



Roots & Branches

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Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

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

PSALM 78



A memorial in Mykhailivska Square, Kyiv, commemorating the great famine (*Holodomor*) of 1932-1933. Created for the *Holodomor's* 80th anniversary. Now the shadow of suffering once again hovers over Ukraine. Photo credit: Julia M. Toews, 2010

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Editorial: Mennonites and Memory

■ By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

It's spring again, with its welcome bursts of colour, but this spring has also been the coldest and rainiest in decades. I recall another spring, that of 1980, when after a similarly dismal spring, summer sunshine and warmth did not arrive until mid-July, a few days after the birth of my daughter. We are now in a different century, with different climate patterns, but to me, somehow, this weather seems familiar. And as with the waxing and the waning of the global flu pandemic of 1918-1919, the dynamics of COVID-19 that we've lived with for over two years are also shifting. Change happens, for better or worse, but often familiar patterns reoccur.

Likewise, as we learn of the horrors of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we can see that the trajectory of history has turned again to violence and destruction in the former Mennonite homelands in Ukraine. It's almost a hundred years since the beginning of the exodus of Russian Mennonites from the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution that traumatized so many. And we read in this issue of how plans are underway to celebrate that exodus and the renewed life it brought to so many Mennonites who had the good fortune to come to Canada.

Undeniably, there has been almost constant unrest in

many parts of the world over these last hundred years, including the horrors of World War II and the emergence of global terrorism. But many of us have likely felt more distanced from more recent violent conflicts. For Europe and North America, the years since the disintegration of the Soviet Union have seen increasing confidence in peaceful coexistence with Russia. Many of us are thankful for the opportunities we've had to visit and support Ukraine. Many Canadian Mennonites also feel connected to the crucial work that agencies like Mennonite Central Committee and the Molochansk Mennonite Centre have been doing in Ukraine since its independence; society-building work which has now turned of necessity into relief efforts. Suddenly we are vividly reminded again of the violent cultural upheaval that facilitated the century-ago immigration of Russian Mennonites to Canada. The cycle of recurrent historical violence continues.

While this issue once more focuses on aspects of Mennonite life in Ukraine, we also want to acknowledge the hardships and deprivations so many Ukrainians are currently experiencing. In the reality of a war that seems to have no end in sight, let's not forget them in the midst of our collective prosperity and peace. Let's pray for the peace of Ukraine, the land that for so long nurtured many of our forebearers.

Mennonite Centre in Molochansk, Ukraine

Update #41, May 7, 2022

<https://www.mennonitecentre.ca/events/>

We are getting many notes and emails from readers who let us know that they are praying ... Thank you!! Here is a pastoral email from the other end of your prayers. For protection I will not name place or person's name but will tell you that your donations are actively supporting this community that finds itself in the occupied zone. The translation leaves a bit to be desired, but you get the picture:

Now it is becoming more and more urgent not so much to help with food, but to help people who do not receive pensions. There



Mennonite Centre in Molochansk (formerly Halbstadt), Ukraine.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews, 2010



Sign for the Mennonite Centre, in the former *MaedchenSchule*.

Photo credit: Julia M. Toews, 2010.

are more and more of them. And they didn't get any money for a long time. It's just like describing the perspective we see here. Products can already be bought—shops, bazaars, summer, they began to bring supplies from the Crimea. Now it is a little calmer, we started trading, but ... people are running out of money. Well, bread

is baked, milk is processed into butter, but there are no construction sites, pieces of iron are not cast, they are not pressed, nothing works! And there are no payments—pensions, state assistance. It doesn't come any more from Ukraine, and the locals (Russians) so far only hang their red flags to the fences, and don't deal with pensions. This is when they start paying. And what? Rubles? In short, if we are not released by our own [Ukraine repossesses the region where they are located], then in the coming months the problem will only grow. We are so grateful for all your help and support. You are the answer to our prayers

To donate to make a difference in Ukraine, go to <http://www.mennonitecentre.ca/> & click on the donate tab at the top. Please include your address when you donate by e-transfer. I need your address to issue tax receipts to you. Please use the email address gtdyck@gmail.com. Your donation will deposit (without passwords) into the account of Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine.

War Diary: Spring 2022 Russian Invasion, Ukraine

(Based on Mennonite Centre Updates)

■ Compiled by Irene Plett

March 13 *Snipers on the roof*

the mayor of Svetlodolynsk reports
no one has money to buy gas for cars
if you have money, purchases capped at 10 litres
limited ability to forage for food.

on the road to Tokmak

is the former Mennonite village of Ladekopp
the schoolhouse built by Mennonites still stands
now occupied by Russians, a check stop
snipers on the roof.

March 27 *Escape from Mariupol*

news from our network: refugees arrive in growing
numbers

13 from Mariupol now in Shiroke



The kitchen in the Mennonite Centre, where volunteers prepare meals for seniors and refugees.

Photo source: Julia M. Toews, 2010.

April 1 *Overrun with military*

early Thursday, Molochansk overrun with Russian
military
house-to-house searches
no one home, kicked in doors
three armed soldiers at the Centre

searched every room and took photos
of photos on the walls
wanted names of all those helped
Ira explained we helped anyone who asked
the mayor of Molochansk and assistant kidnapped
he came out of hiding to save his father
one of our staff had her son taken
he'd served in the army

our man taking food to local villages
harassed by Russian soldiers
he told them to wait until he unloaded the food
then they could do with him what they wanted
they left him alone

April 16

Valentina, age 92, cries in Shiroke

never thought I would survive another war
God bless you for your help
may there be peace, no more deaths

April 26 *Closer to God*

minister from Druzhkivka reports
a time of trial
fear-filled faces, empty shops
listening to explosions: are they near or far?
deciding on a damp cellar or just a corridor
yet many opportunities to show God's love
helping the elderly, isolated, vulnerable
tears of gratitude
as believers thank God for care, and even non-believers
pray
all now closer to God

Excerpts from one of Arnold Neufeldt-Fast's postings on the *Mennonite Genealogy and History Facebook Site*

Everyone feels helpless vis-à-vis Ukraine; we donate, hope against hope, and say that "our thoughts and prayers are with Ukrainians."

I am in contact with two scholars/archivists in Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia who have helped with some research. Both have described air raid sirens, flight to bomb shelters, concern for their young families, and of course for their country. I have no words.

The evening prayer below is from a Mennonite Catechism which "our people" brought to "New Russia" (aka Ukraine) in 1789. It entreates God and his angels to stand watch through the night. It was prayed by generations.

As darkness descends again on those Dnieper River cities, I can choose to "hold vigil" and speak this prayer on behalf of this "old neighbour"—and in their stead. It gives substance to my generic good wish; I find it helpful and others may as well:

Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in your name I go to sleep.

I commit my body, my soul, my possessions, my relatives and acquaintances, my friends and enemies into your good and merciful hands.

As night approaches let me crawl into bed unconcerned, under the shadow of your fatherly

goodness, under the protection of your almighty hand, under the assistance of your holy angels. May I fall asleep with good thoughts, and rest unhindered. And may it cause my health to flourish.

Be with me when I am alone; guide me when I walk in darkness; strengthen and comfort me when I am afraid; watch for me when I sleep; direct my thoughts to you when I awake.

Warn me when there is danger; wake me up tomorrow when it is time, and then encourage me again with a cheerful mind, healthy body, new strength, and holy thoughts to pray. May I continue to live for yet a long time to your honour, to the comfort of my loved ones, and for the benefit of my fellow human beings. ... But if this night be my last or your Final Day should come, then be merciful to me and receive me into your kingdom among your chosen and pardoned ones. Amen.

(My edited translation)

Source

Gerhard Wiebe and Heinrich Donner. *Katechismus, oder kurze und einfältige Unterweisung aus der heiligen Schrift, in Frage und Antwort, für die Kinder zum Gebrauch in den Schulen, ausgegeben durch die christliche taufgesinnte Gemeinde in Rußland, welche Mennoniten genennet werden.* Including 1837 foreword of the 8th Prussian edition. Berdjansk: Kylius, 1874; reprint, 51, <https://dlib.rsl.ru/01004444984.a>

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MHSBC Annual Fall Fundraiser

Join us for a special event celebrating the Mennonite love for music!

Music that Shaped the Mennonite Soul, with Author Wesley Berg, author of *From Russia with Music: A Study of the Mennonite Choral Singing Tradition in Canada*

Featuring the MEI Concert Choir and other performers. Wesley Berg will reflect on Mennonite music in Russia, musical traditions brought to Canada, and further developments in Canada.

Emmanuel Mennonite Church

3471 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford

Sunday, October 2, 2022

Doors at 1:30; Program at 2:30 pm; *Faspa* at 4:00 pm

For tickets call 604-853-6177 or purchase online at www.mhsbc.com.

Early bird tickets are available until September 16: MHSBC members, \$30; future members, \$35. After September 16, tickets are \$40. Deadline for tickets is September 23.

Thanks to our gold sponsor:



Wesley Berg

Photo source: MHSS website

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Centenary Projects

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) is forging ahead with its centenary projects in 2022 and 2023, hoping that the COVID-19 pandemic will not force plans to change. This organization that brings together Mennonite archives, museums and provincial societies met virtually on January 15 and 16, 2022.

MHSC has some major projects in the works to recognize that a century ago thousands of Mennonites were on the move. Beginning in 1922, more than 7,000 Mennonites left Manitoba and Saskatchewan, moving to Mexico and Paraguay in an effort to save their traditional way of life. To commemorate this largest migration of Mennonites out of Canada, a story-telling exhibit will be on display at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba, from early summer to the fall of 2022, and then will travel to other parts of Canada. This is a joint project of MHSC, Mennonite Heritage Village and the Plett Foundation.

"Beginning in 1922, more than 7,000 Mennonites left Manitoba and Saskatchewan, moving to Mexico and Paraguay in an effort to save their traditional way of life."

In 2023, MHSC is partnering with TourMagination to host a train trek to commemorate the 21,000 Mennonites who migrated from Russia to Canada in the 1920s. This Memories of Migration *Russlaender* 100 Tour will run for three weeks in the summer of 2023, beginning in Quebec City and ending

in Abbotsford, BC, with stops along the way to remember how Mennonite communities in various provinces welcomed the newcomers 100 years ago. The journey is divided into three sections and participants can choose to join the train for one or all of the parts. Space is limited and train travel is expensive in

Canada, but the provincial Mennonite historical societies are planning events along the way that everyone is invited to participate in. For more information about the Memories of Migration event, visit the website at mhsc.ca.



Emigrant families Rogalsky, Wittenberg and Isaak, plus Johann Toews, pause for a photograph in Seberj at the Russian & Latvian border in 1924. Several members of these families eventually settled in the Fraser Valley.

Photo source: Ron & Julia Toews

Memories of Migration

Cross-Canada train tour to commemorate *Russlaender* centenary

■ By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

It's been almost 100 years since thousands of Mennonites from the Soviet Union began migrating to Canada. A train tour commemorating their journey will wind across Canada in the summer of 2023 to mark the anniversary.

Ingrid Moehlmann, the event's initiator, remembers her father's final wish that started it all. "On his deathbed, the last thing he said to me before he slipped from consciousness was, would I please do something for this centenary," she says.

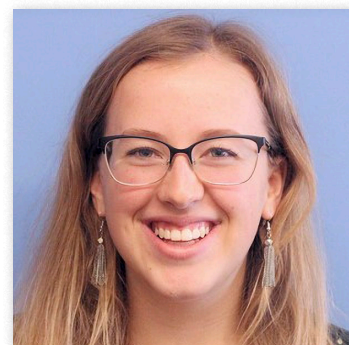
His grandfather, David Toews, helped bring thousands of Russian Mennonites, or *Russlaender*, to Canada after the 1917 Russian Revolution ravaged the country with famine, epidemic and violence.

When dissent arose amongst the Canadian Mennonites on how much to support these immigrants, Toews arranged for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) to pay the travel costs, putting the debt for 21,000

people in his own name. He also persuaded Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King to allow the Mennonites into the country.

Toews dedicated most of his life to the project—he finished fundraising and paying off the debt six months before his death. "That was a huge, huge thing in our family," says Moehlmann, who attends First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

The idea of a train tour came to Moehlmann in a dream in 2015, a year after her father passed away, and she's been planning Memories of Migration: The *Russlaender* 100 Tour ever since. Going almost coast to coast, the three-week journey, organized by



Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

Photo source: Canadian Mennonite University website.

TourMagination, an Anabaptist-heritage travel company, will start in Quebec City on July 6, 2023, and end in Abbotsford on July 25. The trip is divided into three segments, each roughly a week long; participants can join just one or two sections or all three.

