

# Mennonite Historical Society of BC Newsletter

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The MHS Newsletter is produced periodically to inform and promote the work of the BC Historical Society. It is mailed to people who contribute \$25 or more to the work of the Society.

Editorial Committee:  
Henry Neufeld, Louise Price and Helen Rose Pauls. Contributions are welcome.

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WHAT WE HAVE  
HEARD AND  
KNOWN, WE WILL  
TELL THE NEXT  
GENERATION.  
Ps. 78

## Annual Fundraising Banquet & Lecture Russian Mennonite Women confront Stalinism

What happened to Russian Mennonite women when their men were arrested, exiled or shot in the 1930's, when they were subjected to collective farm labour, when there was no food for their children, when the last churches were closed by 1935, when they were exiled to Siberia and Central Asia in 1941, when they were drafted into the work army in 1943?

Dr. John B. Toews will discuss these topics at the Fundraising banquet Saturday, October 14, 2000 at Garden Park Tower. Tickets are \$15. To reserve your tickets, please call (604) 853-6177



Justine Sawatzky and her children - Jakob, Irene, Hans and Katie. Taken in Yugoslavia 1944.

## Book Launch and Concert

Authors John B. Toews, *The Diaries of David Epp*; Harry Loewen, *Road to Freedom*; and John J. Krahn, *Our Family Story* will be launching their new books at a concert and book signing evening. Also featured will be two musical groups, the Jubilee Singers conducted by Wilmer Neufeld and the Fast Family Singers. In addition, special guest pianist Kathryn Koslowsky will be performing her recital pieces.

### Book Launch and Concert

November 3, 2000, 7:30pm.  
at South Abbotsford MB Church  
32424 Huntingdon Road.

admission free;  
donations gratefully accepted.



## Book Launch evening November 3, 2000.

by Helen Rose Pauls

Books by authors Harry Loewen, John B. Toews, and John Krahn will be available for sale during the intermission and following the program.

*Road to Freedom-Mennonites Escape the Land of Suffering* is edited by Harry Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, and is a memorial to the painful past of Mennonite refugees, and a reminder for future generations, not to forget their history. The book tells refugee's personal experiences, and includes stories about arrests, flight, exile, war and separation from loved ones. It also has accounts of miraculous escapes, God's leading, and answers to prayer.

*The Diaries of David Epp 1837-1843* has been translated and edited by John B. Toews. David Epp was a lay minister in the Chortitza Mennonite Church and sought to

serve the ongoing spiritual needs of his people. Epp kept a regular diary, and they provide a vivid and candid portrait of the nature of his religious office, as well as the struggles and triumphs of his parishioners. The reader can walk alongside this pastor and experience the joys and sorrows associated with building Christian community.

*Our Family Story Book* by Grampa K is dedicated to "forbears who survived and added zest in the many communities in which they lived". The format is a series of family stories from the past, written as letters to grandchildren, as well as reflections from John Krahn's life experiences. Numerous photos and sketches illustrate the stories. Some of the themes are evocative for those of us who grew up in the Fraser Valley.

## ZAPOROZHE PROJECT

by John Konrad

The BC Mennonite Historical Society has been a major contributor to the microfilming of some 120,000 pages of documents in the Zaporozhe regional archive and the Zaporozhe Communist party archive.

This work, done under the supervision of Dr. Harvey Dyck (University of Toronto) required sensitive negotiations and much persistence over a four year period. We are pleased that microfilming is now complete and copies of this material (109 reels) and an

English language inventory and guide will be available sometime in the future.

Taken from the richest archive on Mennonites in the former Soviet Union, the collection consists of key documents culled from more than fifty separate collections and tens of thousands of individual files, is a treasure trove of Mennonitica of the Imperial and Soviet periods. When studied it will fill in many gaps of the Mennonite story and result in major reinterpretations of our history.



