



Mennonite Historical Society Of BC Newsletter

Vol. 6 No. 2

April 2001

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

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

Directors:
Walter Bergen,
Hugo Friesen,
David Giesbrecht,
Edward Hildebrand,
John Konrad,
Peter Neudorf,
Henry Neufeld,
Jean Neufeld,
Helen Rose Pauls,
Louise Price,
Henry Rempel,
William Riediger,
Richard Thiessen,
John B. Toews.

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

Celebrating the Early Mennonite Music Makers in the Fraser Valley

an afternoon of song and storytelling,
Sunday, May 27 @ 3 p.m.

Central Heights Church, Abbotsford

to celebrate music in the life of Mennonite churches in the Fraser Valley in the 30's, 40's and 50's, with special emphasis on the music and music makers of that day. Anyone who sang in the church choirs of that time is invited to a volunteer choir

rehearsal at

Bakerview Church on Saturday May 26 at 7 pm.

Also taking place:

A String Orchestra commemorating the work of
Walter and Menno Neufeld.

Nancy Dyck and the Pacific Mennonite Children's Choir
Male Chorus

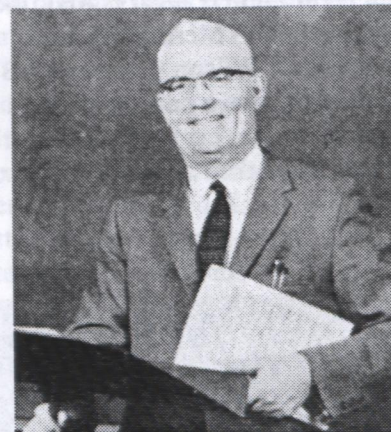
Congregational singing

Reflections on the lives and work of people such as Franz C. Thiessen, George Reimer, H.P. Neufeldt and C.D. Toews.

Join us for this special occasion.

Contact person : Holda Fast-Redekopp 604-864-9259 holdafr@telus.net

C.D. Toews, choral
director at M.E.I.



Mennonite Historical Society of BC 211-2825 Clearbrook Rd. Abbotsford, BC
V2T 6S3 Tel. (604) 853-6177 Fax (604) 853-6246 email: mennohist@rapidnet.net
www.rapidnet.bc.ca/~mennohis Hours 9:am -4:00 pm Monday to Friday.

Editorial

In this issue, we are pleased to feature another story in our *The way we were series*. The story of West Abbotsford is especially interesting to me, since that is the church that my parents, together with many other refugees to Canada after the Second World War, called home for many years.

In my memories, Aeltester Epp spreads his arms wide to bless us. And still when I hear, "The Lord bless you and keep you", it is the childhood memory of Aeltester Epp I see, his shining face raised, his arms outstretched, a symbol of Christ to hug us all, to clasp us to his bosom.

On those Sunday mornings at West Abbotsford, "Hallelujah, schoener Morgen" rang out loud, and we sang for all those still left behind in Russia, those who could not sing.

If you have memories of West Abbotsford, or of any other BC Mennonite Community, we would be interested in reading about them. We need your input to make this newsletter one that will reflect the history of our people in this province.

LP

Volunteers

The work of the society could not be done without the help of our volunteers. Archivist Hugo Friesen writes, "We have been very pleased to have the help of four students from Columbia Bible College who were doing their *Field Education* with us during the past school year. We say a special thank you to them for their interest and enthusiasm as they worked with various aspects of researching and indexing obituaries, as well as numbering our existing files.

The students are: Erin Slipp (Calgary, AB), Jodi Teichrob (Port Rowan ON) Merilee Wiebe (Hershel, SK) and Janet Wilson (Camrose AB). We are very pleased to have a number of local volunteers who come to our centre for a day or part of a day per week as their schedules allow.

They work with organizing and cataloguing new materials, indexing and editing our obituary database, and many miscellaneous tasks. A hearty thank you to Grace Dolden (Chilliwack), Jake Geddert, Dolores Harder, Helen Nickel and Helga Rempel (all of Abbotsford)."

