mini-SUV with the fried clutch that we used there to drag the logs near the building and thereafter parbuckle them onto the building with man and woman and child power.

People who have worked in the old Iron Curtain countries will easily identify with the type of difficulties I am describing. The shortage as well as poor quality of common materials was frustrating – until I finally learned to roll with the Russian way of improvising. For example, we needed a length of chain with a slip hook at one end and a locking hook at the other. After many stops, we found appropriate chain but no hooks of any kind anywhere in the village. We improvised by finding a couple of carabiners and cutting useable but not ideal hooks out of a towing strap.

The available nails and spikes provided more adventure, as they mostly bent when being driven into rock-hard well-cured larch lumber. When I attempted to pull nails out with the one-claw hammer that was available, the handle snapped. I rebuilt the handle. The next time I attempted to pull a nail, the hammer itself fell apart, revealing it to be what I think was Chinese-made pot metal. Claw hammers seemingly don't exist in Russia. I joked with my hosts that it amazed me that a country that could put the first man into space couldn't make a hammer. They were not amused. And the adventures carried on.

It seems visions need to be modified. I am happy that the will of the people, if not the skills and equipment, was there to finish the building. Their vision also had to be modified. They were certain that Viktor from Canada would easily work some sort of magic and in three weeks a building would rise from the marshy land, clear to the ridge pole, and that they would simply carry on with basic local carpentry techniques. At the end of my visit three-quarters of the log work was done, leaving the last quarter for the pastor's family to do. Some of the volunteers, planned on returning to assist the pastor's family, and within the following year I heard that the building was completed.

On my last morning, I divested myself of my grubby work clothes and dressed for the first leg of my long journey home via Siberia Air to Moscow. This airline is the airborne equivalent of the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Mostly this was a hair-raising adventure, but in the end the mission was accomplished.

As to redemption? In many ways I felt I had come home to the villages of my grandparents. I immediately grew to love the many Siberians, both Russian and tribal people, as they welcomed me into their homes and to their meals and gatherings. Although I was near the Barnaul/Slavgorod colony and the village of Rosenwald from whence my mother had come, I was unable to visit owing to time constraints. Interestingly, I spent an evening with a retired Russian history professor whom I regaled with the story of the Mennonite immigration to and subsequent exodus from the area. He had lived in the region and taught there all of his career and this was the first time he had heard any such story. He thanked me for rounding out his historical knowledge.

A member of my work crew was Vitya, a veteran of the Red Army. When I asked him to tell me about life as a military man, all he would say was, "Military service should be done by correspondence." Another individual, a formidable axe-man, shared that he had murdered someone and, when he became a believer years later, he felt convicted to confess to the authorities. At the police station, the officer in reception hadn't known what to do with him and so asked him to sit on a bench in the waiting room while he consulted with his superiors. In the end, the man served only two years in prison.

Travelling in search of Russia was a journey into the lives of people.

[1] Logs are left naturally round and are expertly carved and crafted to fit tightly on top of each other. This fitting process is called scribing. (www.coyoteloghomes.ca)

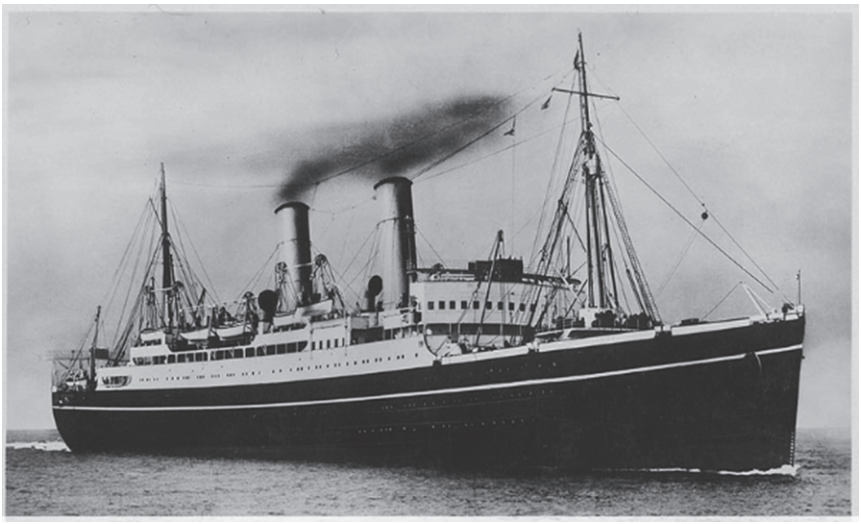
[2] Parbuckle: a sling for raising or lowering an object vertically. (www.wordplays.com)

Vic Janzen's life and career endeavours have varied from teaching in a one-room school in rural Prince George, teaching log house construction, teaching in the humanities and forestry technology disciplines at senior secondary schools and raising cattle in Columbia Valley. For the last 18 years he has worked in general renovations, short-term missions building in Mexico and volunteering with Mennonite Disaster Service in Canada and the United States. Vic and his wife Claudia make their home in Chilliwack, BC.