## FROM OUR READERS...

### Appreciation

*We were greatly moved when we read today's Newsletter. Thank you for it and especially for the monument. It truly is a fitting tribute to our heroes.*

*On May 28, 2000, we were hosting a young couple from Germany. We showed them this symbol of remembrance. Their grandmothers desperately fled to Germany during W.W. II and were shipped back to northern Russia in cattle cars. Our young guests needed this reminder of their own tragic history, of which they knew little.*

*Thank you for the lectures and the attractive local reminder of our aching past.*

*Jacob & Hilda Born  
Abbotsford.*

### Garden Park Memorial

*I was recently given a copy of your Summer 2000 Newsletter, covering the Garden Park Memorial dedication. The contents, comments, poem and horrors of the 1930's touched me deeply and I was saddened by the fact that no one from our family was present to light candles in memory of our lost ones.*

*Father's two brothers were taken in 1937-38 and a sister died in prison. Mother's two brothers-in-law were taken during the same time. One survived.*

*Others suffered years of depravation and separation.*

*I want to congratulate everyone who made the dedication so meaningful and thank you for passing it on in print.*

*Frieda Fast  
Chilliwack*

### 125 anniversary

*Thanks so much for your newsletter and congratulations on doing the memorial for victims in the Soviet Union. We did one like it at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum some years ago. I think these are important for our children and grandchildren.*

*We are sending copies of our Manitoba MHS newsletter and a few things related to our 125th anniversary of the former West Reserve.*

*There is another CO project coming up in Manitoba - the making of a film on CO's by the National Film Board. It is focussed on the Southern Manitoba context. You may wish to tell your CO groups about this.*

*I am delighted to see the papers of J.B. Toews deposited. If an inventory exists, I would be glad to see it. Thanks also for sending us lists of any Mennonite books you have for sale at the archives.*

*Lawrence Klippenstein  
Winnipeg*

Newsletter welcomes letters. We ask that they be about issues of interest to MHS members. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity.



## Common Heritage: Doukhobor and Mennonite

*Guests from the Doukhobor community were invited to participate in the annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historical Society in January. SMHS President Leonard Doell made the following comments, reprinted here from the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian.*

As a Mennonite people we have been your neighbours for nearly two hundred years. In 1802, when Czar Alexander I gave the Doukhobor people opportunity to settle in Molotschna in the Ukraine, they arrived there at the same time as some of our people and became close neighbours.

The Mennonite whom the Russian Doukhobors best knew was Johann Cornies. He was appointed by the Czar to oversee the agricultural developments of Mennonites, Hutterites, Doukhobors, Molokans and Nogais. He helped the district to prosper by directing and motivating young farmers. He helped them in farming operations through instruction and material support. Cornies felt a closeness to the Doukhobors who shared many of the same values as we did.

In 1874, the first Russian Mennonites arrived in southern Manitoba. My great grandparents were part of that first wave of people to come to Canada. This past year we celebrated the 125th anniversary of our life in Canada and we, too, have been reflecting on what that means. When our people arrived here, the Canadian government promised our people exemption from military service, freedom to set up our own language and curriculum and the freedom to set up our own village system. When the Doukhobor people arrived 25 years later, the Canadian government offered them some privileges, but we both discovered that they were not very good at keeping their promises.

When Doukhobor people arrived at Blaine Lake in 1899, their neighbours across the North Saskatchewan River and south of them at Great Deer were Mennonites just like in Russia.

Because of our common spiritual beliefs in areas of pacifism and communal living, Mennonites and Doukhobors have often (been) assumed to be one. Particularly during the two wars this has been the case.

Today as our peoples mutually celebrate our anniversaries we are grateful to God for his goodness to us even though we as a people have often been unfaithful and unworthy of that love.

I give thanks today for you, Doukhobor brothers and sisters, for your commitment to serve God, even though this has come at a heavy cost to your community.

Throughout our common histories we acknowledge that there have been differences between us as peoples but there are also similarities that at significant times in our history have woven our paths together. In the case of communal living, educational issues and exemption from military services both of our peoples have needed accommodation from Canada's governments. This has not always been negative but limited and often their hospitality has not been of the lasting kind.