Moehlmann will lead the tour with Henry Paetkau. They are heading up the *Russlaender* Centenary Committee (RCC), a subcommittee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. The tour will make stops in places of key historical significance to the Russian Mennonite migration, from the first landing site and quarantine station on Grosse Isle, an island near Quebec City, to the three earliest Mennonite settlements in the Fraser Valley of BC.

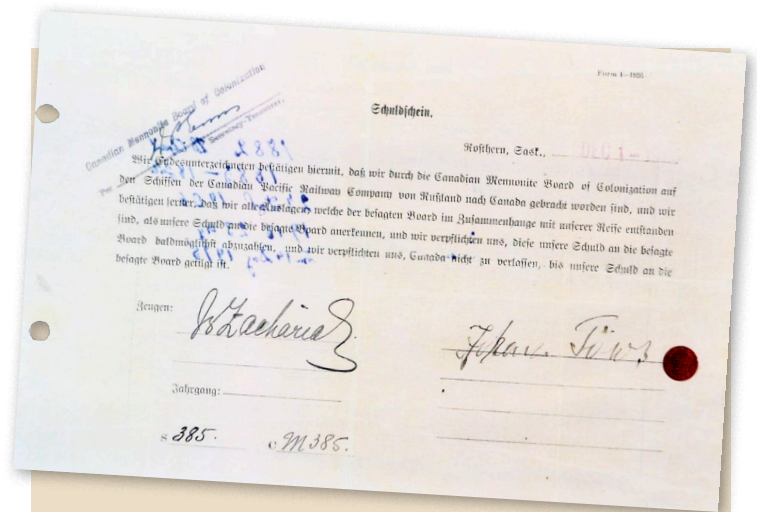
Along the way, participants can join S ngerfests, visit museums, tour cities and attend a gala dinner sponsored by the CPR, among many other highlights. In Winnipeg, the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies will host an academic conference exploring themes of war, revolution and migration in the Mennonite experience, led by Aileen Friesen, associate professor of history at the University of Winnipeg and co-director of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies.

Moehlmann is looking forward to the tour's arrival in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, to reenact the moment when the *Russlaender* got off the train and broke spontaneously into song, singing, "Now thank we all our God" in German. "I've heard about that my whole life," she says.

The tour will celebrate the faith of the immigrants, remember the loss of their former communities, memorialize the challenges of resettlement and acknowledge Indigenous displacement in Mennonite and Canadian history.

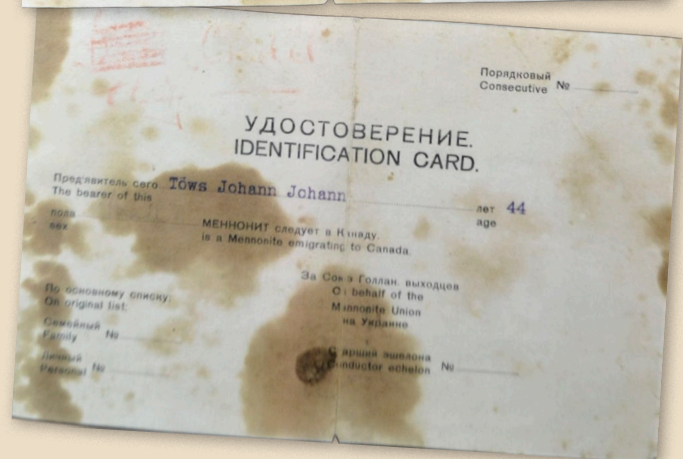
"We can tell our story about what took place in Ukraine and there is a lot of heartbreak and tears associated with that, but . . . we need to understand that we came to this land as settlers and therefore we are incorporated into this fabric of settler colonialism that is part of Canadian history. And we cannot get away from that, that is also part of our story and we need to acknowledge it," says Friesen.

Travellers will explore truth and reconciliation during the tour, as they learn about the displacement of Indigenous peoples that made way for many Mennonite settlements. "We know and understand the damage that has been done through settler-colonialism and it needs to be acknowledged," Friesen says.



A *Schuldschein* (certificate) recording the travel debt of Johann Toews, a former resident of Yarrow, BC, upon emigrating to Canada from Russia, 1926. Family members are listed on the reverse side.

Source: Ron & Julia Toews family files.



Medical documentation for immigrant Johann Toews upon his entry to Canada in November, 1926, with Canadian Pacific stamp and Dr. Drury's authorization.

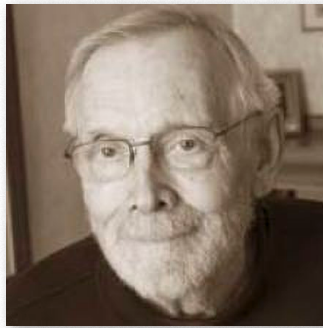
Source: Ron & Julia Toews family files.

Recently, 450 people attended a history webinar Friesen presented in connection with the tour, and people have already begun registering. Moehlmann hopes some of those will be young people. "I'm a teacher, I'm always interested in what can bring history to younger

generations.” Travelling by train is expensive, so she’s exploring possible ways to include young people, like inviting individuals to sponsor them to serve as train stewards.

It’s important to commemorate the *Russlaender*’s centenary because the history is fading from many people’s memories, Moehlmann says. “I see the Mennonite world I grew up in sort of crumbling very quickly. People just don’t understand anymore, I think, because they’re many generations removed.”

For many who do remember, this story is deeply personal. Moehlmann’s grandmother and her family could not afford to make the journey to Canada after all the men in their family but one were killed and their livelihood was lost. It was David Toews who provided the funds. “My mother’s entire family, both sides, was directly saved by this travel. It was my dad’s family who did that. . . . So for me, both sides of the story are really significant because there’s no way I would be here if one or the other hadn’t happened.”



David Riesen Moehlmann, who requested on his deathbed that the *Russlaender* migration be remembered.

“I’m hoping [the tour] makes people reflect on how it is we came to be here and some of the lessons learned along the way,” she adds.

Friesen says although Mennonite identity has changed significantly over the years, “that sense of community still prevails and it’ll be nice to experience that again, to experience all these different elements as a community.”

To learn more, visit russlaender100.com.



Ingrid Moehlmann is the instigator of *Memories of Migration: The Russlaender 100 Tour*, a weeks-long train trip across Canada, coming in 2023.

Reprinted from *Canadian Mennonite*

Singing by Number in Russian Mennonite Colonies

■ By Robert Martens

By the 1890s, choral singing had become hugely popular in the Russian Mennonite colonies. The phenomenon was an odd one, considering that art of any kind had been widely discouraged by previous generations of Mennonites, but certainly the new openness displayed by the relatively new Mennonite Brethren was a key factor. The old ascetic behaviour, the strict stand against the “world,” was withering away as Mennonites adapted to new social realities.

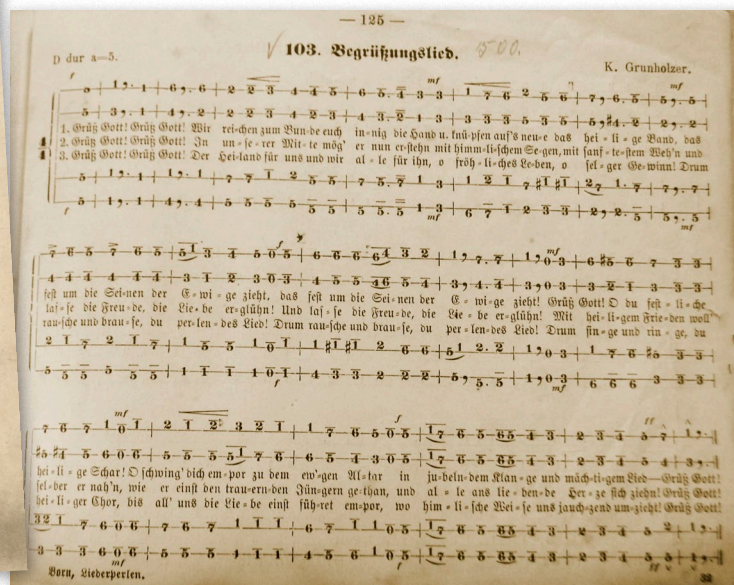
Choral singing, though, did cross denominational lines. Mennonite Brethren embraced the art form with greater enthusiasm, but the old church, the *Kirchliche*, as well as the new upstart *Allianz*, were also keenly involved. Rehearsals were held in schools and homes, and at times in churches, where the acoustics must have been favourable. In the villages, choir members

were mostly young, ranging mostly from ages sixteen through twenty-five. Participation in choir singing was perceived as a route to marriage. Urbanized Mennonites, though, were more “sophisticated,” sometimes using piano, harmonium, and even pipe organ accompaniment as an adjunct to the voices. Choir members in the greater population centres were often older as well.

Choir life was busy. Choral groups performed at weddings, baptisms, and funerals. At Christmas, carolling in the streets ushered in a happy time. Some choirs travelled extensively, taking part in music workshops or choir festivals (*Sängerfeste*) in neighbouring or distant Mennonite villages. All these activities, it was cautioned, were not to be done primarily for enjoyment, or as artistic endeavour. A *Zions-Bote* correspondent wrote, “These song festivals showed that great efforts were being made in singing. But, brothers and sisters, let us give heed that



Title page of a copy of *Liederperlen* printed in 1895. It reads, "Pearls of Song. Collected by Isaac Born. Halbstadt. Typography, P.A. Neufeld, 1895."



we do not neglect heartfelt singing in favour of artistic singing.... It would be good if singers and conductors could give more attention to clear pronunciation, so that the listeners may be able to understand not only the melody but also the words, and take them to heart... (qtd in Letkemann 429).

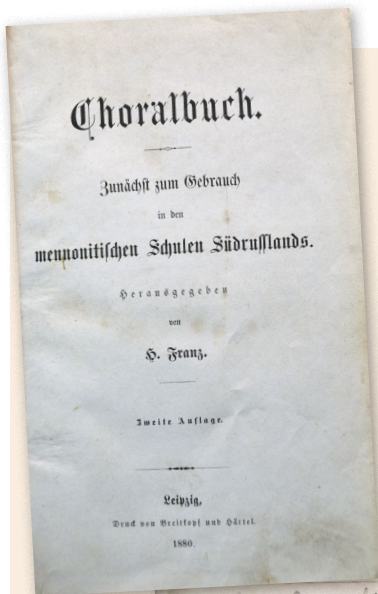
The great demand for music led to Mennonite choral publications. Isaac Born was a key figure in the movement, publishing hundreds of four-part hymns, always in number notation, *Ziffern* (numbers), rather than in the standard European usage of staff notation. In other words, in this system invented as early as 1677 by a Parisian Franciscan monk, numbers from 1 to 7 on a musical staff indicated the musical notes. Previously, individual Mennonite singers had written out their own music, in their own idiosyncratic code, and this was clearly insufficient. *Ziffern*, then, were a considerable improvement, but Russian Mennonites seemed to get stuck there, and hung on to the system long after others had abandoned it. "Why Mennonites did not change to the use of staff-notation at this time," writes Peter Letkemann, "and thereby gain access to a wide range of German anthologies is a question which cannot be answered" (429-30).

Isaac Born, born in 1853 in Gnadenheim, Molotschna colony, joined the Mennonite Brethren Church at the age of twenty-two. There he was steeped in music, singing in a sixty-six-voice choir in Lichtfelde, Molotschna. Born became a musical devotee. Between 1889 and 1915, he was a catalyzing voice for the publication of

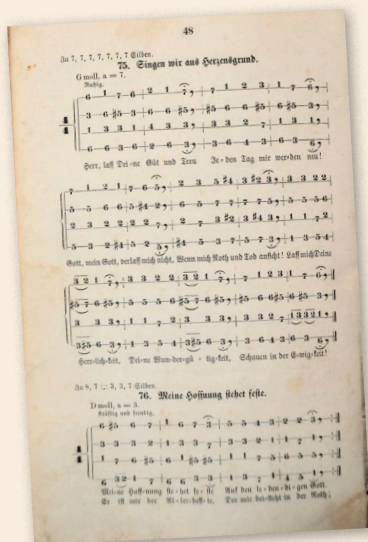
Mennonite songbooks. He began by publishing four-page circulars of songs called the *Sängerfreund* (The Singer's Friend). After eighteen months of instalments, the circulars were bound together, printed as volumes, and distributed to Russian Mennonite choirs. The first singers' papers were printed by colleague Peter Neufeld, who lived in Halbstadt, Molotschna, and whose inexperience resulted in numerous errors in the early days. Previously, Mennonite music had generally been published by Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig.