The Historical Society has also been privileged to have Nikolai Mazharenko on staff at this time. Nikolai is a participant of the MCC International Visitor Exchange Program, and is a citizen of Ukraine. His job at the Society is translating the Odessa Region State Archives from Russian into English. Nikolai works for the Society Monday to Friday afternoons, and all day Thursday. He also works at Columbia Bible College.

Annual General Meeting!

The Mennonite Historical Society's annual general meeting will be held on Sunday, May 27, immediately after the afternoon music event. All members are welcome to attend.

Special events

From Russian steppes to the South American Chaco: an evening of story and song, February 10, 2001.

An overflow audience greeted story tellers Anneliese Jeske, Erich Penner, Walter Bergen and the members of the Mennonettes at this evening of story and song.

Anneliese Jeske's family was one of many who crossed the Atlantic to Paraguay in the early '50's in search of a future. Anneliese was a young girl at the time, and the memories she shared were those of a child entranced by new beginnings: enjoying the freedom aboard ship when the adults were all sea-sick, watching the lights of the new land appear on the horizon, finding that dried cow patties provided relief for sunburned feet. There were memories also of many challenges: the unaccustomed climate, the mosquitoes, the dysentery, the lack of drinking water. The joy when water was finally discovered.

Erich Penner's family arrived in Brazil in the late 1920's. From 1930-1950, there was a thriving community in Krauel Plateau. The land was rolling, covered in jungle. Out of this wilderness, homesteads were carved, a sawmill, school, several churches, and a co-operative took shape. But one had to work hard to make a living here, and in the 50's, people start to leave for the cities, and to emigrate to Canada. Now only a few families remain.

Walter Bergen's aunt, **Neta Gunther** of Nieder Chortitza, Ukraine, was among the thousands of Mennonites that were evacuated by the German army in 1943. During her stay in a refugee camp in Yugoslavia, she met and married Jakob

Bergen. Soon after, Jakob was drafted into the German army, and Neta found herself alone and pregnant in a refugee camp in Thuringen, W. Germany. In the meantime, her husband had been able to escape to Holland.

Through the efforts of MCC, Dominik Hilkema of the Mennonite church in Amsterdam, and a "Mennopass", Neta, now with an infant son, was reunited with her husband. They joined the first group of refugees who emigrated to Paraguay in 1946 on the Volendam. Here, Neta's husband became a minister and Neta worked hard to manage the farm during his frequent absences and to raise their eight children.

These three stories, representing the stories of thousands of immigrants that made the difficult transition from the steppes of Russia or the cities of Europe to South America, gave a glimpse into the lives of these refugees when they finally arrived in their new homes.

The Mennonettes, a choir from Eben-Ezer, under the direction of their conductor Erna Tilitzky, sang a number of hymns and folk songs that further told the story. Some of the songs were familiar tunes with original words composed by Jake Tilitzky for this occasion.

The evening ended with a 'faspa' of buns and platz. Thank you to the story tellers and the Mennonettes for an informative and enjoyable evening. Thank you also to all those who participated by attending the event and by contributing to the cause of the historical society.

Saturday opening: the archives will be open on Saturday, June 2, 10 am-3 pm, especially for those who are unable to visit us on a week day. If this is successful, we may consider regular Saturday openings.

Books and Book Reviews

Lead Kindly Light by Helen Grace Lescheid. Essence Publishing, 1999. review by Helen Rose Pauls.

Often one wonders how those who suffered unspeakable things during the Russian devastation, can still be loving, grateful and humble persons. In "Lead Kindly Light", Helen Grace Lescheid has given us a glimpse of her mother's hope.

Fleshing out her mother's detailed journals with researched historical facts, the author has produced a vivid story of pain, loss, struggle and overcoming. Born in Osterwick, Chortitza, Ukraine, in 1912, Neta Loewen experienced the Russian revolution, with its ensuing terror, sickness, struggle and loss, at an early age. Later, she experiences the oppression of Stalin, the closed churches, confiscation of belongings and banishment of loved ones.