Tales of an Immigrant Ship: The *Montcalm*

This is the fourth in a series on transportation of Mennonite migrants.

By Patricia Froese-Germain



Canadian Pacific S.S. *Montcalm*. Source: Nova Scotia Archives. https://novascotia.ca/archives/Tourism/archives.asp?ID=133

In the summer of 1929, seventy Mennonite families went to Moscow to ask for permission to leave the Soviet Union and, to everyone's surprise, they were granted that permission. This inspired about 18,000 people to rush to Moscow, all hoping desperately to also get authorization to leave, all knowing that failure most likely meant prison. And approximately 13,000 *were* sent to labour camps or prison. There were about 5,700 people who did make it to temporary refugee camps in Germany. Of these, 3,885 were Mennonites, with the others being Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, and Adventists. They all hoped to make it to Canada where they had family or friends who would help them start over.

Canadians were reluctant at the time to receive any refugees, partly out of fear that trade with the Soviet Union could be endangered, but eventually 1,344 were accepted (Epp 327). Because the opposition to refugee resettlement was so fierce, refugees arrived on several ships in 1930 instead of being all together on a single ship where they would have been more conspicuous. Thus, there were many different nationalities on board the *Montcalm* – English, Scottish, German, Russian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Danish, Norwegian. On one voyage, the passengers and crew celebrated a late Christmas (in February) and sang "Silent Night" together in many languages.

In the small group going to Canada were my father, John (aged 5½) and his parents, Kornelius Froese and Elisabeth Fast. Kornelius's sister, Elisabeth's brother and sister, and their families were part of the nearly 4,400 denied entry to Canada. By 1933, they were settled in South America. My grandparents never saw their siblings again.

About the *Montcalm*

One of the several refugee transport ships was the *Montcalm*, part of the Canadian Pacific Line owned by Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). It was the third ship named *Montcalm*; the other two were renamed and sold or scrapped. The *Montcalm* 3 was built in 1920 by John Brown & Company of Glasgow (ShipsList).

To a non-sailor like myself, the *Montcalm* sounds like a large ship: 16,418 gross tons, a length of 549.5 feet, a beam of 70.2 feet (the widest part). It had two funnels, two masts, two propellers (called a twin screw), and a maximum speed of 16 knots. There were 542 cabin class and 1,268 third-class passengers. Mennonites in 1930 would have been in the third-class cabins.

Cabin class passengers stayed in roomy cabins, some with their own bathrooms, and had access to elegant lounges, a writing room, a drawing room, and a nursery to tuck away children. Third-class passengers were restricted to their own dining hall, book stall, and smoking room, all quite plain in contrast. The cabins were very small, no more than a place to sleep at night.

The *Montcalm* and her crew had an interesting history. On her maiden voyage in 1922, they rescued the crew of a Norwegian steamer, the *Mod*. In 1927, she collided with an iceberg in the Strait of Belle Isle between Newfoundland and Labrador but sustained only minor damage. In 1932, the crew rescued 27 men and the captain's dog from a rescue tugboat, the *Reindeer*, in heavy seas off Halifax (ShipsList).

On April 21, 1922, the *Montcalm* made her first voyage from Liverpool, UK, to Quebec and Montreal. In 1929, several other routes were added, departing from Southampton, Antwerp, and Hamburg. She completed fifteen round voyages on these routes between March 16, 1929, and April 28, 1932. The destination in winter was Saint John, New Brunswick; the summer destination was Quebec City and Montreal.

In 1939, the *Montcalm* was converted to an armed merchant cruiser and renamed the *HMS Wolfe*. (It might

be noted that the renaming was probably intentional: Generals Wolfe and Montcalm opposed each other in the Battle on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. Both were killed.) She was bombed twice during World War II. She was later used as a troop ship and a submarine depot ship. By 1952, she had reached the end of her lifespan and was scrapped in Faslane, Scotland.

About my father's voyage

My father, John, and his parents arrived in Saint John, New Brunswick, on February 9, 1930. They travelled by train from the refugee camp in Prenzlau, Germany, to Hamburg. From there they travelled to England and on to Canada.

John had vivid memories of the voyage. A few years before he died, he started to write his memoirs but never completed them. The past was too painful to relive. Part of his memoir does describe the voyage from Germany to Canada.

The North Sea crossing from Hamburg to Grimsby, England, was quite rough. I had my one and only experience of sea sickness on the entire journey. Here in the salon I was playing with my rubber ball when it got away on me and bounced into the spittoon. No amount of begging could get my father to retrieve it for me!

From Grimsby we proceeded by train to Liverpool. I was impressed by two interesting things in the port city. One was the grime and soot on the buildings. When you touched them, your fingers were black. Secondly, there was a small park in which pansies were blooming in mid-winter.

Finally, we were able to board the CPR passenger liner, the Montcalm. It was a large ship that would take a week to cross the Atlantic. For me it was a lark, but my parents! Were they ever sick. Mother insisted that she was dying and would never see land again. Dad, on the other hand, was so sick that he was afraid he would not die. Meanwhile I had the run of the ship.