With time, Neufeld's work improved and became quite reliable. Over the next years, hundreds of German-language hymns were ordered from abroad, often from the American publication, *Evangeliums-Lieder* (Gospel Songs). The requirements for all songs appearing in *Liederperlen* was that they be simple and edifying. But Mennonite singing became increasingly sophisticated: in 1896, even Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* was transposed into *Ziffern* and appeared in Born's songbook, now called *Liederperlen* (Pearls of Song). For reasons now unknown, Born changed the song-paper's title in 1891. *Liederperlen* was published monthly, then bound into volumes every three years. Eight of these were eventually printed. A ninth was cut short by the Russian government's prohibition of German-language publications in 1915. Out of the hundreds of songs, scholar Peter Letkemann, in his seminal work on Russian Mennonite hymnody, pinpointed nineteen that were written by Mennonites themselves.

continued on page 11



Delicately drawn musical instructions for those who wanted to move from Ziffern to regular note reading. Found in an old Russian hymnal for sale at the MCC Thrift Store. Julia M. Toews collection.



A page from the Chorabuch. The focus was on the tune, hence only one verse was printed with each song.

Translation of instructions from Heinrich Franz's *Chorabuch* on how to interpret and read Ziffern music

Translated by Julia M. Born Toews

Heinrich Franz writes, "To effectively use the Ziffern method the following instructions need to be observed:

In all major and minor keys, the same method is used to find the starting (or tonic) note. For major keys, the tonic is #1, for minor keys the tonic is # 6. These are the starting tones from which to find all other notes. At the same time, there is an indication of what key the song is to be sung in. One only has to sound the "A" on a tuning fork; then it's easy to find the tonic note #1 or #6 from the "A" (of a tuning fork or pitch pipe—JMT).

1. A double cross (#) in front of a number raises the note by half a tone; if the sign in front of a number is a flat (or b) then the tone is lowered by half a tone.
2. A comma (,) beside a number doubles its time length.
3. A period (.) beside a note lengthens its time by a half.
4. A line (-) over a number shortens the time value by a half.
5. The symbol "o" in the line indicates a quarter rest; if there are other symbols tied to "o" such as a comma (o,), period (o.) or a line (ō), the same time values as described above apply.
6. A curved line under two or more Ziffern indicates that the same syllable is sung to all these notes (4 3 2).
7. Dots or angled lines above a Ziffern, or several Ziffern with a curved line above, indicate that according to the melody, not all words in every verse fit the notes given: so that sometimes a syllable is sung with one note, sometimes with several notes tied together. (No example given)
8. The symbol "⌋" indicates that the preceding musical section is to be repeated.
9. The symbol of a curved line with a dot underneath or above (⌒), indicates a hold, and indicates the end of a line (phrase)."

A Chorabuch is a book that contains the tunes to which hymns are sung. Most hymnbooks did not include notes or Ziffern. At the start of every hymn was an indication of the name of the hymn tune to which that particular song was to be sung, sometimes with a number referring to where it was located in the Chorabuch. The song leader (Vorsänger) usually had a copy of one of these tune books and would use the information it provided to give the starting note for leading the congregation in hymn singing.

This particular Chorabuch was published by the much-respected music publishers Breitkopf & Härtel and was printed specifically for use by Mennonite schools in Russia—first published in 1868; my copy, which is a second printing, in 1880.

All words in italic are mine. - JMT

Isaac Born even promoted his work in North America. In 1893 he appealed to the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America for a subsidy of \$150.00; the money would be used to provide *Liederperlen* songbooks with standard notes (rather than numbers) to North American Mennonite choirs. His request was turned down, but the Conference encouraged its members to buy Born's publications.

Born's health, unfortunately, deteriorated. In 1903, after fifteen years on the job, he gave up the editorship of *Liederperlen* to Heinrich Braun, also of Halbstadt. Braun bought Neufeld's printing press and named it *Raduga*, Russian for "rainbow." The publication duties of *Liederperlen* twice again changed hands, in 1910 and 1913. It must have been an exhausting project.

Isaac Born died in 1905 in Waterloo, Terek colony.

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC's archives contains hundreds of songbooks, some relatively recent, some aging, well-used, and fragile. The graphic on the top of page 9 is the title page of a copy of *Liederperlen*

printed in 1895. It reads, "*Pearls of Song*. Collected by Isaac Born. Halbstadt. Typography, P. A. Neufeld, 1895." The flipside of the title page is inscribed in Russian Cyrillic: "All rights reserved. Odessa, September 15, 1894."

This songbook stands as part of the John B. Toews Rare Books and Songbooks Collection. Dr. Toews has attached a note to the book: "This almost complete collection of *Liederperlen* belonged to Helena Janz of Contentiusfeld, Molotschna, in Ukraine. She migrated to Canada with her husband, Abram Toews, and their family in 1926. Complete sets of this type are exceedingly rare."

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Peter Heese: A Mennonite "Exile"

■ By Robert Martens

Conflict in the Mennonite community, as in any other, is not an exception but the norm. Sometimes, these internecine struggles eventually lose their energy, and peace is made. Occasionally, however, the community devours its own, as, for example, when individuals attract jealousy with their exceptional talent and leadership capability: their "star" quality. Peter Heese was one such.

Peter's grandfather was the well-known teacher Heinrich Heese, who fled Napoleonic recruiting forces in 1808 and fled to South Russia. Here he accepted the Mennonite faith, joined the community, and quickly rose to prominence when he was asked by Russian Mennonite organizer Johann Cornies to teach at the Ohrloff *Vereinsschule*, a secondary school (literally, Ohrloff Community School). Heese worked as Cornies' secretary as well, handling the Russian correspondence and aiding in educational reform.

In 1840, he was asked to teach Russian at the Chortitza *Zentralschule* (a secondary school). The work

was difficult, but Heinrich Heese was committed. And he was not merely a schoolteacher. He was passionate about Mennonite life and, believing that farming was at the heart of any prosperous community, he worked on improving agricultural methods. Heese also advocated for better relationships with Russian servants and advised on dairy stock and tree planting, all this while teaching. It must

have seemed to some Mennonites that Heinrich Heese was everywhere.

Eventually, his activities aroused such hostility that he was forced to retire from Mennonite education. After passing the Russian teacher's examination at the age of sixty-two, he opened a school in



Peter Heese (1852–1911)

Photo source: Mennonite Heritage Archives

which most of the students were sons of nobility. He died in 1868, “having previously written his own funeral sermon” (Epp & Thiessen 1).

Brilliance and confrontation seemed to run in the family: Heinrich Heese’s grandson Peter, also a reformer, activist, and educator, likewise “left” the Mennonite community under a cloud. Born in 1852, he must have known his grandfather, and perhaps some of the older man’s legacy rubbed off on the boy. Peter was educated at the Chortitza *Zentralschule*, the *Gymnasium* in Ekaterinoslav, and the University of Moscow. By 1879 he was teaching at the Ohrloff *Vereinsschule*, where his grandfather had been such a stand-out, and the next year was made co-president of the school along with Johann Klatt.

The Russian government was imposing reforms upon Mennonite schools that would force them into line with national standards. In response to this, and to other government dictates that seemed to be pushing a nationalist bureaucratic model, thousands of Mennonites left Russia in the 1870s for North America. Peter Heese would have none of that. He stayed, and worked alongside Klatt to reform Mennonite village schools. Standards were raised, and Russian became a common language in the classroom.

“[T]he Heese-Klatt period is called the Golden Age of education among the Molotschna Mennonites” (Hege & Neff 1).

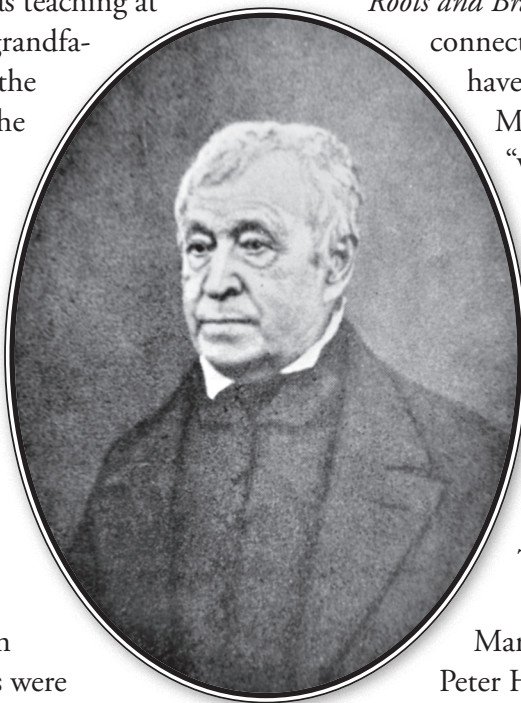
Like his grandfather, Peter Heese was a committed activist and reformer to the point that he invited sharp criticism. He also lacked, apparently, the requisite Mennonite “humility.” In addition, he was very wealthy. Another difficulty may have been his reputation: his liberality and prominence likely made him second in influence among Mennonites to Johann Cornies, who



The Chortitza Zentralschule with the Krueger clock tower.

Photo source: *Erste Mennoniten Doerfer Russlands*, N.J. Kroeker

also withstood withering critique. (Heese contributed generously to the school for the deaf in Tiege; see *Roots and Branches*, Feb. 2021). And, surely, his connections with state and authority must have rubbed some independent-minded Mennonites the wrong way. Was he too “worldly,” too assimilated?



Heinrich Heese

Photo source: *Heinrich Heese, Johann Philipp Wiebe* by David Epp. Echo-Verlag, 1952.

Peter Heese resigned from the Ohrloff school board in 1896 in bitterness, abandoning the Mennonite religious life as well. In 1906, he began a new career, publishing a Russian newspaper in Ekaterinoslav. He died in that city in 1911, was buried there, then reburied alongside his wife in Tashchenak, Ukraine.

The following (trans. Robert Martens) is an eyewitness account of Peter Heese’s life printed in a Russian Mennonite newspaper in 1926. The author is not listed, nor is the date of writing. The article, despite its

biases and prejudices, provides a vivid and moving narrative of the man that no academic treatise could match.

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“Building Blocks for the Writing of Our History”

From Unser Blatt (Our Paper), March 1926, Year 1, No. 6.

Our Paper has a standing rubric [i.e., a special section, *Geschichtliches*] for the historical. That this entails primarily “our” history is obvious. Yes, this column must go forward with great vigilance and depth. From the past, one learns to understand better the present, and can shine a certain spotlight on the future. One knows neither oneself, nor one’s people, if nothing or little is known about our becoming.

Today, historians blessed by God are few. And yet, they are needed, if our little house is not to be lost, and it has recently been in great danger. Until our loving God awakens these men, we must painstakingly gather the building blocks together, many building blocks both great and small, be they in the original form, fresh from the stonecutting, with all their sharp edges and corners and rough surfaces; or already worked upon, and ready to find their rightful place. And so the following reminiscences: a new building block for the master’s hand.

These concern a man who, relatively recently, not only put his private stamp on a public work, the *existence of education in Molotschna* [emphasis in original], but has been a great influence upon its beneficial development. He has therefore the right to be gratefully acknowledged by posterity for all time. This man was at one time School Board President Peter Heese.

We shall pass by his childhood and youth, as well as his first work as teacher in the Ohrloff Community School, and begin when he was given leadership over all the schools in Molotschna. Here he was the right man in the right place. He did not work aloofly, but with an open and loving heart. It might well be said of him, “He loved our people, and he built the school system for us!” Much could be told of him by his contemporaries. As a man of high intelligence, still he operated closely with teacher and student. Besides this, he was always open to the needs of his students. He could never be called petty. He was “noble”—as he was often called—in the best sense of the word. The often anxious, thrifty Mennonite mindset was alien to him, perhaps because he had not worked for his substantial fortune, but had inherited it. No wonder that he stood in such general esteem, that his name was so lauded by all, and that his loyalty and devotion to his school were so profoundly appreciated.

Heese also practised extensive hospitality. Widowed

early, he was nevertheless seldom alone in the secluded countryside. His house was usually filled with guests, and this not just for a day, or week, but for months at a time. These were rarely relatives, but rather teachers who were recuperating during the summer from the strenuous work year. [At his house], education commissions wrote school guidelines, plans for teachers and students, and even entire curricula. And what Heese did was without hesitation, self-interest, or ambition.

His love for those around him was revealed in his affable relationship with “the little folk.” His employees and labourers could testify to that. In each he saw the “person,” and treated each accordingly. To protect the downtrodden and defend the assailed came naturally to him. He was inclined to excuse weakness, but his entire being was repelled by spiteful and backhanded attacks.

Unfortunately, there came a time when his public objectives were no longer understood. From his fellow citizens and believers, he demanded a much closer relationship with the Russian population and placed much higher requirements on the learning of the Russian language, as it had been stipulated to him by the Ministry of Education. With great insight he foresaw that the tsarist regime would not forever tolerate our privileged national status as it yet was practised at that time. The rights of national minorities that are currently sanctioned, and are becoming more entrenched every day, were at that time unthinkable; and what we had then was not a lawful right, but rather preferential treatment that was bound at some point to fall apart. At that time the winds blew ever stronger from above that all national distinctions must vanish, and in time they would have vanished, if it were not for the great reorganization.