(Common Heritage con't)

In the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, a Jewish man goes to the Rabbi and asks him if there is a blessing for the Czar.

The Rabbi thought for a moment and said, "Yes, there is. May the Lord bless and keep the Czar far from where we live!"

At times that has been our mutual experience as well. Congratulations on your 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this past year. We are thankful for your willingness to come today and share about your faith and culture. We look forward to our time together this afternoon.

## Manitoba Mennonites

### 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Celebrations marking the arrival of the first Mennonite settlers in Manitoba's West Reserve in 1875 were held this summer. The first settlers arrived at Fort Dufferin and then moved to the area between Emerson and the Pembina Hills.

A West Reserve Mennonite History insert was published in southern Manitoba newspapers on 26 June 2000. Copies are available at the MHS office.

### Neubergthal

Parks Canada has designated the village of Neubergthal, near Altona, Manitoba, as having national historical significance. Neubergthal is an example of a Mennonite village which retains historical and archaeological significance. Between 1874 and 1900, Mennonites founded over 100 such villages in southern Manitoba. Closely knit by kinship, religion and culture, the newcomers worked cooperatively and demonstrated that permanent agricultural settlements could succeed on the open prairie away from the river valleys.

## Donations to MHS

Your support of the BC Mennonite Historical Society is important and we thank our many supporters who contribute to our work. Donors can receive enhanced tax benefits by **donating shares or mutual funds** to a charitable institution like the BC Mennonite Historical Society.

With the demutualization of Canadian life insurance companies, these companies are distributing shares to policyholders. Shares can be kept as an investment and they can also make a great gift to charities, like the MHS.

Please contact MHS Board members **William Riediger** or **Edward Hildebrand** to discuss this further.



## BOOKS

### **The Last Journey**

by Henry Teichrob. 1999. Fern Hill Press,  
170pp. (Available at the MHS office)  
Reviewed by Henry Neufeld.

This book sketches the author's and his wife's family's (Teichrobs and Unruhs) history from its origins in the Danzig area to Landskron in Molotschna, to the Sagradowka settlement, to Alexanderfeld in Kuban, to Memrik, to the Siberian settlement of Barnaul, to Durango in Mexico, to Morden Manitoba, and to Indian Head, Saskatchewan, Regina and Matsqui B.C.

The shortage of land in the Russian Mennonite colonies and the difficulties in deciding whether to leave Russia in the 1920's is discussed, with some arguing that life in Russia would soon return to its pre-Revolutionary status, while others were skeptical and saw the state intruding in every aspect of life.

The Teichrob family spent five days in Rotterdam and experienced the care and assistance of the Dutch Mennonites through MCC.

The family finally settled on a farm near Indian Head Saskatchewan. They were

the only Mennonite family in the area and felt keenly their isolation from their faith community. They faced the challenge of preserving their spiritual realities in isolation from other Mennonites, an isolation which also hastened their assimilation into the broader society.

Mennonite publications, family singing, and Bible reading helped provide a base for the children. With the arrival of a radio the family was strongly influenced by evangelical radio preachers. Their 1941 move to Regina put them into closer contact with other Mennonites and the Teichrobs were involved in starting the Parliament MB church in Regina in 1942.

Henry Teichrob became a teacher in rural Saskatchewan; he also taught at the Christian high school in Caronport, Saskatchewan and in Regina.

The author provides a broad historical context for the world events that affected the Mennonites and the Teichroeb family in each decade. This family's story is the story of many Mennonite families, their quest for freedom, and the struggles of isolationism and assimilation.

### **Correction**

In our last issue we printed a poem by Harold J. Dyck, A Lament. The first line of the third stanza should have read: "Cry your sad Steppe's sepulcher lament" rather than "Let your sad Steppe's sepulcher lament." We apologize for the error.