The larger picture is developed through intimate details. Her sister is threatened for

singing Christmas carols. A desperate mother-in-law rudely demands wheat from her son. The security of boarding German soldiers is short lived as her husband is impressed into the army never to be seen again. She has bits of frozen bread for her babies on the trek to Germany. One small room houses them as they labor for a farmer in Austria. In Canada she feels guilt and shame that she is a burden to their sponsors. And joy comes when she is able, once again, to care for her brood as a field hand on the rich farms of the Fraser Valley, so like the home she has left behind.

Faith, like a kindly light, accompanies Neta throughout her difficulties as a refugee with four small children with not enough to eat and as an immigrant trying to find a place in Canadian society. The "God who is there" accompanies her and gives her hope to carry on.

Books and materials available from the Historical Society office collection.

Books for reference

1. *The Salomon Bergen Family* by Isaac Bergen. Contains genealogical information of Salomon and Anna (Penner) Bergen. Includes numerous photographs and stories of family events from 1831-1995.
2. *Block/Sawatzky genealogical material*. Donated by Jack Block. Extensive information beginning with Peter and Maria (Bartel) Block, plus items collected by Helen (Sawatzky) Block.
3. *Brandt Family Tree Album* by Esther (Brandt) Born. A fine album of family history and genealogy of Abram and Justine (Rempel Brandt from the 1800's to the present.
4. *Jacob and Helena (Peters) Siemens and descendants*, by Henry J. Siemens and Katherina and Jacob Bergmann. Family history and genealogy with stories, records and photographs. Includes summary index. 1850's- 1980'

The historical society has an excellent library of books in German and English, all relating to Mennonite history. Members are encouraged to make use of this collection.

New Library books: check these out!

1. *The Past inside the Present*, by Elsie K. Neufeld. The story of Waldemar and Susanna Klassen.
2. *Not without Zeal*, by Elfrieda and David Dyck. The story of Henry R. Baerg.
3. *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, by Franz Isaak.
4. *Gnadenfeld*, by J.C. Krause.
5. *Oreburg am Ural*, by Peter P. Dyck.

Books for sale

1. *Garden in the Wilderness*, by Edgar Stoesz and Muriel T. Stackley. Mennonite communities in the Paraguayan Chaco 1927-1997. \$35.
2. *The Trans-Chaco Highway: how it came to be*, by Gerhard Ratzlaff. \$30.
3. *Lead Kindly Light* by Helen Grace Lescheid. (see review) \$18.
4. *The Kuban Settlement*, by C.P. Toews, H. Friesen and A. Dyck. \$11.
5. *Zagradowka* by Gerhard Lohrenz. \$11

Researching Yarrow

by Harvey Neufeld

The Yarrow Research Committee's main focus will be the Mennonite settlement in Yarrow B.C., from 1928 to 1960, a time period in which Yarrow was predominantly a community of first and second generation Russian Mennonite immigrants.

The committee plans to publish several monographs; the first of which, edited by Leonard Neufeldt, Lora Sawatsky and Chuck Regehr, intended for a general readership, is to be published in time for Yarrow's 75th anniversary in 2003.

The purpose of this volume is to provide a collection that seeks to honour Yarrow through acts of remembering, and to convey to those who were not part of this world, what it was like to live in that time and place. This volume will set the stage for subsequent publications.

The Yarrow Research Committee was organized in Abbotsford, BC in the spring of 1999

Committee members include Jacob Loewen and Harvey Neufeld coordinators; Harold Dyck, Esther Epp Harder Agatha Klassen, Leonard Neufeldt, Peter Penner, Chuck Regehr, Ted Regehr, Lora Sawatsky, Ruth Derksen Siemens and David Giesbrecht.

In addition, the Yarrow Research Committee has established a conference committee, chaired by Ted Regehr, to plan and to solicit the assistance of other Mennonite Historical societies in sponsoring a conference in 2003 on Mennonite settlements in the Northwest, with emphasis on the Yarrow community.