Heese analyzed his time, and dealt with the existing circumstances and relationships. He wished to anticipate, salvage, and preserve, not to tear apart or destroy, as many thought. And yet the opinion, “Heese wants to make Russians of us,” rose like a bogeyman in the anxious minds of many—there was mistrust, wariness, hesitation—and the initial adulation waned away. Yet he, who knew the Russian soul far better than the soul of his fellow believers and their traditions, did not find the correct means, the correct tone, to enlighten the

people about his intentions. He imposed his directives with a severe consistency, and so the happy times of his work with youth education and training ended in harsh dissonance.

He retired from public office in the colonies, lived quietly on his estate, or spent time abroad to improve his health. At the same time, he remained a benefactor to the poor dispossessed who were without reputation or means but desired an education. Notably, however, his protégés were mostly Russian or Jewish; much fewer in number were his fellow believers.

Then arrived a year of great famine in northeastern Russia. Pleas for state and private help appeared in every newspaper. Heese also wished to help, not only with donations of money and grain, but by actively looking after those who were suffering. He immediately turned to the authorities with a petition to set aside farmland for himself among the land's people, where he could help out and save lives to the best of his ability, in his own person, and with his own money. The government found this too irregular. It did, however, allow him to initiate his rescue plan among the Tartars living near Kazan near the Siberian border. This dealt Heese a harsh blow, but his heart was large enough to devote himself immediately to the work of neighbourly love in that region.

The area of his work lay approximately three hundred to three hundred fifty versts [1 verst = approx. 1.1 km.] northeast from Kazan, there where European culture and civilization had already extended a brotherly hand to the original inhabitants. Here Heese immediately had to care for three Tartar villages lying next to each other and with a population of six to seven hundred inhabitants. The activities of the Red Cross did not reach that far [into the back country]. The governmental institutions were, however, finally helpful in that they provided the necessary food from their storehouses upon payment.

Now, our beloved God led in such a way that I was able this summer to make a vacation trip, partly for relaxation, partly for study, into the area of famine. I hurried with high expectations towards Mother Volga,

but was severely disappointed at first sight near Kazan. She was too narrow, and—too dirty—she was dotted with flecks of green, blue, and red from the combustion of naphthalene on the

giant steamers, giving her an unclean aspect. Nowhere did I see the shimmer of silk; nowhere, the costly jewellery of the boyars. I had other impressions on my return trip downstream.

My trip took me a few hundred versts down the Kama River in the foothills of the Ural Mountains. The scenery

was spectacular: still so much undisturbed woodland in its original purity. After a brief rainfall, the vegetation appeared in all its luxuriousness. Everything breathed new energy and new life. Only the human beings dragged themselves along, deep-eyed and hollow-cheeked.

At a little bend [of the river], I left the steamer to proceed further by horsepower. Night fell, really only a gentle twilight, but the dark woods felt rather frightening. After a few hours, however, a magnificent, dew-drenched morning greeted us. We found ourselves in our carriage upon a high lookout. Before us lay a wide valley in which was a chain of both small and large Tartar villages with many tiny wooden mosques: the realm of the half-moon.

As we at length neared such a settlement, there appeared before me a typical house, beside which mostly women and children laboured at, it seemed, an open-air oven. Looking more closely, I saw a tall figure with a tropical helmet; that could be no other than the sought-after philanthropist from the Taurian region. At first, unbelieving astonishment; then, great joy. After months of separation, a familiar face.

Here I saw a side of Peter Heese which I would never have imagined. Everywhere, the indulged urbanite and property-owner was plunged into his work. The meals for the populace were prepared and distributed under his special direction. And even so, afterwards he had to oversee the cleaning of utensils and of the great kettle, since the Tartar women are not accustomed to over-cleanliness.

Many were stricken with scurvy in the villages, and

“Pleas for state and private help appeared in every newspaper. Heese also wished to help, not only with donations of money and grain, but by actively looking after those who were suffering.”

yet—no doctor, no medic, not even nurses. Every afternoon, Heese himself entered the dirt-covered homes in order to clean with water and cotton the stinking, wounded mouths of the ill, and to follow up with lemonade he had prepared. It is necessary for someone to witness the work that Heese was accomplishing in this quiet and isolated part of the world; news of this would never have reached us, if not for this unexpected encounter. But one must also appreciate the shining eyes and the stammered foreign words with which the sick unto death greeted him upon entry and thanked him upon departure, to feel something of that which reigned, driven by need, in the breast of this friend to humanity. “What you have done for the least of these...” And so it was. Heese himself made nothing of it. It was all done as though natural and self-evident.

And when towards evening all preparations had been made for the next day, and the world had given itself

“The End of Eichenfeld”

from Abram Dombrowsky's *The Massacre in Eichenfeld, 1919.* Der Bote, 40, 28 October 1987. Written in 1926 in Nikolaipol, Yazykovo Colony, South Russia.

■ Translated by Robert Martens

I welcome the opportunity to write down the thoughts and experiences of my youthful years. My birthplace was Eichenfeld but I live at this time in Nikolaipol. I will return in this writing to the year 1919.

It was an extremely turbulent time for us. The front lines in the civil war crossed our area frequently. Then one day in 1919, a group of Makhno's men entered my home village of Eichenfeld. They were a wild, rabid bunch. Some of us were robbed. All of our wagons were hitched up to transport their soldiers. My father and I were compelled to ride with two wagons, but in this instance not too far. Previously we had been away for a week on a similar forced transport, but this time we were allowed to return quickly. We asked ourselves what that could mean, but when we came home the reason became clear. I arrived in our village a little earlier than my father. The military were everywhere; one could barely move through the streets. I was nearly home when a pair of men stopped me and ordered me to drive to the other end of the village to pick up livestock feed

over to sleep, then he made a pilgrimage, completely alone, into the secretive, quiet, pale night, away from everything—just as he had during recent years withdrawn, a stranger to the world. What he there lived through, thought through, struggled through—no one has yet learned. Only One knows the truth!

How he stood in his last years in relation to dogmatic Christianity, I do not know. However, that he lived like a Christian, I know indeed; and that his selfless service reflected the great Christian love of the neighbour, I have observed, not only among the starving, but many times elsewhere. And if we rely on the words of Jesus [that we should] judge others by their fruits, then we can in great confidence entrust him into the arms of the heavenly Father, who knows how we obtain our good and proper end. —

Heese died suddenly on February 1, 1911. It is only right that his memory lingers long among his people.



The Eichenfeld massacre memorial, by Paul Epp, situated at the mass gravesite where the inhabitants of the village of Eichenfeld, Ukraine, are buried.

Photo source: paulepp.com. Used with permission

from a neighbour. I was to bring this to the village livestock enclosure, now filled with stolen animals. Once I had done that, I could return home.

Arriving home, I unhitched and fed the horses, and returned to the wagon to retrieve the harness. Only the harness lay upon the ground—the wagon had disappeared. It had been stolen. I went indoors, washed up, and sat down at the supper table. The house was crammed with soldiers, women, and everything imaginable. Curses and insults flew through the house.

While we were seated at the supper table, neighbours suddenly arrived with news: our two schoolteachers and the store owner had been killed with sabres. An inexpressible terror seized us. Soon my father came home; it was already completely dark. The village was in turmoil. We heard one shotgun blast after another, and no one knew what had happened, or what would happen. In our house were three families: my parents; Mother's brother with his family; and my grandparents. It was about 8 pm when my uncle, who had been forced by a soldier to carry a sack of oats, came back. His first words were, "Terrible things are happening in the village." Many of our neighbours were dead. People were being murdered. Soon they would be here. What should we do? The entire village was surrounded; in fact, not only the village, but each house, so that there was no possibility of escape. I was sixteen years old at the time and had to hear the dreadful news that my schoolmates were now dead from sabre blows. I was terrified that I might also forfeit my life to a bullet or sabre. Our only choice was to trust in God.

We gathered together in a room and pled with God. Immediately after our prayer, our dreadful guests arrived. Completely drunk, they entered our home cursing and screaming. I came first into their hands, and was forced to stand against the wall. I had already given up any hope of staying alive. But God's plans are different from ours! [*Doch der Mensch denkt und Gott lenkt!*] About twelve men were in the house, all with loaded weapons and drawn sabres. A few were plundering the cellar. Others took my father and grandfather into the next room and tortured them in various ways, demanding money. Their greed for money prompted my tormenters to let me loose, but I didn't have the energy to do anything. I remained standing at the wall, not speaking a word, and listening to my family being tortured.

Suddenly they brought in a neighbour, a man in his seventies. They had caught him on the street. He most likely was attempting to escape to safety.

After a while one of the men approached me and asked who I was and why I was standing there. I must confess that fear of a dreadful death seduced me, in my young years, into a lie. I answered that I was a labourer and had been ordered to stand at the wall. With a quick sharp word he ordered me to leave the room. The door of the room in which all this took place was standing open. It led to the entrance hall, where the servant

girl was, and she had heard everything. I left the room and went into the entrance hall. Here I sat down on a bench. The entire time I was forced to hear the cries of pain of my grandfather, father, and uncle. It was nearly unendurable.

After about two hours of torture, these three, plus the old man whom they had caught and brought in, were led to the barn to be murdered. The last words of my father were, "Goodbye, this is the last time we will meet on this earth." From the others I heard nothing. Soon I heard four shots. All four were corpses. They [the soldiers] came back in, more furious than ever. One of them interrogated the Russian servant girl. Because the girl had heard all my previous answers [to the soldier], she repeated the same. I was fortunate that the girl didn't bear a grudge against Germans, or I would not have survived. For some time the maddened soldiers raged through our house, after which they departed, leaving strict orders that no one was to enter the barn, or they also would receive a bullet in the head. It was midnight. Everything was quiet. The quartered soldiers had gone to bed but none of us could sleep. The thought that our fathers lay dead in the barn allowed us no rest. We could hardly wait until morning, when we could find out the situation in the village, and discover what had happened.

When daybreak finally arrived, things turned chaotic once again. The signal to move on brought all the soldiers to their feet. I was ordered to hitch up once again, and so I left home in the early hours. But what I was forced to look upon as I drove through the village! At each home lay two or three or more corpses. I didn't encounter any familiar faces. There was no one to ask about whom had been murdered. As I left the village behind me, I was constantly ordered forward.

After we arrived at the next Russian village, I was released. I set out on the journey home. Approaching my village, I heard already from a distance the wailing and weeping. "Is it possible that the entire village has been murdered?"—that was my only thought. When I came home, I was told the terrible news: "In one night, all wives have become widows, and all children, orphans." Wives walked the streets mourning their husbands, while children wept for their fathers. In one dreadful night, eighty-two men and women had been murdered [seventy-nine men and three women]. There was indescribable pain in every house in the village.

Everywhere, people cried to God for help and comfort—only He could help us.

Night arrived. Everyone was afraid to stay in their houses, since there were no longer any men there. Accordingly, several families gathered together in homes in order to encourage and comfort each other. During the first night, six widows with their children stayed at our house. The night was very calm. We slept undisturbed until morning. The following day there was a discussion on what could be arranged with the bodies. It was impossible for us to bury them all without assistance, so we had to wait until God sent us help.

In the afternoon, the village was once again extremely uneasy. The “birds of prey” were again our guests, and they robbed everything they could touch or see. Two young men were murdered. It was rumoured that all youth over the age of sixteen would be killed. Our hearts were filled with fear. Towards evening, everything quieted down, and we all went to bed. The same families were still staying with us. It was a calm night. Only abandoned homes were being plundered.

On the third day, the help we longed for finally arrived. Men arrived from neighbouring villages and began the work of burial, digging graves in the cemetery and gathering up the corpses for interment. Up to twelve bodies were laid on the cold, bare soil of a single grave. Boards were set over the bodies, and then those were covered with earth. It was a heartrending day! But then, nothing else could be done—the times were in such chaos. Oh, it is terrible to live through—to be part of—such experiences!

Towards evening all the men from the neighbouring villages left for home. None of them wished to stay in our village. Now the widows and orphans were once again alone. The night after the burial was very unsettled. On our farm property stood a dwelling in which a former landowner lived. He was one of the very few men to be spared so far. A few families stayed with him during the nights.