## Mennonites in Southern California: An Interpretive Essay

by Jeff Wright

*This article originally appeared in the California Mennonite Historical Society Bulletin, No. 36 (April 1999) and is reprinted with permission. Jeff Wright is Mennonite Urban Ministry Director for Southern California; a graduate of MBBS, and attends First Mennonite Church of Upland, California. BC is sometimes compared to California and we thought this article would be of interest to our readers.*

Twenty years ago the Anabaptist presence in Southern California was in serious decline. In 1978 a handful of churches from the Mennonite (MC), General Conference (GC), Brethren in Christ (BIC), and Mennonite Brethren (MB) denominations labored to maintain the traditional boundaries and identity of their more Eastern counterparts, while losing both membership, and increasingly, identity as a unique expression of New Testament Christianity. Fewer than twenty churches among the four groups labored, often with little knowledge of each other across denominational lines. As late as 1985, the conventional wisdom among seminarians of the day was that Southern California was a wasteland. As one student put it to me at the time, "the Mennonite world ends on the south edge of Bakersfield."

Twenty years later a diverse community of churches are exploding across the Southern California basin. As of July 1998, some fifty-six Anabaptist churches of these four groups live and witness to Christ in Southern California. These congregations represent over a dozen different cultural groups and worship in at least seven different languages. How did this change happen and what might the Anabaptist future in Southern California look like?

### A Brief History

Mennonites came to Southern California in search of economic fulfillment. In the

1890's the first wave of Mennonite migration came to work in the citrus industry. These Mennonites established roots and became prosperous land owners, farmers, and small business owners. Churches in Upland were the central point of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church in Southern California. A cluster of Mennonite congregations were also founded in Los Angeles between 1916 and 1930.

A second wave of Mennonite migration came in the years around World War II, in search of jobs. These Mennonites were less rooted to the land as the first wave had been. As this group began to share in the postwar prosperity they began to move into the new cities of Southern California. However the existing Mennonite churches began to face decline as the children and grandchildren of the first two waves of migrations began to move out of the Mennonite church.

A third wave of Mennonite Migration began in the early 1980's and continues to today. Again, economic opportunity is fueling this migration. The difference this time is that most of these Mennonites are not European, and were not Mennonites before coming to Southern California. Significant church planting began among African -American, African, Latino, Indonesian, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean and "Generation X" communities. What are the issues that fueled this growth of a new Mennonite community?



## *Mennonites in California (con't)*

### **Factors Fueling Growth**

First, people of vision served in key leadership roles in the 1980's and called forth broad church support for evangelism and church planting. Allan Yoder, Southwest Mennonite Conference and Don Shafer of the Brethren in Christ were both passionate strategists around evangelism and church planting issues. Both conferences led the way in planting new churches.

Second, a dialogue between historic Anabaptism and third-wave charismatic renewal led to a common theological context. In other places, Anabaptists have been suspicious of charismatic expressions of spirituality. In Southern California, particularly among the integrating Mennonite and General conference churches, there has been a level of acceptance, even an embrace of the historic Anabaptist Vision of discipleship, community and nonresistance, and the contemporary charismatic themes of worship, renewal, intercessory prayer and expressions of so-called "sign gifts" (e.g., speaking in tongues). For whatever reason, most Mennonite churches have failed to see a conflict between these perspectives and have developed a theological matrix that allows for a neo-Pentecostal expression of historic Anabaptism.

Third, there has been a commitment to build grassroots institutions. The founding of what is now known as The Centre of Anabaptist Leadership in 1987 was the first of a new generation of grassroots groups that sought to mobilize churches within the region around a broad mandate of service, evangelism and mission. The formation of a Southern California MCC Relief sale has provided another venue for grassroots involvement.

Fourth, there has been a significant commitment to the formation of a multi-racial church in Southern California. The church has developed a strong record on being a church of many peoples. The Southwest Mennonite Conference had Stanley Green, a South African of colour, and James Isaacs, an African American, as Area Ministers. Today most of the integrated Mennonite Church leadership is non-European. Of 29 churches affiliated with the Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference, only five are majority European-American in membership. European-American church membership comprises about 11% of total church membership. Mennonite Brethren numbers would also approximate this trend.