The Yarrow Research Committee has joined the Chilliwack Museum and Historical Society, qualifying contributors to receive receipts for tax purposes.

For more information, contact the Historical Society.

From a refugee camp in Austria to the farming community of Yarrow, BC

by Irene Bergen, edited and translated by Louise (Bergen) Price

On October 5, 1948, Hein and I, and our one-year-old daughter Luise, arrived in Mission. This was the end of a five-year long trek for us, from Ukraine, through Yugoslavia, Germany and Austria, across the Atlantic, and finally across Canada by train. Uncle Heinrich Boldt and his brothers Jakob and Peter had agreed to be our sponsors; we would be living with Uncle Heinrich and Tante Greta and their family in Yarrow.

So here we stood in the BC rain, waiting for an uncle that Hein had never met. All the other passengers were gone. While Hein went to look for his uncle, I found shelter from the rain under a roof on the train platform. A few people eyes us curiously, but no one approached us. As soon as Hein returned, though, two men appeared—Uncle Hein Boldt and his son Henry. I don't remember how we greeted each other. We were exhausted, grimy and tired from the long train ride.

It rained the whole way back to Yarrow. But we were riding in Henry's car. He must be a rich man, we thought, to have a car like this. And then we arrived at their enormous house, with a bathroom and electric stove. Such rich people.

We owned a baby buggy, 2 crates, a wooden suitcase, and \$560 in Reiseschuld (travel debt).

The first week we were there, the neighbours had a shower for us, something we'd never experienced before. They gave us 2 one hundred-pound sacks of flour, a 10 pound pail of Roger's Golden Syrup, a few jars of canned fruit and vegetables. Some the jars had corn in them—I think Tante Greta must have read my expression. In the refugee camp we had cornmeal every day for 2 years. Tante said she'd exchange the corn for pickles. But the pickles were sweet, another thing we weren't used to.

We also received cups, plates, towels and other things. I have been using the bread pans I received for 50 years now, and they're still as good as new.

We ate with the family for one week. Twelve people at one table. And we kept thinking, "How come they all eat so little?" (Try explaining the word 'diet' to someone from a refugee camp!) When I started baking and cooking for us, I baked 4 loaves of white bread every second day. It tasted wonderful with the Rogers Syrup.

We paid \$10 a month rent. As part of the rent, we could get potatoes for ourselves from the bin in the cellar, and each day we got a litre of milk as well. Once a week we went to Funk's, and bought a half-pound of hamburger meat. Henry Neufeld, who worked there, always gave me soup bones, and sausage ends. It all tasted so good.

Our first Sunday in Yarrow was Thanksgiving Day. Hein's cousins Betty and Ann Boldt were dressed as fine ladies. We dressed up, too, Hein in his good pair of riding pants and boots, and I in my boots and black coat.

"Married ladies wear hats to church," Tante Greta announced. So she gave me one of her hats, a black one with a blue flower, and a net that came down over my eyes. I had never worn a hat to church before. Luise was just beginning to talk. All through the service she pulled at my hat. "Mama. Blume." That's all I remember of that service.

I had no experience in cooking or baking-- in Russia we'd had nothing to bake or cook-- but Tante taught me how to bake, can, cook jam.

That fall, Hein got a job on the dike that paid 90 cents an hour, chopping up trees that blocked the dikes in Yarrow. In the winter, he worked in the raspberry fields, digging out raspberry plants and burning them, rolling up the wire and piling up the posts. He received \$25 per acre for this. With all of this money coming in, we were able to pay off quite a few of our debts. In March 49, Hein got work dredging the Fraser River, and by May of that year, we had paid off our travel debts.

In 1950 we bought a small farm on Peardonville Road and joined West Abbotsford Mennonite Church. Our years of being homeless were over; we had found our new home in Canada.