In our house, someone always stood guard so that in an emergency the rest could be wakened. We were

suddenly awakened by Mother. Four men had entered the house of our resident. Two stood by the door so that no one could escape. They had closed all the shutters. We sat by our windows and watched what was happening. After a long time the men came out and headed directly for our house. They pounded on the windows

and doors, screaming “Open up!” Since I had heard that all young men under sixteen were to be murdered, I prepared to escape—where to, I didn’t know. It was dark and raining. My mother and aunt opened the door. Shouting for the property owner, they entered the house. I was unable to escape out the rear door, so I hid behind a door and waited in

“When the men were told that the property owner was dead, they demanded to know who the eldest son was. They were directed to Grandmother, who lay in bed and was unable to walk.”

terror. When the men were told that the property owner was dead, they demanded to know who the eldest son was. They were directed to Grandmother, who lay in bed and was unable to walk. She had suffered eight long years from arthritis.

They asked Grandmother if there was a male in the house who could hitch up a wagon. “There’s only a twelve-year-old,” answered Grandmother, who did not know that I was inside. The boy was ordered to appear. They looked at him angrily—“What can we do with a child?” they screamed, and one of them struck him so hard on the chest with the butt of his shotgun that he fell to the floor. The boy’s mother cried out in fear, and with that scream she also received a such a blow that blood flowed from her head. I was enduring utter terror, being forced to watch and hear what was happening, but I knew that if they saw me my life was forfeit. Many times the brutes passed by me but not one looked behind the door. Today, I can only say that the hand of God directed those bloodthirsty men to pass me by.

Now these bandits demanded that someone guide them with a light to the stable. My mother and aunt went with them. While they were in the stable, I decided to run outside, but only made it to the kitchen when I heard knocking on the other door. I threw myself under the straw in the kitchen. Because it was dark in the kitchen, no one saw me. As soon as the men had gone by, I went to the rear door and fortunately, God be thanked, I made it outside. I lay under a bush in

the neighbouring farm for about three hours, listening to what was happening at home.

There were noises of fighting in the stable and barn. Suddenly, all was still. Very quietly I stepped into my home to see what had happened. I came to the door; everything stood open; no one was inside; the house was empty. It was eerie. My only thought was, "If they have all fled, where could Grandmother be? She can't walk, and must be in the house, dead or alive." But I could not find her. I did not wish to remain alone in the house, but where, in the dark night, could I go? In fear I sneaked like a thief in the night through the front yard to the neighbouring house. The shutters were all closed. I opened a shutter and begged to be let in. The people inside were so afraid that it took a long time before they recognized me and let me in. The house was jammed, and I was pressed from all sides for news on what had happened in my home. While I reported all that I knew, and that I had found the house empty, tears were shed.

I could hardly wait for morning to find out what had happened to my family. Finally, as day was breaking, I went to my neighbours, where I found Grandmother. She sat there with eyes full of tears. Her first question

was, "Are you still alive? Has the heavenly Father delivered you once again?" She had not expected to find me alive. A few women with their children arrived. They had spent the night in the fields in the rain. My mother, aunt, sister, and another woman had stayed in a neighbouring village some three versts [1 verst=1.0668 kilometres] away. In their terror they had fled there in the dark of night. We could not express our gratitude to God enough that we were all still living. Many had fled their homes, leaving house and livestock behind, just to save their lives. We were now the same; we were already among the last to do so.

I resisted flight for a long time, since it seemed unthinkable to be homeless, but there was no other way, if we wished to stay alive. An old horse that had not been taken was harnessed. I put some flour and a little other food in the wagon. The women climbed into the wagon, and so before evening we left our beloved home for Adelsheim. Over the following days, the remaining livestock and a few things were fetched.

The story in Der Bote continues with a section called "Homeless."

HONOURING BC MENNONITES

The Life Story of Jacob Tilitzky—in his own words

Edited and brought up to date by Bruno and Wanda Derksen-Bergen

On October 21, 1925, in the village of Gruenfeld nestled in the wide, wide steppes of Ukraine, Cornelius and Katharina Tilitzky welcomed their eighth and last child. They named him JASCH. Little did he know that his parents were in the process of leaving their home to move to a faraway country. Before turning one, "Jaschchi" was carried through the gates of Riga, to Southampton, across the stormy Atlantic through Quebec, and on to Hochfeld, Manitoba. Two years later the family moved to Waldheim, Saskatchewan, the place of his earliest memories: memories of an old two-storey house, a red barn, wide, wide fields of grain, horses with their frisky colts, and a school with a caring teacher and good friends.

After eight years on the rented farm during a time of depression, the parents thought it was time to seek



Jake Tilitzky

Photo source: the Tilitzky family

greener pastures in BC. It was with mixed feelings that Jacob made this major move, saying goodbye to friends, horses and pet colts on the one hand while anticipating new adventures on the other. Life was different here in Abbotsford with mountains and tall trees to climb. Church, later called the West Abbotsford Mennonite

Church, met in various homes including the Tilitzkys'. Life for Jacob had its routine of school, with classmates from many backgrounds, and work on the farm of berries, chickens, cows and the annual excursion to the hopyard. Participation in the various church functions was more a matter of routine than from the heart.

Things turned around in his late teens. With a deep conviction that there must be more to life than that which he was experiencing, the adult Jacob turned back to the church. At West Abbotsford, he found acceptance and encouragement in the faith. After thorough baptism instruction, Jacob committed his life to the Lord in baptism (1947). Soon he was called to the various ministries of the church: Sunday school, DVBS, youth, youth choir conductor. Studies at the Bethel Bible Institute over a four-year period, and later, winter sessions at MBBC, CMBC and MBS (now AMBS) and a semester at the Pastoral Institute of BC, augmented his public-school education.

November 22, 1952, dawned bright and clear. From far and near, young and old found their way to the West Abbotsford Mennonite Church. It was the WEDDING CELEBRATION of ERNA DERKSEN and JACOB TILITZKY. They had known each other since 1936 when both came to BC with their parents. Their love for each other blossomed and their gifts and personalities complemented each other in their life and ministry in a beautiful way. The three acres of forest on Queen Street was to be their home for fifty-four years.

On November 22, 1957, the couple was ordained by *Aeltester* H. M. Epp. They assisted in the ministry at West Abbotsford until 1963 when the newly formed Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church called them to serve as pastor couple. Here, through the fullness of God's grace and the good will and love of the people, Erna and JT (as he was affectionately called) received blessing upon blessing over the next forty years—"protocol" wasn't one of JT's priorities. Why do things the same way when they could be done differently!!! It is to the credit of the church that they accepted him for who he was.

JT soon found his niche in the wider Mennonite family:

- 9 years as Chair and 3 years as Coordinator, Conference of Mennonites in BC
- 3 years as Chair, Mennonite Church Canada
- 6 years on Council, General Conference Mennonite Church North America

- 6 years as President, General Conference Mennonite Church North America, highlighted in 1983 by the first ever joint session with the Mennonite Church where Ross Bender & JT placed their respective stones on the ONE FOUNDATION, JESUS CHRIST. As Conference representative to the Mennonite World Conference, JT experienced the dynamics of the worldwide family through the general assemblies in Amsterdam, Curitiba, Strasbourg, Winnipeg and Calcutta [Kolkata], as well as council meetings in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Through his participation in the wider Mennonite family, the Lord opened many service opportunities for JT:
- 1977-1978—*Umsiedler* ministries in Germany, including the establishment of the Wolfsburg Mennonite Church
- 1983—South American ministries: Colombia, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay
- 1985 and 1990—various Mennonite colonies in Mexico
- 1988—Revisiting *Umsiedler* churches in Germany
- 1989 and 1991—Ministries in the former Soviet Union: Siberia, Kazakhstan, Orenburg—to preach the Gospel and minister in regions where many of our people were once so horribly mistreated was an overwhelming experience for JT.

God knew JT wasn't the best retirement material! Yes, he loved his tennis and golf and building model planes, but that would not satisfy—so God gave him interim pastor opportunities: Vancouver First Mennonite, Sherbrooke, Eden, Chilliwack, Bethel Mennonite, Clearbrook Mennonite, Eben-Ezer. The three-year intermittent ministry at Port Hardy was a spiritually stretching experience. These were all experiences that JT would not have wanted to trade for any leisurely retirement. God be praised for all the blessings bestowed and shared with so many.

In January of 2020, Jake and Erna moved to the Mayfair Senior Living and Care community and Erna is so very grateful for their tender love and care. On November 9, 2021, Jake passed into Eternity with Erna by his side. Jake was a blessing to many and will be dearly missed. He is now with his Saviour and Lord.

Remembering Jake Tiltzky

■ By Louise Price

Sunday morning at West Abbotsford Mennonite church. Two rather long-winded ministers had already spoken, and the hands of clock were inching towards twelve. Jake Tiltzky was to be the next speaker—a bit of a relief since he was not known for long sermons. Jake walked to the pulpit. He smiled. “*Die Zeit ist kurz, o Mensch sei weise*” [Time is short, O man, be wise], he said, quoting a song we all knew. Then he smiled again and returned to his chair. I was a child at the time, but it’s a sermon I’ll never forget!

It was only fitting that at his memorial service—a service he had planned himself—the message was delivered in scripture readings and hymns. No sermon.

When Eben-Ezer Church was established in 1963, Jake was called as pastor. He and his wife Erna lived simply in a small cottage surrounded by tall cedars. His sermons reflected his lifestyle. He believed there was a finite amount of money in the world, and those who were rich were taking from the poor. He often spoke in stories that both young and old could understand. His sermons centred on God’s love for his creatures.

Thinking back, I’m surprised at how much freedom Jake allowed us as young people. We organized coffee houses in the church basement on Saturday nights, with candlewax dripping down Chianti wine bottles and guitars strumming, everyone joining in on old folk songs. I think all of us felt that this was our church, we belonged.

Jake was there at many of the milestones of my life. He taught my catechism class and baptized me. When



Jake Tiltzky with Irene Bergen on the occasion of her 90th birthday.

Photo source: Bergen family

Vic and I planned to get married, he invited us to their home for a visit. Although I was one of the first in the church to marry outside of the Mennonite fold, he was completely accepting.

After I left Eben-Ezer to join Langley Mennonite (LMF), Jake remained part of my life. Whenever we’d meet, at weddings, funerals, concerts, there was always a welcoming smile, a handshake. He was there when my dad died, and we’d hoped he’d be able to say a prayer at my mom’s funeral, but he was no longer able.

Jake Tiltzky was, of course, more than the pastor of one church. As noted above, he was moderator of MCBC, Conference minister, and interim pastor in a number of churches, including LMF in our church’s early years. Over the years, he spoke in churches in many countries and continents, but he remained the same person he’d always been, with a warm and gentle smile.

I will miss him.

GENEALOGY COLUMN: THE TIES THAT BIND

Joining and Leaving the Mennonite Community: A Genealogical Perspective

Part 5: Mennonites from Prussian Lithuania in Russia

■ By Glenn H. Penner (gpenner@uoguelph.ca)

West Prussian Mennonites made several attempts to settle in what is present-day Lithuania [1], first in 1711 after the region was seriously depopulated by the plague of 1709 [2]. These Mennonites were expelled by king Friedrich Wilhelm in 1724 and most ended up back in Prussia, where many of them formed the Tragheimerweide congregation [3]. A second attempt was made not long after the expulsion. This group was again expelled



“Ready to go!” Travel cases display at Mennonite Heritage Museum.

Photo collage: Julia M. Toews



Former Mennonite church in Plauschwarren, now a farmhouse (1942). During renovations paintings were discovered in the hallway.

Photo source: Plauschwarren – GenWiki (genealogy.net)

in 1732. A third attempt was made in the early 1740s, after the death of Friedrich Wilhelm and the succession of his much more tolerant son Friedrich (Fredrick the Great). This led to a Mennonite community which lasted for two centuries, until their flight from the advancing Russians at the end of World War II.

This community of Mennonites, and the region where they lived, have been referred to by many names—Plauschwarren (the location of the church and name of the congregation), Tilsit (the name of the nearby city), Memel (the name of the nearby river whose lowland the Mennonites settled), East Prussia (the Prussian province in which these places were located for most of the time Mennonites lived there), Gumbinnen (the name of the East Prussian district) and Lithuania (the current country and commonly-used term for that general area for many centuries).

Much to the chagrin of the local clergy, the Mennonites attracted several local Germans [4]. Some of these family names remained within the congregation, some returned to Prussia during the expulsions, some died out, and some immigrated to the Mennonite colonies in Russia.

In this article I discuss only those family names that eventually ended up in Russia.

Fisch

The brothers Alexander and Jacob Fisch joined the Mennonites in the 1711-24 period. They were originally from the Culm area in Prussia and had been baptized

into the Catholic church as infants [4]. Alexander, Jacob and George Fisch were among those expelled in 1724 [3a]. This family did not return to Lithuania and appears to have settled in the Thiensdorf congregation. The Thiensdorf Mennonite Church registers record the death of Johann Fisch, age 67, on 3 Aug. 1797 in Thoyerichthof (born about 1730) [5]. He is found in this village in the 1776 census of Mennonites in West Prussia, together with his wife and daughter [6]. The 1789 census of Mennonite landowners in West Prussia shows that he owned 20 Morgen of land in Thoyerichthof [7]. He appears to have had two known sons: Johann and Cornelius. Johann's son Johann married Catharina Peters in 1820 [5] and immigrated to the Molotschna colony in 1843 [8]. He had two known sons, Heinrich and Johann. Nothing is known about son Johann. Descendants of son Heinrich stayed in Russia and later were found in Kazakhstan [9]. It is unknown where they are now.