I was not appreciated in the engine room and was promptly escorted out. Since the men spoke English, I can only guess at what they said. The crew in the wheel house was equally inhospitable and shooed me back out. The galley crew was very good to me. Relatively few passengers were able to come down for meals, and they fed me well. Occasionally I would bring my parents some tea.

The Atlantic crossing was very rough. The ship had to slow down because the propellers became exposed as the ship descended into one of the roughs, causing the engines to race. One night the foghorn sounded constantly. The crew was listening for echoes from icebergs known to be in the area. No one, no matter how sick, was permitted to stay in bed, but had to be up, wearing their life jackets. The next morning the fog lifted, and I recall the awe we experienced seeing the large icebergs all around us. God had answered the many prayers that had ascended to Him that night.

One wonders if the crew of the *Montcalm* realized the impact they were having. By simply doing their jobs, they offered comfort to refugees and immigrants, taking them to a new country and new opportunities. Surely the crew has been featured in many a family story over the years, remaining unaware of the memories they created in all these grateful strangers.

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Patricia is a retired technical writer "living the dream" in Ottawa – reading, learning to garden, spending time with family and friends, going to concerts and museums, travelling with her beloved partner, Bernie. *"Living the dream" is something that colleagues and I said at work, but then it was sarcastic and now it isn't.*

Sixty Years (Plus Ten) of Peace and Plenty

By Selma Hooge

In 2008 the Mennonite Historical Society of BC (MHSBC) organized an event celebrating sixty years of life in Canada for those of us who arrived as immigrants a few years after World War II, most in 1948. We called that event "Sixty Years of Peace and Plenty." Heather Pauls Murray would later write in *Roots and Branches* (April 2009, p. 3) that she had assumed "the evening would be chock full of stories from the last sixty years in Canada." Instead, most of what she heard was songs, poems and reports focusing on our life *before* we came to Canada. Upon review of what else was said and done during that two-day event, October 18 and 19, I had to agree – not much was told about the sixty good years we had spent in Canada, for which we were so grateful. Today, ten more years of peace and plenty have gone by; and those of us who are still here are very grateful that our parents were able to come to Canada during the years of unlimited opportunities in this country.

...not much was told about the sixty good years we had spent in Canada, for which we were so grateful.

Heather's grandparents and her father were among the displaced persons ("DPs") who came without any money or material possessions. But they, like most new immigrants at that time, were willing to work at any job; nothing was too menial. From picking hops and raspberries and doing chores for others during the first year or two, that family soon owned a farm of their own. Before the grandparents died, they were owners of several farms in the Fraser Valley.

Farmers weren't the only ones who became successful soon after their arrival in this country. Most of us can probably name builders and developers and tradespeople who have become wealthy. Some of these successful men and women had very little education when they arrived here as young teens. But after being restrained by Communism in Ukraine for many years, and then surviving without a home for five more years, they thrived on this country's freedoms and opportunities for work and private ownership. Some of them learned a trade, then became business owners, and are now heads of large, prosperous companies. The Mennonite Heritage Museum was built by someone who came to Canada without any material possessions to his name. Columbia Bible College, the University of BC, Stillwood Camp and Conference Centre, and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) have also been recipients of benefactors who were once penniless but are now millionaires.

Among the boys and girls and teenagers of the new immigrants of 1948 were those who had academic ambitions. Some became professors and wrote technical and instructional books. Among our personal acquaintances was a Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI) graduate who became a neurosurgeon; he went on to write books and lecture at world symposiums, including in Europe, where he might lecture in the German language. Another became a nuclear physicist; he, too, wrote educational material.

No doubt there were also prominent artists and musicians who came to Canada after World War II and then were given opportunities to study and use their talents in the arts. I know of a Heinrich Friesen in Yarrow who had a special gift for building superior violins. Many who were young enough to go to school after we arrived here became teachers and nurses; among the nurses was a lady who already had a 10-year-old daughter when she arrived in Canada. Learning a new language and then attending nursing school with other high school grads must have required a lot of courage and determination. Most other women her age, like my sisters, went to Vancouver to do housework. After my 22-year-old sister had learned English, she worked in the stationery department at Woodward's till she had her first baby.

Many men and women who came to Canada with nothing, then became wealthy, made a point of "giving back" – one way of showing gratitude. Many who are now volunteers at the MCC thrift shops were once recipients of used clothing and food when they were hungry and in rags during the war and postwar years. Now these same people who sort used clothing or fix appliances at MCC thrift shops may arrive in Cadillacs, BMWs, or other luxury vehicles. Several immigrants of the late 1940s have gone back to Ukraine to help people in need there. Some became missionaries and returned to Europe to assist Mennonites who arrived from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s.

Attendees at the 1949 *Dankfest*, held at Greendale Mennonite Church.
Photo: courtesy of Selma Hooge

Among those who arrived in Canada seventy years ago we could probably name failures, too, and those who became a burden to society. However, it appears that the majority were eager to work and were very grateful for the opportunities they had here in Canada.