When letters from Canada started arriving for Hein and Irene Bergen, they noticed that on the top left corner of each envelope were the words 'From H. Boldt', followed by the address. Since the word 'from' means 'holy' or 'pious' in German, the Boldts must be extremely religious, Hein thought. He knew that the family was MB, but putting 'from' in front of the name seemed a bit excessive!

Mennonite Centre Project and local information meeting

In the summer of 2000 a newly-formed international association, Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, purchased the former Mennonite Girls' School (Maedchenschule) in Molochansk/Halbstadt as the focus of a program of Mennonite humanitarian assistance in southern Ukraine. Still in relatively good condition, the one-storied, 2,500 square foot schoolhouse, with its spacious foyer, bright classrooms, teachers' room, and library, sits on a large lot among flower gardens and fruit and shade trees. At relatively low cost, we will restore this historically noteworthy and architecturally distinguished one-time Mennonite public building to its original condition and adapt it to use as a multi-functional centre.

Since the collapse of the USSR a decade ago, Ukraine has been passing through a harsh subsistence, health and economic crisis, which continues to worsen. At particular risk are seniors and children. Visitors to one-time Mennonite towns and villages see old people with drawn faces, deeply-sunken eyes, untreated running sores on arms and legs, and sickly, underweight children. Malnourishment is widespread.

Groups of local people are trying to assist, but resources are few and needs great. To help stem the

crisis the Mennonite Centre will first assess needs of people in places where Mennonites once lived. It will then begin its mission with programs of food, medical aid, and social assistance, starting with pilot projects and expanding step-by-step. This will be done in cooperation with international and local Mennonite and non-Mennonite groups. Friends of the Centre will also assess proposals that the Maedchenschule be used as a community resource centre for youth and seniors in the former Mennonite Molochansk area.. (from the website www.mennonitecentre.com)

On Saturday, April 21, a group met at Garden Park Towers to hear a report on the progress of the Maedchenschule, which is to become a Mennonite Centre. As a candle of remembrance was lit, Walter Unger of Toronto stated that we as Mennonite people must reconnect with our past and reclaim our history.

Unger drew parallels between what was once a school promoting excellence in education to what will become, in part, a clinic of medical excellence that will serve the needs of abandoned children and the elderly. Unger then introduced Harvey Dyck of the University of Toronto. Dyck challenged the audience to light candles of remembrance, and to reach out their hands to the needy people in Ukraine. (More information to follow in next newsletter.)

WEST ABBOTSFORD MENNONITE CHURCH

by David Loewen



West Abbotsford Mennonite Church 1936

Origins

The West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, founded in 1936, was one of 14 Mennonite churches established in the Fraser Valley between 1928 and 1939. Earlier, the founding group of Mennonites worshipped in local churches, including the South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren Church and homes of some of the original members.

Most of the early pioneers had very little, if any, money. Credit was hard to get and work was difficult to find. Peter Unger worked for \$1.00 per day – his start in the chicken business, of which half was paid in the form of baby chicks. John E. Peters worked for one chicken per day and eventually traded eight chickens for his first bicycle. Clothes were bought from the Salvation Army in Vancouver for \$1.00 per sack.

The stumpland south and west of Abbotsford was auctioned off in 20-acre lots at \$10 per acre—more than these pioneers had expected to pay.

However, they persevered and were eventually established homes. Their livelihood came from dairy, poultry or berry farming, while also working elsewhere, for example, picking hops in the Sardis-Yarrow hop fields.

When Nicolai N. Dyck arrived with his family in the summer of 1934, he discovered that there were some Mennonite families living northwest of Aldergrove, including three ordained ministers.

Dyck invited one of them to Abbotsford to serve and so Rev. Heinrich H. Dueck came out on bicycle to serve the Dycks on the occasion of their 25th anniversary. As a result, the ministers at Coghlan agreed to take turns traveling to Abbotsford every Sunday to serve that group. The only irregularity in this schedule was during the hop-picking season, when a number of families moved to the hop fields in Chilliwack for the harvest.