### **Next steps**

Anabaptist-Mennonites came to Southern California looking for the California Dream - good jobs, good schools and a good home. They built a church through visionary leadership and dialogue between historic Anabaptism and contemporary charismatic renewal. This church has become capable of building grassroots organizations in a multi-racial context. Given that past and present, what are the cutting edges for the future of Anabaptists in Southern California?

First, the search for the California dream continues, and churches are faced with the challenge of "bootstrap stewardship," in an era of prosperity. As this new wave of Anabaptists continues to grow, basic economic development will continue to be a dominant challenge.

Insuring that new Anabaptist brothers and sisters have access to the economic levers, and can assist others in their communities through economic empowerment is a primary ministry.



### *Mennonites in California (con't)*

Second, there is clear need for the church in Southern California to become multi-generational. Billy Graham said, "God has no grandchildren." And he is right. At the same time, congregations as faith communities need a variety of age ranges to transmit the gospel from one generation to the next. The search for the California dream led a generation of European-American Mennonites away from the church in the 1940's and again in the 1970's. As this generation of churches find their children no longer worshipping in Korean, Spanish, Indonesian or Japanese, will there be people of vision and flexible systems to help these children adapt and remain in the church, albeit a new transforming church.

Anabaptist-Mennonites in Southern California are unlike their counterparts across the rest of North America. Nowhere else in North America is the economic side of the faith story so clearly evident. Nowhere else is there such a high comfort level with charismatic renewal informing and shaping historic Anabaptism. Nowhere else is there such an ethnic and denominational diversity in an urban metropolitan centre. Nowhere else is the North American Anabaptist-Mennonite movement growing so quickly. While it is a far from perfect expression of the church, it is, nevertheless, a sign of the in-breaking Reign of God in our midst.

## Queries

*With this issue we begin a column for people engaged in family and genealogical research. We invite readers to submit questions on family histories.*

**Thiessen, Issac.** I'm looking for information on the family of **Isaac Thiessen**, Altonau, Molotschna, South Russia. Married to Gertrude Harder, b. 06 October 1863, died in Altonau, Molotschna, South Russia.

Please e-mail Mary Ann Quiring at [quirine@uniserve.com](mailto:quirine@uniserve.com) or c/o the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.

## Genealogy workshop 2000 - New time & place!

A genealogy workshop with Tim Janzen has been scheduled for **Sunday, October 22**, 2:00 pm at the Mennonite Historical Society. There will be no charge for this session. For further details please call the Mennonite Historical Society at (604) 853-6177.

Due to a conflict with the Abbotsford Genealogy Conference being held Oct. 21, 2000 we have amalgamated a portion of Tim Janzen's presentation into their conference. He will be presenting an overview of sources at 10:00 am at the Abbotsford conference. For more information call Diane Luck at (604)850-8483 or visit their website at: <http://www3.bc.sympatico.ca/abbotsfordgengroup/AGG.HTML>



## BAKED BREAD OF FELLOWSHIP

It's been almost thirty years since I belonged to a Mennonite church, but when I hear a name like Bartel or Friesen, or Balzer I'm still curious to know whether they're Mennonites or like me a birthright Mennonite still proud of an Anabaptist heritage. I almost always find a way to ask. If they are, or have been, Mennonite, I felt a thrill, a sense of fellowship, a shared history of plumme moos and pacifism. Everytime I met a Mennonite I look once more, more carefully, at what I never want to take for granted. It may seem stupid, but I don't think so; in a world where so many have lost their identity, it's good to know the mutual aid of friendly pfeffernuesse and faspa to help you understand your own name better and its family ties, and to separate you from the crowd and help you know, if not who and what you are, at least where you came from and what you've taken with you. I'd rather belong to a small community sharing simple home baked bread of brotherhood than to the large society sharing the indigestion of millions of McDonalds.

by Elmer F. Suderman.

*From Mennonite Life, June 1977. Reprinted with permission of the author. Elmer Suderman lives in St. Peter, Minnesota.*