One person who became wealthy here boasts that it was his hard work and frugal ways that brought him success. It is commendable that he worked hard and saved money but that alone does not spell success. What about his cousins who were sent back to Russia during our flight – they had to work much harder than we did here in Canada, and they barely earned enough to stay alive. What if he had been sick and could not work hard?

The immigrants who arrived in Canada in 1947/48 and later can be grateful for several other factors when they look at their own success stories in this country. They had better economic opportunities than any previous immigrant groups. They arrived in well-established Mennonite communities, and many had relatives who sponsored them and helped them get started. Anyone willing and able to work could find a job. Land and real estate were available and affordable. Even the many single moms and widows who came those years were soon able to buy a little house or a small acreage. That was partly due to the willingness of their older children to help. In many families it was probably the same as in ours. My older, unmarried siblings gave every extra penny that they did not need for rent, food or bus fare to my parents, first of all to settle the travel debt which our sponsors had paid and then to save money to buy a house. Only after that would the young people begin to save for their own future.

Another thing the successful immigrants should never forget – where would they be if MCC representatives like C.F. Klassen, Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, and others had not come to Europe to find us and help us? And what if there had not been relatives or strangers here in Canada willing to take a chance on sponsoring us? Or what if Canada had not accepted us? Where would we be then?

My family is most grateful that distant relatives, to whom we were strangers, were willing to take a chance on us so that we too could immigrate to Canada seventy years ago. Till the day they died, my parents were grateful to call Canada home. Here they could live among their own people, attend church without fear, buy as much food as needed, and live in their own house.

I was only 12 when we came to Canada. I cannot boast of great financial or academic success but I am very grateful that my husband (born in Canada) and I were able to have our children here. The children got married and had children, and now we are seeing great-grandchildren – the results of Seventy Years of Peace and Plenty.

Community Dankfests *that have been held to celebrate and give thanks*

The first such celebration may have occurred in October 1949, after the majority of those Mennonites who were homeless (DPs) in Europe after World War II had arrived in Canada. A large gathering took place at Greendale Mennonite Church. Our heroes Peter and Elfrieda Dyck were present, as were several community officials. Three young refugee girls, Erika Rempel, Mary Janzen and Veronica Barkowsky, dressed in long, pastel-coloured dresses, presented a Certificate of Gratitude to

D. E. Calbick, Canadian Immigration officer from Huntingdon, Canadian Immigration Pacific District. The November 2, 1949, edition of the *Chilliwack Progress* contains a report of the event. (This can be accessed online at www.theprogress.com; go from there to archives.)

In August of 1998, Winnipeg hosted a Freedom 50 Year Golden Jubilee. This event was planned by a committee of seven and an additional six advisers. This was a two-day event: on Saturday, August 15, attendees gathered at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach. On Sunday a program featuring several speakers, including Dr. Harry Loewen, was presented at Centennial Concert Hall. The committee's goal at this gathering was to raise $50,000 for MCC, since it was due to MCC's assistance that so many were able to find a new home in Canada. (I don't know if that goal was reached). It was at this gathering that Harry Loewen asked for submissions of stories about our refugee experiences. The resultant book, *Road to Freedom*, was edited by Loewen and published in 2000. It is filled with the stories of the many different roads to freedom.

Later that same year, a mini *Dankfest* was held at King Road Church in Abbotsford. I still have the program in my files – it is all in German. Peter Dyck (1914-2010) was once again present to tell stories about his time with MCC in Europe. He was a great storyteller. Then ten years ago, as mentioned above, MHSBC organized the two-day event at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford. The afternoon of Saturday, October 18, was set aside for visiting and viewing displays. Harry Loewen was the speaker at the evening program, which featured a banquet in the gym. Loewen arrived in Canada as a teenager, achieved his doctorate, and became professor and Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

Today, seventy years after our arrival in our new country, many are no longer with us; but those of us who are still living remain deeply grateful for the good, long life we've had in this country, Canada.

siberia

By Robert Martens

from her vast continent
of fear and memory
so my mother told me –
and she was a girl
fleeing with her family
the crawl of communist terror
the locked winters of siberia –
and her grandmother embraced her
her grandmother too grieved for tears
she was known for her kindness
and have we also felt
the sinking storm
the cold clutch of the land –
and her grandmother held her
sarah she said
and her grandmother was left behind
i feel she said
like i am being buried alive

Book Review

Janis Thiessen. *NOT Talking Union: An Oral History of North American Mennonites and Labour.*

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016. 232 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

Near the beginning of her recent book, *NOT Talking Union*, Janis Thiessen asks the question, why the need for research on the relationships between Mennonites and unions when Mennonites have often been opposed or indifferent to organized labour? For example, a 1937 statement from the Old Mennonite Church (OM) counselled abstention from union membership. The church felt that it was better to endure suffering than to rebel, and that participation on a picket line was a form of violence. Besides, it was imperative, said the Church, that believers not be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (4) by affiliating with unions.