Niebuhr

Christoph Niebuhr and his family were also expelled in 1724 [3a]. He ended up in Reimerswald, West Prussia, where he died on Apr. 9, 1766, at the age of 80 years [10]. His grandson Jacob (1766-1835; GM#12374) immigrated to the Chortitza colony around 1796-97 [11]. To my knowledge all Niebuhrs and Neubauers of Mennonite background are descended from Jacob.

Schapansky

Matthies Schapansky, the son of Matthies Zepansky, was born in the city of Elbing to Lutheran parents around 1670 [4]. In 1696 he married the Mennonite Catharina, daughter of Claas Jantzen of Wengeln in the Klein Werder [12]. This was a Lutheran marriage. They had several children together. These children were born and christened Lutheran [4, 12]. The family moved to Lithuania around 1714. By 1722, his 6 children had become Mennonites. They were expelled from Lithuania in 1724. They moved back to the Klein Werder region and joined the Frisian Mennonite congregation of Thiensdorf. It was here that one of his grandsons, David, was born sometime between 1725 and 1731 [13]. David Schapansky was the common ancestor of all Mennonite Schapanskys. His son, David, immigrated to the Chortitza colony in 1793 [14]. A grandson Hermann also immigrated there in 1818 [15].

Wichert

Johann Wichert was born around 1697 in Podwitz near Culm in Prussia to Lutheran parents. He came to Lithuania around 1713 with the Mennonite Tobias Sperling. He became a Mennonite sometime before 1722 [4]. He and his family were expelled in 1724 and ended up back in the Culm area (the Schoensee congregation) [3a]. The Wichert name became rather common within the Schoensee congregation, but remained almost unknown elsewhere among the West Prussian Mennonites [16]. A descendant, Heinrich Wichert (b. 1791; GM#60313) immigrated to Russia in 1822. Some of Heinrich's descendants immigrated to Saskatchewan in the 1920s. Another Schoensee Wichert, Cornelius (1821-1874; GM#448875), immigrated to Russia in 1870. His grandson Heinrich (1894-1963; GM#469922) immigrated to Ontario in 1926.

Falk

The first Mennonite record of a Falk appears in the Lithuanian congregation. The Falks seem to have been part of the last, and successful, Mennonite community in Prussian Lithuania. Although this group started settling in the 1740s, there are very few records available before the church registers were started in 1769 [17]. By the 1770s there were two Falk families in the congregation: those of David Falk and Johann Falk. Johann Falk

had no known children. David Falk's son David immigrated to Schoenwiese, in the Chortitza colony, in 1793 [15]. He is the ancestor of all Mennonite Falks.

Several other new surnames were introduced into the Mennonite community in Lithuania. These include Becher, Gerban, Hill, Guhr. These surnames remained in Prussia. Some, like Hill and Gerban, went extinct within the Mennonite community.

The next two instalments of this series will discuss those Mennonites who, during the early years in Russia, left the Mennonite church.

Notes

1. For historical information on this Mennonite community see: a) the GAMEO article <https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Lithuania> and b) Erwin Wittenberg and Manuel Janz, "Mennonite Settlers in Prussian Lithuania." *Preservings*, 2020, No. 40, pp. 19-26.
2. Glenn H. Penner. "The Great Plague of 1709." *Preservings*, 2020, No. 40, pp. 43-46.
3. For my transcription of the list of Mennonites expelled from Prussian Lithuania see: "Mennonites Expelled from Lithuania in 1724." mennonitegenealogy.com b) also see [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Tragheimerweide_\(Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Tragheimerweide_(Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland))
4. In 1722 the Prussian government investigated, and a report can be found in the Berlin archives: XX. HA; Abt. 7, EM 38d, Nr. 29. Detailed information on some of those who had joined the Mennonites or were planning to do so, appears in the report. I would like to thank Erwin Wittenberg and Manuel Janz, both from Germany, for a copy of the transcription of the report.

Chamber Pot Tales

Story No. 1

■ By Helga Rempel

In Paraguay, we lived in village #13, or Kirchheim, which was several kilometres away from the centre of the Volendam Colony. Village #5, Tiefenbrunn, was the centre of the colony, and all the important offices, the hospital, cooperative (store), post office, high school, etc., were in that village. We mostly raised our own produce, as well as eggs, milk, and pork, but flour, sugar, etc., we bought at the store. In the early years we also bought meat and eggs at the store. Staple foods were shipped to the colony from Asunción by boat and wagons. People would know when a shipment arrived and would line up to receive their allotted food items. One day *Vati* was there and they had just received honey; you had to bring your own containers to carry home

your purchase. *Vati* had not known about the honey so had no container along. He looked around to see what he could find—ah, then he saw a chamber pot, just the item to carry home filled with honey! We were overjoyed to receive a sweet treat.

The pot was a welcome item and used by the younger siblings. In April 1955 we emigrated to Canada. The pot was packed in a travel bag and I was in charge to see that it was not lost. At that time, we were a family of nine, one-year-old Peter being the youngest. Erich, two years old, was always "my boy," so while *Mutti* carried Peter, I looked after Erich. Gerhard was four years old, Margarete was five, and Helene, seven—she was a little chatterbox. When we took the first plane in Asunción, an elderly couple was travelling with us. The

husband told *Vati* that his wife was afraid of flying, and could *Vati* please have one of his “many” children sit with them to distract his wife. Guess what—*Lenchen* (Helene) was chosen, and shortened the trip considerably for that couple.

The pot was used on the plane, in the hotels, at the airport. As we disembarked at a large airport, the bag with the pot was left on the plane by Helga. We noticed the missing item when we were in the terminal, where we were in need of it. It was my responsibility, so I brazenly walked back out on the tarmac thinking I would climb back into the plane (there were many, but I thought I knew which one!!!). Soon I was grabbed by

a security guard and escorted back into the terminal. A translator was found and I told my tale of the “Lost Chamber Pot.” I was anxious that it should be found. We had to board our connecting flight without the chamber pot. We were already buckled in, the doors had been closed, and the plane was already taxiing, when someone came running with an item in their hand. They stopped the plane, opened the door, and handed in our “missing chamber pot.” What a relief!

That pot was still in use in Winnipeg, on Lipton Street, as well as on Strathcona Street. Where did it end up?

Helga Rempel volunteers at the Mennonite Historical Society of BC.

Story No. 2

■ By Louise Bergen Price

While enroute to Canada from Germany after World War II, Mom wasn’t sure how on earth she’d be able to wash and dry diapers on the ship and train ride to Canada, so she potty-trained me early—by one year old! And that chamber pot travelled all the way from Austria to Winnipeg, where we had an unexpected stop when one of Dad’s uncles invited us to stay with them for a few days, before we proceeded to Yarrow via the Mission station. Somehow, in the kerfuffle, the pot was lost. I guess Mom had to really “toilet train” me the rest of the way. That chamber pot was soon replaced by another enamelled one that I’ve used for a flower pot.



“Not honey, but flowers.”

Photo credit: Louise Bergen Price

I probably wouldn’t use it to carry honey at this point, but then, I’m not desperate.

BOOK REVIEWS

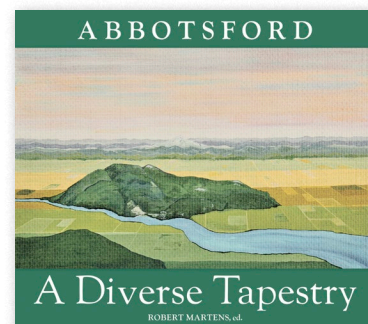
Abbotsford: A Diverse Tapestry. Ed. by Robert Martens. Abbotsford Historical Book Committee: Abbotsford, 2021. 286 pp.

■ Reviewed by Louise Bergen Price

Abbotsford: A Diverse Tapestry, published in 2021 in the midst of the pandemic, is a book with a difference. Instead of only celebrating the lives of important leaders, the stories focus on the various separate communities that, in coming together, have built “something greater than the sum of its parts” (v). To accomplish this end, editor Robert Martens and the Book Committee collected stories and articles by an array of authors that reflect the diversity of this

community. Also included are archival photographs and maps.

The book begins, as it should, with a history of the Indigenous communities settled around Sumas Lake and the colonization of the area. Once five times the size of Cultus Lake, the shallow lake and surrounding flatlands provided inhabitants with fish, food plants and wildlife. For European settlers, the shallow lake with its yearly flood and abundant mosquitos were a liability, especially when spring



floods washed out roads and railways. The result was a massive project in the 1920s that drained the lake, producing thousands of acres of top-quality farmland, yet undertaken without any meaningful consultation with Indigenous peoples. As Grand Chief Les Ned remarked, “What really gets me, they drained that whole lake and Sumas Band never got one inch of that” (25). Chapter 7 ends with a call to action: “As society moves toward reconciliation and works to remedy past wrongs, we will need to consider what compensation is needed to balance the historic scales” (45).

In chapters 8 to 40, we learn about the arrival of immigrant and refugee groups to the area. Dr. Satwinder Kaur Bains describes Sikh migration and history as well as the story of the Gur Sikh Temple. David F. Loewen provides an extensive overview of Mennonite integration into the broader community from the early 1930s, when the first immigrants began to farm an area known as “Poverty Flats,” to the present day. David Giesbrecht discusses how the Japanese community suddenly became “enemy aliens” during World War II, and John H. Redekop describes the arrival of the Hungarian refugees after the uprising in 1956.

Mabel Paetkau, then coordinator of MCC’s Refugee Sponsorship Program for BC, tells how the aftermath of the Vietnam War (1955-1975) brought an influx of refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia while other refugees and immigrants arrived from Guatemala, El Salvador, Sri Lanka and Poland, many sponsored by local families and groups. More recently, Abbotsford has been enriched by new arrivals from Iraq and Syria.

Chapters in this section also explore the growth of various services and institutions such as Abbotsford Community Services (now Archway), the University of the Fraser Valley, and the new Hospital and Cancer

Clinic. Issues discussed include Abbotsford’s response to the homeless situation, the growing diversity of the population, and the flourishing arts community. In Chapter 42, “Black Connections-Abbotsford,” a local group that began as a student association at the University of the Fraser Valley, seeks to raise awareness of systemic patterns of racism.

Woven through these chapters are stories about the people who make our community special, from early pioneers such as Edward Barrow and Charles Hill-Tout to Christine Lamb, Patricia Ross, Walter Paetkau, Mayor Henry Braun, Dr. Andy Sidhu and many others. Some of the names are well-known in the community, others relatively unknown.

Chapter 41 brings the reader full circle as John Vissers describes Abbotsford’s environmental history: the geological features brought about by the Ice Age, and the arrival of the early inhabitants, the Stó:lō, and their descendants, the Semá:th and Matsqui Peoples. Vissers details how the draining of the lake and the wetlands along the Fraser River impacted the environment and deprived Indigenous People of their traditional food sources. Other topics discussed are the Sumas Energy 2 protests, waste reduction efforts, water conservation, climate change, and the Trans-Mountain Pipeline. Several NGOs were instrumental in changing local attitudes towards the environment, among them the Backyard Habitat program begun by Sylvia Pincott.

Abbotsford: A Diverse Tapestry is not a book to be read at one sitting but one that the reader will come to time and again to be inspired by stories of success while challenged to work towards righting past injustices. The book is a must for local school libraries, and a great resource for anyone interested in our community.

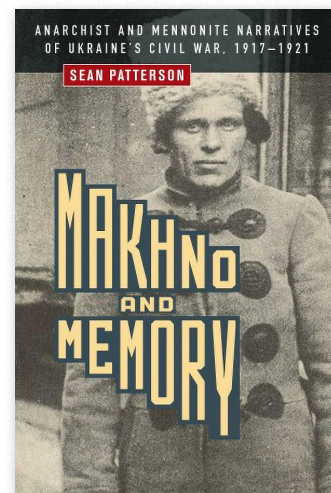
Sean Patterson. *Makhno and Memory: Anarchist and Mennonite Narratives of Ukraine’s Civil War, 1917-1921.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020. 199 pp.

■ Reviewed by Robert Martens

“Any army, of whatever kind, is evil, and even in a free and popular army, composed of volunteers and dedicated to the defence of a noble cause, is by its very nature a danger.... With an imperceptible and therefore all the more dangerous gradualness, it becomes a collection of idlers, who acquire anti-social,

authoritarian and even dictatorial leanings, who acquire also a taste for violence as a thing in itself...” (67).