The attitude among members of General Conference (GC) and Mennonite Brethren (MB) churches was much more cautious and pragmatic. Still, even after Mennonites urbanized, small-town values of independence and laissez-faire attitudes persisted among them. Union activists were frequently regarded as "outside agitators." If there was not outright hostility to organized labour, Mennonites commonly thought of unions as essentially irrelevant – "not part of the landscape" (39).

Much has changed since the mid-twentieth century. The Old Mennonite Church officially stated in 1954 that unions "serve a useful purpose for the maintenance of justice and a balance of power in a sub-Christian society" (45). Still, among Mennonites of the three mainline denominations (OM, GC, and MB: the subjects in Thiessen's study), organized labour, even to this day, is regularly regarded with suspicion.

The church felt that is was better to endure suffering than to rebel, and that participation on a picket line was a form of violence.

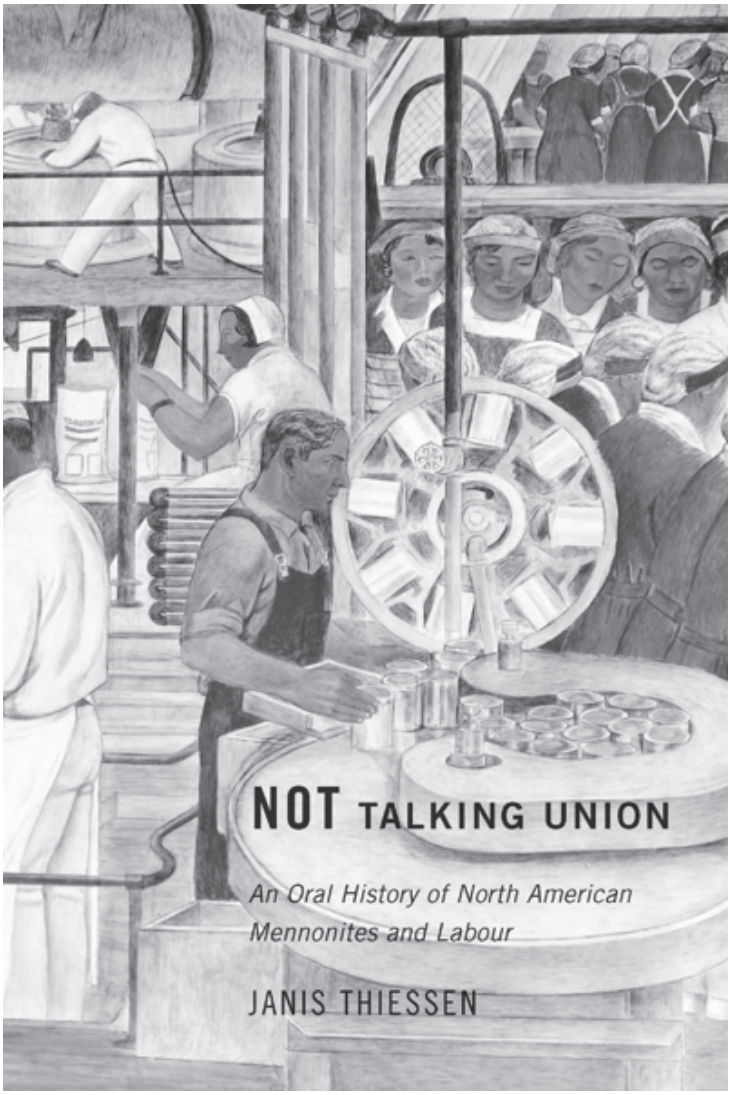
Nevertheless, writes Janis Thiessen, this is a topic that needs to be explored. Religion has been largely ignored by scholars, particularly by European academics who imagined at one time that institutions of faith would fade away. A powerful method in researching religious attitudes, writes Thiessen, is by way of oral history, verbal account, to some extent subverting or challenging the official documented, archival history. And this despite the weaknesses of oral history: the fact that no two life stories told by the same person will ever be the same; and that personal stories of faith tell not only what persons believe, but what they think or want to believe.

Thiessen, who teaches history at the University of Winnipeg, interviewed well over 100 Mennonites in her effort to unveil their attitudes – sometimes contradictory, paradoxical, even inexpressible – towards labour unions. Interviewees were given considerable power to direct the conversation as they wished. Religion was the starting point. Thiessen believes that five major personal narratives of religion predominated in these interviews: a death narrative, in which loss brings not so much solace as insight; a problem narrative, where guilt and anxiety over salvation can induce suffering; an affective narrative, based on mystical or charismatic experience; countercultural stories of activism for peace and social justice; and finally a progress narrative, in which the individual grows away from fundamentalism but does not necessarily discount earlier truths.

Perhaps surprisingly, Thiessen finds little difference between perceptions of unions held by Mennonites and those maintained by the greater North American society, asking, "Is there anything Mennonite, then, about this study?" (69) Social class, parental attitudes, experience, and religion all influence personal Mennonite opinions on organized labour, but church theology and dogma hold little sway in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. No cohesive theology exists to influence personal attitudes among Mennonites: the church has moved from a communitarian to an individualistic stance. And so responses to Thiessen's questions vary widely: "[S]mart folks don't want a union job, so loud mouths get them" (54); "It seems like there is a level of self-protection at the expense of anything else" (55); "If you want a good union, then Christians should join and change what's wrong. But people would rather criticize without taking responsibility" (58); "[N]o problem seeing Jesus opposed to the abuse of power and kinds of unfairness workers deal with in many situations" (58).

In the latter half of the book, Thiessen deals with three case studies, each fascinating in its own way, and

each undergirded with oral history. The first concerns the activism in California of the United Farm Workers Union led by César Chavez in the 1960s and 1970s. Small Mennonite growers were caught up in the conflict. Earlier, Mennonite churches, along with MCC, had focused on winning souls of Hispanic farm workers, and the result was the creation of Hispanic MB churches. The labour conflict then divided along ethnic lines, with the old MB churches defending their fruit growers and Hispanic churches supporting the union. The conflict also split the U.S. Mennonite community geographically, as Eastern churches and college students criticized Californian growers. MB farmers became defensive: "who are these uppity Mennonite Easterners to say how to behave" (103). Thiessen found her Californian interviewees tight-lipped, even hostile, still remembering the perceived slights of decades ago. Presently, she writes, a "covert silence" is maintained, an intentional avoidance of the topic in order to maintain the peace.



The second case study refers to a conflict in 1970s Manitoba. The newly elected NDP provincial government had provided conscientious objector status in labour legislation – Section 68 (3) – for workers who were unwilling to join unions at their places of employment. An appointed board that heard cases of such workers were rendering decisions that seemed inconsistent and even baffling. Harold Jantz, then editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, led the fight for conscientious objection in the workplace. He was joined by church leaders and MCC Manitoba. Arguments made by Jantz were strangely individualistic: "You cannot go to a person's church to determine what his beliefs are, no matter how sincerely he believes and how close he feels himself to be to his church" (118). Eventually the conflict fizzled out, with few Mennonites having joined the battle. In her oral interviews, Thiessen finds discrepancies between what is now said and what was written during the heat of conflict.

Thiessen's book concludes with an oral history assembled from four workers in the employ of faith-based organizations; in this case, all the employers happen to be MB. All four individuals find themselves in difficult positions, and even firings are involved. An interviewee comments that it is "easy to say what you believe, but not so easy to stand up. It's easy to write a paper; it's not so easy to live" (137). (Rewarding experiences, it must be said, are also articulated.) The problem may lie, writes Thiessen, in the changing spiritual landscape in North America. Mennonites, she says, have evolved from a life based on institutional "dwelling," to "seeking" a spirituality not dependent on the church, and finally to a mode of spirituality based on practice and presence. Faith-based employers find themselves in a difficult position, caught between old notions of institutionalism and new forms of secular business models. And the four interviewed employees, writes Thiessen, were hoping to find an outmoded communitarian way of life in their faith-based workplace – and discovered that it did not exist.

"Oral history," concludes Thiessen, "has the potential to bring about reconciliation for both individuals and communities by providing opportunities for people to be heard at length without judgement…." (159). At times Thiessen may project herself into the conversation to the point where judgements are indeed being made. Ultimately, though, she succeeds: her interviews have resulted in a thoroughly academic but dramatic, even entertaining book.

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's 50th Annual Meeting

By Alf Redekop, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) held its annual meeting on November 15, 2018, at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg. Founded in 1968, MHSC celebrated its 50th anniversary this year, with a history conference entitled "A People of Diversity: Mennonites in Canada since 1970," held at the University of Winnipeg, November 15-17. There was strong affirmation at the annual meeting for another volume in the *Mennonites in Canada* series written by Frank H. Epp and Ted D. Regehr, which will focus on the diversity of Mennonites in Canada since 1970.

Three Awards of Excellence were presented to persons who have made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research and/or writing. All three taught in the history departments of either Canadian Mennonite Bible College or Mennonite Brethren Bible College for several decades, leaving their imprint on numerous students and passing on the Anabaptist vision to the next generations.

Adolf Ens began his teaching career at Canadian Mennonite Bible College in 1970. He and his wife, Anna, served with MCC in Indonesia and Uganda, but spent most of his teaching years in Winnipeg. He was a key player in the publication of many Mennonite history books via CMBC Publications, and is best remembered for his 2004 history of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada entitled *Becoming a National Church: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada,* and a number of volumes that focus on the local history of the Mennonite West Reserve in Manitoba.

Abe Dueck began teaching at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in 1971 and played an integral role throughout his career in gathering, preserving and telling the Mennonite Brethren story to both college students and the public at large. From 1991-2003 he served as the director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, during which time he wrote numerous periodical articles for the *Mennonite Historian.*

John J. Friesen served as Mennonite history professor from 1970-2000 at Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Canadian Mennonite University from 2000 to 2010, the last five years part-time. His most noted monograph, *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites*, was published in 2007. The full citation for these three award recipients can be read on the Society's website (www.mhsc.ca).