These sentences might have been written by a



Mennonite, but they were not. This passage, quoted by Sean Patterson in his book, *Makhno and Memory*, is in fact an extract from the writings of Volin, an anarchist who allied himself with Nestor Makhno in the Ukrainian civil war that followed the Bolshevik Revolution. The situation in Ukraine, writes Patterson, was more complex than depicted in the histories of either Mennonites or Makhnovists. Makhno—the “scourge of God” according to some Mennonites—was also a more complicated figure than Mennonite narratives might suggest. But he was also not the idealized revolutionary profiled in anarchist writings, in which his atrocities are almost universally denied—and in which Mennonites are not once mentioned.

After Russia withdrew from World War I, Ukraine was granted its independence, but only under the authority of occupying Austro-German troops. Mennonites welcomed the advancing German-speaking soldiers, hoping they would provide respite from the endemic crime of the preceding years. But Ukrainians rose up in anger, killing thousands of the occupying troops, who subsequently withdrew. A bewildering number of armies hoping to establish dominance either invaded or rose up within Ukraine, and the civil war was fought on multiple fronts. Nestor Makhno’s Black Terror was among them. Mennonite colonies suffered torture, rape and murder at the hands of his troops, especially in 1919. Makhno himself, however, seemed to be rarely at the scene of massacre. Victor Peters has written that “[t]here were no murders whenever Makhno was present” (qtd in 107).

And yet he unleashed terror. Who was this man, reportedly an enigma even to his own friends?

Sean Patterson suggests that histories are constructions, regardless of the source. In his book he compares Makhnovist and Mennonite narratives of the civil war years, and suggests that we need to regard those narratives as objectively as possible, even to “merge” them to create a clearer picture of the time.

In the book’s first section, “Through Makhnovist Eyes,” the author looks at Makhnovist sources; these include Makhno’s memoir and the diary of Halyna Kuzmenko, his wife. Nestor Makhno, born in the village of Huliaipole, never failed to call his mother country “Ukraine,” which was known to Mennonites of the time as “South Russia”; the perspectives of opposing worldviews is evident even in the name of the country.

Huliaipole was situated near the Schönfeld colony, where some of the richest Mennonites and German-speaking settlers in Russia lived a lifestyle entirely unattainable by the locals. Makhno worked for a time on the Janzen estate. His experiences there were not all bad—Makhno played in childhood with the Janzen boys—but condescending, sometimes brutal, treatment pushed him towards an ideology of revolution. (Years later, Makhno would spare the lives of members of the Janzen family.) He was imprisoned by Russian authorities for serious crimes and sentenced to death. His sentence, however, was commuted due to his youth, and several years later, in 1917, he left prison under a Bolshevik amnesty.

Makhno writes in his memoir that he was welcomed back to Huliaipole with “reverence,” as “the one who rose from the dead” (51). He immediately organized anarchist resistance, with the stated objective of creating a just and equitable society. The local estates were soon under attack. Makhno writes that he told his men, “... do not harm in any way, either by word or gesture, the bourgeoisie themselves.... I consider it appropriate to say to all the comrades setting out to disarm the bourgeoisie they must not get carried away and be involved in pillaging” (qtd in 53). One might suspect that Makhno is not being entirely honest here, but he did direct violence, in the beginning at least, against landowners only, and allegedly hoped to bring them into a new internationalist egalitarian society by stripping away their possessions and touching their conscience.

His followers, more often than not, ignored Makhno’s idealistic verbiage. A Mennonite eyewitness would seem to confirm this. In the Mennonite town of Halbstadt, Jacob Toews listened to Makhno deliver an hour-long speech in which the anarchist leader emphasized the principles of “peace and justice.” Toews writes that Makhno’s troops “did not go by what their leader promised” (23). Despite Makhno’s frustration with the lack of discipline, punishment was rarely meted out; he kept his men on a very long leash, and sometimes the leash seemed to vanish altogether. Consequently, the Makhnovists, often seriously drunk, seemed to pillage, extort, and murder at will. And their leader seemed increasingly content to let loose the dogs of war. He was an unstable character, at one time nearly committing suicide, and Patterson writes that he may have been “driven to his end by an unending civil war

and thoroughly desensitized to extreme levels of violence” (71).

In the second section of his book, “Through Mennonite Eyes,” Patterson turns to the perspective of Mennonites through such sources as Victor Peters, Gerhard Lohrenz, Dietrich Neufeld, and the Russian Mennonite newspaper, *Die Friedensstimme*. It might shock Mennonites, who know all too well the stories of Makhnovist atrocities, that many contemporary anarchists and academics are sympathetic to Nestor Makhno. But the Mennonite story might be re-examined as well, writes Patterson. Upon Catherine the Great’s invitation, Mennonites settled on “empty land” previously inhabited by Cossacks and nomadic Tatars. They were therefore aligned with imperial Russia, and the inhabitants of Ukraine largely regarded them as foreign settlers. Then, when the number of landless swelled among them, Mennonites colonized new settlements, buying land from financially distressed estate owners, thus depriving peasants of land rental opportunities. Finally, during their last years of life in Russia, Mennonites were subjected to anti-German racism, fanned by a corrupt Russian elite wanting to deflect attention from their own sins. It did not help the Mennonite cause when they welcomed occupying Austro-German troops in 1918, and indulged, some of them, in retaliation against Ukrainian peasants who had stolen their possessions in the post-revolutionary chaos.

And then hell descended upon the Mennonite colonies in the form of Makhno’s Black Terror. Mennonite pacifist sources of the time, writes Patterson, condemn the inbred injustice of Russian Mennonite colonies, and sometimes speak of Nestor Makhno as the instrument of God’s wrath. The Mennonite *Selbstschutz*, defence forces formed to drive back “bandits” such as the Makhnovists, remain even today a point of controversy. Unlike the defence troops in other historical narratives, the *Selbstschutz* was never draped by Mennonites in honour and glory. It has been regarded by Mennonites as, at best, a necessary evil. And the evil Mennonite colonies faced was great indeed.

Patterson ends his book with the events leading up to the massacre of Mennonites at Eichenfeld, Jasykowo colony. German troops had committed atrocities there, and so had such *Selbstschutzler* as Peter van Kampen, a Mennonite murderer and thug. But the picture is very



Makhno (bottom row, third from right) and his lieutenants, Berdyansk, 1919.

Photo source: Wikipedia, public domain.

complex. Eichenfelders had friends among neighbouring Ukrainians, who warned them that Makhno’s men were on the way. They also had enemies, and the evidence indicates that many of the worst atrocities in the massacre were committed by local Ukrainians with a grudge.

Makhno, perhaps half-heartedly, had attempted to establish order among his troops, issuing “an appeal to his troops to immediately halt all drinking, looting, and violence against civilians...” (124). Yet, a short time later, he wrote a citizens’ address in an anarchist paper: “The bourgeoisie is all laughs as it sees our failures on certain fronts.... Death to the bourgeoisie! Death to all their minions! Long live the liberation of the working class!” (qtd in 129) The statement inflamed his followers, and the Eichenfeld massacre followed.

“Lynch law” became the norm (125). Even the smallest of constraints was eventually abandoned. In the case of Eichenfeld, landowners had been sought out and murdered, but others were usually left unmolested. In following days, that was no longer the case: in Sagraadowka, 206 Mennonites were killed in three days, women and children among them: “In an inversion of the original revolutionary impulse for justice, terror now became an end in itself, with the rhetoric of justice a convenient handmaiden for the pursuit of wholesale slaughter” (143).

Patterson’s superb history ends with a meditation on reconciliation. “Unfortunately, it is often only in a state of mutual brokenness that intractable enemies are able to rehumanize each other” (151). Patterson quotes a Makhnovist who is wrestling with his participation in brutality: “The most ferocious beast could not have

acted worse; but we never realized what we did.... If there had been someone amongst us at those moments to have spoken a few, quiet reasonable words to calm us, it might have been different! I do not know what possesses me (and others will tell you the same) but in those moments of bloodshed there is neither pity, nor thought of consequences, but only the thirst for blood, and still more blood; although now I can speak, and think and reason" (151).

Ralph Friesen. *Dad, God, and Me: Remembering a Mennonite Pastor and His Wayward Son*. Victoria: Friesen Press, 2019. 275 pp.

■ Reviewed by Robert Martens

In 2007, Ralph Friesen and his wife were dining at their favourite Nelson restaurant when memories of his father, Peter, unexpectedly came flooding back. He began to weep. "In my adolescence, after Dad's stroke, I was embarrassed by him. He tried to be of good cheer, despite the horrendous blow that had slammed his body and brain with such force.... He was a brave man, far braver than I ever realized, and I had failed him. Understanding this for the first time, I wept that August morning" (2).

Ralph Friesen's relationship with his Kleine Gemeinde minister father had always been strained. Emotions were repressed, he writes, such that overt demonstrations of parental love became a rare thing. Influenced, perhaps, by his degree in marriage and family therapy, in this memoir Friesen observes the father/son connection with an analyst's eye. A genuine relationship with his father, he writes, was impossible when feelings were not expressed. Friesen admits that this kind of parenting was widespread in mainstream North American society before the cultural upheavals of the last half of the twentieth century. Among Mennonites, however, immersed as they were in theology, a cold, unforgiving father could translate into ideas of a cold, unforgiving God. And so Ralph Friesen resisted the church and its teachings, especially after his father placed him in the way of a "rabid pack of evangelizers" (10). Ralph as an adolescent continued to love his father but now considered him a "beloved enemy."

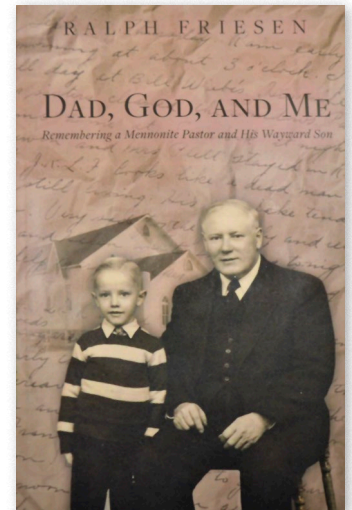
Peter D. Friesen was born in 1902, a sickly child who barely survived. The town in which he was raised, Steinbach, was dominated by Friesens. The times were hard indeed when Peter was born. Miscarriages and

Reconciliation between inveterate enemies is difficult but not impossible. During the famine and the typhus outbreak between 1920 and 1922, many Mennonites tended to hungry or sick former Makhnovists. They did so in a spirit of grace.

Makhno and Memory is available online and accessible in the MHSBC library.

child deaths were common, and feeding and clothing the family, a constant challenge. Open emotion might not have been an option when sheer endurance was what was needed. Nevertheless, as a young man Peter discovered the joys of "sinful" entertainment such as the movies. He was single until relatively late, marrying Kansan Margaret Rempel, the love of his life, in 1931. He was baptized late as well, after finally making a serious "decision for Christ" at an evangelistic meeting. Evangelicalism and the doctrine that souls needed saving had only recently entered the Kleine Gemeinde consciousness. The idea of conversion, writes Friesen, was a contradiction of traditional Kleine Gemeinde teaching, which simply counselled a good life and trust in God's mercy.

Conservative Mennonites, Ralph Friesen points out, left Canada en masse for Mexico in the 1920s, leaving those Mennonites who remained wide open to a growing surge in evangelical activity. The Kleine Gemeinde, originally a conservative breakaway group in Russia, changed its name to Evangelical Mennonite Church, and then Evangelical Mennonite Conference, in the mid-twentieth century. Peter D. Friesen and his son grew up during this time of dissension and change. Peter made a living as a watchmaker and as a bookseller—running the Evangel Bookstore—and clearly demonstrated entrepreneurial skills, but considered money useful only if pledged to the service of God. He served as an unpaid minister for twenty-one years. As such, he



was compelled to mediate between traditionalists and “progressive” evangelicals. Peter Friesen was a man of tradition in his support of the peace principle, but was a “modernist” in his passion for saving souls.

“Dad was schooled in the Stoic style of Mennonite males,” writes Friesen. “Most of the time we had very little information about his feelings” (127). The family, he says, drew apart. “I learned not to expect his individual attention, and was unaware that I even wanted it” (138). Discipline could be harsh. Young Ralph “wondered about this God who coldly insisted on punishment, regardless of my pleas” (147). His father, Ralph Friesen believes, had suffered so many losses in his life that he suppressed his grief, resulting in anger or emotional distancing.