The Society endorsed the founding of a Russlaender Centenary Committee with a mandate to develop a full-fledged historical commemoration program, with events across Canada from Quebec to British Columbia, reflecting and celebrating the story of the 1923 immigration of Mennonites to Canada from the Soviet Union. A historical re-enactment of the Russlaender immigrants in 2023, with a train travelling across Canada from Montreal to Saskatoon, with stops in Kitchener and Winnipeg, is one of the proposals. The Society also established a committee to remember the 1922 migration to Mexico and Paraguay.

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada consists of six provincial Mennonite historical societies, four Mennonite denominational bodies, the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, the Mennonite Heritage Archives, the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, the Mennonite Heritage Village (Steinbach), the Mennonite Heritage Museum (Abbotsford), the Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, Canadian Mennonite University, Humanitas Anabaptist-Mennonite Centre (Langley) and Mennonite Central Committee Canada (an associate member).

The 2018 executive is Royden Loewen (Winnipeg, Manitoba), president; Richard Thiessen (Abbotsford, BC), vice-president; Alf Redekopp (St. Catharines, Ontario), secretary; Conrad Stoesz (Winnipeg, Manitoba), treasurer; with Barb Draper (Elmira, Ontario) as the fifth member. For 2019 the executive will be Laureen Harder-Gissing (Waterloo, Ontario), president; Conrad Stoesz, vice-president; Barb Draper, secretary; Jeremy Wiebe (Winnipeg, Manitoba), treasurer; and Royden Loewen as the fifth member.

Recipients of the MHSC Award of Excellence are (left to right) John J. Friesen, Abe J. Dueck and Adolf Ens, 15 November 2018 in Winnipeg. Photo: Conrad Stoesz

A People of Diversity: Mennonites in Canada since 1970

Reported by Helen Rose Pauls

Sponsored and organized by the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies and the University of Winnipeg's Department of Mennonite Studies, this Mennonite Studies conference felt like a *Ted Talks* session: 33 speakers in two and a half days. Being well versed primarily in the history of long-ago Mennonites, I was interested in hearing of more recent changes and trends taking place since 1970.

Is Mennonite identity becoming passé? Are we mainstreaming or still differentiated from the world? How do we define the core? It seems to depend on whether you belong to Old Order groups in Ontario, urbanites in Winnipeg, or Mennonite Brethren in BC. It seems we are more diverse than ever: hence the title of the conference, "People of Diversity." And every conference has a new word – for this meeting it was *intersectionality*. (Intersectionality is represented as an analytic framework that attempts to identify how interlocking systems of power impact those who are most marginalized in society. *Wikipedia*)

The conference was preceded by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's 50th anniversary celebration.

Here's just a taste of points I pondered:

Eating together is like communion for us, an ecclesiastical practice, and still seems to unite us. Mennonite cookbooks have always sold way more copies than Mennonite theology books. We and our children still long for "old foods" such as zwieback, *paska*, *perishki* and *portzelky*, just like gramma used to make.

A huge effort on the part of Mennonites in the last fifty years has been sponsorship of immigrants, and MCC became a leader in this respect, establishing a pattern for Canadian immigration. This was especially true where the "boat people" were concerned: 160,000 arrived in a decade.

The church growth movement that took place among the Mennonite Brethren in BC – utilizing strategies learned from Californian developments – resulted in the planting of at least fifty churches in the 1980s and 1990s, many of which thrived but not all of these survived. Neither did the Mennonite name, since many church plants called themselves community churches in order to be more seeker friendly.

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Fifty years ago, Quebec's Quiet Revolution brought challenges to those leaving the Catholic Church, since many former Catholics did not know how to move forward without the Church's direction. Mennonite missionaries planted several churches with initial success; almost all of them, however, faded away as secularism became too attractive.

Other conference topics included settler-Indigenous interaction; new ideas around sexuality; materialism; worship wars; closure of many Bible schools; Mexican Mennonites returning to southern Manitoba and Alberta; contemplative services making inroads with Taizé, Lectio Divina, and liturgy; the success of Old Order Mennonites in retaining their children; and the shift of many Mennonites from towns to cities.

The proceedings of the conference can be reviewed in more depth in the 2019 *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. The theme of next year's fall conference will be Mennonites and Anthropology: Faith, Ethnography and Cultural Entanglements. Watch for the date.

A Tribute to Erna Block

By Robert Martens

The Mennonite Historical Society is saying goodbye to long-time volunteer Erna Block, who died October 30, 2018.

Erna, the first of four children, was born in Herbert, Saskatchewan, to Peter and Aganeta Block, on July 25, 1929, just as the Great Depression was settling upon the Western world. The family moved to Swan River, Manitoba, in 1937 after Erna's father lost his job. She would later treasure her memories of the extremely welcoming German Baptist congregation there. At the age of 11 or 12, Erna was already teaching Sunday school.

Over the seven years the family lived in Swan River, the family moved frequently, living in five different homes. In 1944, looking for greener pastures, the Blocks moved to Yarrow, British Columbia. Erna experienced the large 1,500-member congregation as a culture shock. Eventually, though, BC felt like home, as Erna attended Yarrow's Elim Bible School and Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute and made friends. She also served as piano accompanist for a male quartet and for the well-directed Yarrow MB Church choir.

Erna felt a calling to teach. She attended the provincial Normal School and then started teaching Grade 2 in Lillooet in 1951. The following year she moved to Surrey and taught there for nine years. Always inquisitive, Erna returned to school herself in 1959, studying for two years at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg.

Though a "steady-as-she-goes" kind of individual, Erna had an adventurous streak, which pointed her to Quito, Ecuador in 1962, where she worked for a time on radio station HCJB. In 1968 Erna was again in South America, this time in Curitiba, Brazil. She taught at the International School, working here for the MB Board of Missions and Services. Erna also travelled extensively, visiting Paraguay, Chile, Peru, and Colombia, and seeing Iguazú Falls and the Amazon River.

Erna seemed indefatigable: between stints in South America she obtained her Bachelor of Education degree at the University of BC. In 1971 she moved north, first to Stone Creek and then to Prince George where some of her family lived. She taught there until 1990, when she retired.

Erna moved to Abbotsford in 2003, where she became a central figure in her extended family. She also volunteered until the year of her death at the Mennonite Historical Society. I worked alongside Erna quite frequently in the basement workroom which the Society rents from the Mennonite Historical Museum. Vivid memories: I can see her sitting at her work station, surrounded by thousands of photographs, her spine erect, and so focused on her labours that her lack of movement sometimes caused the motion lights to go out. We talked often. Erna was an intelligent woman and a meticulous worker. She often talked about her life, the meaning of human existence, and her stubborn faith. I will miss her deeply.

Through the Flowers: Art Exhibit by Edith Krause at the Mennonite Heritage Museum

Millions of Soviet citizens, along with thousands of Mennonites, were exiled to Gulag camps in the 1930s. Ruth Derksen Siemens' book, Remember Us: Letters from Stalin's Gulag*, gathers the letters from one family's exile. This art exhibit, based on Derksen Siemens' book, has been donated to the Museum and is now part of MHM's permanent collection.*

The following is a talk given by Edith Krause October 13, 2018, at the gallery opening of her exhibit:

The seeds for this body of art were planted in 1991, during the first Fraser Valley Arts & Peace Festival. The first Gulf War, a war fought largely from the air and in which 100,000 Iraqi civilians were killed, had just ended and the annual Abbotsford International Airshow was proud to be exhibiting one of the American bomber planes. Members of our church community at Langley Mennonite Fellowship were horrified at the prospect of this being presented as a "family-friendly" event, and decided to offer an alternative. Thus, the Arts & Peace Festival, a weekend of music, visual art, theatre, literary arts, film and workshops for adults and children, was born.

My first contribution to the festival was a series of drawings titled "Remembering Who We Are." The title came from a comment a friend had made regarding her school-aged children, that instead of telling them to behave themselves, she'd remind them to "remember who you are." This idea has formed the basis of some of my artwork as a marker of historical memory.

I met Ruth Derksen Siemens about 15 years ago. At the time, she was just beginning her work on a PhD thesis in English rhetoric. Her daughter had connected her with a Mennonite family from Saskatchewan who had found a box of over 400 letters written in the late 1920s and early 1930s, letters from relatives in the Ukraine who were suffering under the Stalin regime, many incarcerated in the Gulag labour camps. This was a remarkable discovery, given the difficulty of sending and receiving letters in the USSR at that time. Ruth gave me access

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Crows as symbols of the "Black Raven" police van that cruised village streets at night, picking up innocent victims, the train that carried millions to the Gulag, and political prisoners at work in the Siberian taiga amidst larch trees and wildflowers.
Lousewort (Abram & Hulda Regehr), by Edith Krause

Roots and Branches

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Edith Krause (right) discussing her artwork with Lois Klassen at the opening exhibit. Photo: Louise Bergen Price

to the translations of the letters, images of the hand-written letters, and photographs of the families. These were a rich source of images, both literally and imaginatively.

Reading the letters was a very meaningful experience for me–the story of these families was the story of my parents and grandparents: both my grandfathers died in the Gulag. My parents, however, were very young children at the time and the memories they could recall were very sketchy. The letters filled in a lot of blanks for me. They were another reminder of who we are, not in a sentimental or introspective way, but a challenge to remember who we are and act accordingly.

Our history ought to be a foundation of empathy for other people going through similar things today. My intention in this body of artwork is to remind us who we are and where we've come from and let that set the stage for how we respond to events in the world around us.

"Writing through the flowers" is a phrase used by the letter writers to signal the use of masked messages. In these artworks, images of Siberian wildflowers have been superimposed on images of original letters, photographs and prison drawings. (from the exhibit poster)

Lily (Abram & Lena Boldt und Bramchen)

Poppy (Hans & Susie Regehr)

Arnica (Jash & Maria Bargen)

Three multimedia pieces from Edith Krause's art series, Through the Flowers.