And yet, to the author’s surprise, Peter D. Friesen was frequently loved by the people among whom he worked and lived. He had a compelling sense of empathy with those in his community. “Through inner and spiritual fellowship,” he wrote in a local publication, “we can at times be so closely tied to our neighbour that we have the sense of having a glimpse into the soul of the other” (190). When author Ralph Friesen asked others for impressions of his father, Peter D. was described variously as a great man, kind, non-judgmental, under-appreciated, and accepting. One witness, Wilma Doerksen,

commented, “He was a bridge between the old and the new in the church. He had to find a way between.... I think it was hard on him, and it may have been why he had a stroke” (qtd. in 186).

The debilitating stroke happened in 1958, when Peter Friesen was only fifty-six years old. He would live another seven years as an invalid. The great suffering he had experienced in his early years had returned, and he bore it, for the most part, courageously. Typically for the time, no one offered him any hope of recovery; the idea was that reality must be looked in the face. The chapter dealing with the stroke is painful reading. “Now, for the first time in our family history,” Ralph Friesen writes, “Dad would be home with us every day. But I had already decided that the damaged man in the wheelchair was not my father” (215). Peter D. Friesen was “freed from the pain-body” in 1965.

The book concludes with Ralph Friesen’s account of his education, marriage, and assorted careers. He is among half the siblings in his family who never returned to the church. “If this were a conventional ‘coming home’ story, I would tell you that, at last, I came to accept my father’s religion and took it for my own.... It hasn’t turned out that way. In my own way, though, I believe I am on my journey home” (269).

EVENT REPORTS

Book Launch. Louise Bergen Price, *The Canada Coat*. Victoria: First Choice Books, 2021. 2 pm, January 29, 2022, Zoom webinar.

■ Reported by Robert Martens

In his introduction to author Louise Bergen Price, Museum Director Richard Thiessen remarked on the difficult choice of whether to stage an in-person book launch or to do it online. *The Canada Coat*, an “adolescent novel” that will speak to adults as well, is the first publication of the Mennonite Heritage Museum, and that made the choice all the harder. Since so many were still reluctant to join crowds, a Zoom launch seemed the best option. And one positive of this online launch, Thiessen observed, is that individuals were attending from as far away as Germany and Belgium.

The novel is an immersive experience, telling the story of Bergen Price’s family who lived through the horrors

of the Stalinist era in the Soviet Union. It is, nevertheless, not a memoir, but a fictionalized retelling. At the book launch, Bergen Price recalled that she

was gardening during a pregnancy in the 1970s, and that her mother joined her and told her of her experiences in Soviet Ukraine. Her parents had previously divulged very little of their past. The family had endured famine, arrests, exile, and the refugee trek to western Europe during World War II. Perhaps, said Bergen Price, it was the imminent birth of her first grandchild that motivated her mother to break the silence.



Louise Bergen Price

Photo credit: Vic Price

The problem, remarked Bergen Price, was “writing a fiction but keeping it true.” Truth and fact, she said, are not necessarily the same. Her mother, after repeated questioning, had finally told her that she had

■ Reported by Robert Martens

Mennonites can tell countless stories of their immigrant and refugee forebears, so the show was a natural fit as a presentation of MHSBC. And the always-professional cast delivered. Allen des Noyers, Jennifer Daigle and Haley Allen performed a non-stop performance that drew rounds of laughter and a few tears from the sold-out audiences. At the heart of the musical is compassion: “I don’t want to be rich, I just want to be free,” runs the line of one of the most memorable tunes. But there was broad comedy too: when Allen des Noyer’s immigration officer character enlists for battle in World War II, he’s asked, “What if the Nazis kill you?” “Better than the bureaucrats,” he replies.

The book launch was interspersed with vivid family photos from the Soviet era and from return trips to Ukraine many years later. After Bergen Price read the opening passages of the novel, Museum Educator Jenny Bergen introduced an educational toolkit designed for young students: *Canada Coat: Museum in a Box*. It will be made available to schools upon request.



After the stage was cleared, Jim Martens and Selma Hooge (the latter at the matinee only) told some powerful, and funny, immigrant/refugee stories.

Two sponsors, Mennonite Central Committee and Multicultural and Immigrant Integration Services, a branch of Archway Community Services, stepped up to the plate to help stage the show.

Canadiana Musical Theatre Company can be accessed online at canadianamusical.com.

Thank you to
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our MHSBC
Events
Committee!

Cheryl Isaac, Chair
Richard Thiessen
Linda Klassen
Ingrid Epp
Jennifer Martens

Thank you to
our MHSBC
Volunteers for
Pier 21!

Hilda de Haan
Mary Ann Quiring
Jenny Bergen
Irmgard Thiessen
Elmer Wiens
Robert Martens
Jim Martens
Ralph Wiens

Book Launch. Andrew Unger. *Once Removed*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2020; and *The Best of the Bonnet*. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2021. April 2, 2022, Mennonite Heritage Museum.

■ Reported by Robert Martens

Satirist Andrew Unger touched down in Abbotsford—or “Basically Vancouver,” as described in a *Daily Bonnet* posting—to launch two publications before a packed house. This broke the pandemic pattern, the author noted, of relatively unsatisfying Zoom sessions over the last few years.

Museum Director Richard Thiessen introduced Unger as a direct descendant of Klaas Reimer, initiator of the Kleine Gemeinde, and as his own seventh cousin, once removed. Unger’s *Daily Bonnet* has been phenomenally successful, with over one million website hits, and is read globally, with the likely exceptions, said Unger with his trademark grin, of North Korea and Iran.

Unger opened with a reading from his novel, *Once Removed*. The story grew, he said, out of his “interest in the preservation of history.” He then turned to *The Best of the Bonnet*, a compilation of his *Daily Bonnet* columns, pointing out that the book has a fake introduction but a real afterword, and an actual (though tongue-in-cheek) glossary of Plautdietsch terms. Unger’s forte is satire, gentle mockery of Mennonite mores and folkways, and sometimes of non-Mennonite ways as well. He doesn’t target individuals: “If I say your name, it’s not you”—pause and smile—“but it could be you.”

In the Q&A session, Unger said that his parents are both supportive. His father is a retired minister. Normally, he writes a column every day but also stockpiles articles for future use. As for inspiration, he is “literally never consciously watching people and taking notes.” Instead, he waits for ideas to come to him; in



Andrew Unger with his new book *The Best of the Bonnet* at his book launch at MHM.

Photo credit: Wendie Nickel

a sense, he is “everything.” Has he ever been criticized for crossing a line? “For myself, none of this is edgy,” he said, but occasionally he decides not to publish what he has written. Most complaints from readers arrived in the first months of *Daily Bonnet*, when they may not have been aware that the postings were satire.

Unger’s material has changed since the column first appeared in 2016. During the first couple of years, he satirized Mennonite stereotypes but that subject matter eventually ran a little dry. He now focuses more on current events. His name has “changed” too. Originally, he published as Andrew Bergman for reasons of privacy, but also in honour of his mother—Bergman was her unmarried name—and of his Grandfather Bergman, an “amateur poet.” His pen name became too much of a hassle because of, for example, a cheque written out to Andrew Bergman, and hence uncashable—a Mennonite nightmare.

Lineups to purchase Unger’s books were long, in spite of Unger’s advice that customers might just “wait till they’re twenty-five cents at MCC.”

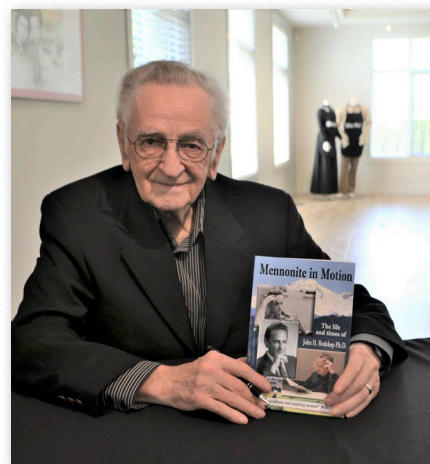
Book Launch. John Redekop, *Mennonite in Motion: The life and times of John H. Redekop*. Abbotsford: Fraser River Books, 2022. 2 pm, Mennonite Heritage Museum, April 23, 2022

■ Reported by Robert Martens

John Redekop’s memoir had already launched earlier in the day at House of James in Abbotsford, yet the room was packed for a second launch, this time at the Museum. It was testimony to Redekop’s prestige in the Mennonite

community. Most attendees were elderly, members of the author’s generation, and likely heavily Mennonite Brethren. Their reception was warm and attentive.

As book launches go, this one was rather elaborate,



John Redekop displaying his new book *Mennonite in Motion* at the book launch. Photo credit: Julia M. Toews

featuring an introduction and closing by long-time pastor Herb Neufeld, and four performances by a male quartet. The songs, chosen by Redekop, related in some way to “God’s faithfulness,” according to the spokesperson for the quartet. Well sung, and incidentally, to a musician’s ear, all in three/four time.

Between numbers, Redekop read from his book which, he emphasized, is more than a memoir—it is also an account of divine direction. The reading over,

the crowd dispersed for conversation and refreshments. Not before, however, Redekop challenged the audience to decipher several samples of letters written to him in tiny, illegible script, and in an unidentified foreign tongue. He has received dozens of these letters over the years, apparently sent from Oregon and California.

A review of *Mennonite in Motion* will appear in a future issue.

Tribute to Esther Epp Harder (1938–2021)

■ By Edwin Lenzmann and Elmer Wiens

Esther was an active, productive researcher of the history of Yarrow and Chilliwack, where she lived most of her life. Her article, “Rites of Dying, Death, and Burial,” leads off the Yarrow Research Committee’s essay collection, *Village of Unsettled Yearnings*. She died September 7, 2021.

Many tributes were posted to Esther’s Facebook page after her passing in 2021:

Allison Kaye wrote, “I met Esther in our work on the Board of the Chilliwack Museum and Archives. She had a deep knowledge of Yarrow, Greendale, and the founding families in those communities. Esther was a kind and gentle soul. She will be missed. Rest In Peace, lovely Esther.”

Carmie Devling wrote, “Esther was so very special. She was the ‘glue’ for our CSSS [Chilliwack Senior Secondary School] class of ’57, keeping us connected. She spent countless hours volunteering at the Chilliwack Museum and contributed to the history of Yarrow. She was a quiet, wonderful example of how we should live our lives.”

Lilian Macauley wrote, “Oh, I am so sorry to hear this. She was my sis-in-law, married to my brother Alvin. Living in Texas, it was difficult for us to visit, but I think she will get a crown in glory for her loving care of Alvin when he was disabled. I did not know she was so ill, but know she was well taken care of by her family during her illness.”



Esther & Alvin Harder

Photo credit: Elmer Wiens

Esther worked as a medical office assistant in Vedder Crossing. After retiring, she shared these skills at the University College of the Fraser Valley, and later taught computer courses at its ElderCollege. Esther was the co-author and co-editor of the *Yarrow’s Pioneers and Settlers* website with Edwin Lenzmann and Elmer Wiens, with whom she exchanged many emails during the fifteen years of the site’s conception and construction. Her poem provides the theme of our web site:

*Dandelions are as
prolific in Yarrow as
the Yarrow flower
but the seeds of the Dandelion,
just as the people who were born,
or lived, or just passed through Yarrow,
proliferate everywhere, settle and take root,
popping up as flowers where one least expects them.*

Esther, the eldest daughter of Elizabeth and George Epp, was born and grew up in Yarrow. In 1959, the Epp family moved to Greendale, where Esther and Alvin Harder lived with their children after they were married in 1960. She attended elementary school in Yarrow, and junior and senior high school in Chilliwack.

We enjoyed working with Esther and will miss her contributions and expertise.



"School drawing exercise"
by Jacob Wiens. Molotschna Colony,
1837. Peter J. Braun Archives

"School drawing exercise"
by Heinrich Willms,
Molotschna Colony, 1837.
Peter J. Braun Archives



Photo credit: Julia M. Toews, 2010, from an exhibit from this collection presented to the Mennonite Heritage Tour Cruise in Ukraine.

Peter J. Braun (1880–1933) was an outstanding educator among the Russian Mennonites. In 1917, when the Russian monarchy collapsed, the General Conference of the Mennonite Congregations in Russia endorsed his proposal for the establishment of a central archive for the Mennonite community in which he would collect, cull, and organize existing historical materials. This large archive, containing material from 1803–1920, was eventually seized by the Soviet

authorities, then transferred to the Odessa Regional Archives, and was considered lost. But the records were discovered by western scholars in 1990. It contains the Molotschna Mennonite school records, the archives of the Agricultural Society in Molotschna, the papers of Johann Cornies, forestry service records, and much more. The archives have been digitized and brought to Canada. Hopefully the archive remains safely stored in the Odessa Archives during this present troubled time.

Roots & Branches

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Your contributions are needed to further this work! All donations will be receipted for

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The Mennonite Heritage Museum has reopened. The Mennonite Historical Society, due to the COVID pandemic, is open by appointment only.