The Sunday worship services were held in various homes, including the Cornelius G. Tiltzky home. In 1936, the first Christmas Eve program was held in one of the homes, and the first baptism took place in the Tiltzky home in 1937.

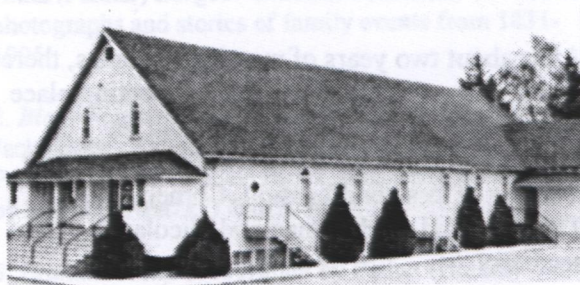
After about two years of meeting in homes, there was a strong feeling that a special meeting place was needed. A planned meeting held on November 15, 1936, became the organizational meeting of this congregation. Cornelius G. Tiltzky acted as chairman and Nicolai Dyck as secretary.

Twenty-two families with a total baptized membership of 45 were interested in forming a congregation. The group decided to organize a congregation and agreed, in principle, to the constitution of the Sardis congregation.

At the provincial conference, a delegate group met Rev. Peter P. Epp and discovered that he lived on Ross Road, not far from Abbotsford. The following week, he was invited to come and join this newly formed congregation and to become its leader.

Shortly after its founding on December 28, 1936, the congregation officially chose Rev. Peter P. Epp as its leading minister. By April 1937 a building committee was stuck. The municipality donated two acres on the corner of King and Townline Roads, and by the fall of 1937, a 20 by 40-foot sanctuary was under construction. Some of the lumber was obtained by dismantling the Mill Lake Lumber Mill.

Shortly after its founding, the church changed its name to "United Mennonite Church of Abbotsford", to conform to provincial conference expectations. It was changed to the present name in 1950. The membership grew rapidly during the early decades. In 1946 it stood at 145; by 1954 it was 340, by 1958 it was approximately 450. New members included settlers from Canada's prairie provinces, post-World War II refugees, and immigrants from Paraguay and Mexico. To accommodate this rapid growth, building programs were launched in 1946 and in 1949. By 1952, "long church" was filled to capacity. Sunday School attendance peaked at 290 children and 100 youth in 1954.



The 'long church' 1949

Expansion and Outreach

During the 1950s, two new churches were established to relieve the overcrowding at West Abbotsford. The Clearbrook Mennonite Church at the Clearbrook and Peardonville Roads was organized in 1951. The same year, a group of 15 members founded the Peardonville Mennonite Church at South Aberdeen, where they established an outreach Sunday School program.

Also in 1951, the church's mission and evangelism emphasis resulted in a Sunday School outreach at Sumas Prairie. The church's youth and young adults invested their time and energy

into this ministry, which led to the birth Prairie Chapel, which continues to be a vibrant faith community to this day.

Through a Vacation Bible School outreach in the Burns Lake area in 1955, Rev. Abe Buhler and Jack Nickel founded a children's camp known as Ootsa Lake Bible Camp. Peter Funk had donated the land to the church's youth group for a sum of \$1.00. The development of the camp became a focal point of the youth program and budget. In the 1980's, the camp was sold to a group of northern churches for \$1.00.

West Abbotsford's Leaders

In 1945, after a number of shorter-term ministers, Rev. H.M. Epp, newly arrived from Manitoba, was elected as leading minister. His tenure ushered in a period characterized by strong, stable leadership and dramatic church growth.

Following Rev. Epp's death in 1958, Rev. P.J. Froese was elected leader. During his tenure, the style and language of worship became an issue for members from diverse backgrounds. As a result, a group of members established the Eben-Ezer Church in 1963.

Other leaders include H.P. Fast (1967-68), Peter Harms (1968-71), Dietrich Rempel (1972-81), Dave Wilson (1981-83), Paul Boschman (1983-88), Stan Martens (1988-90), David Friesen (1990-96), Jake Thielmann (1996-2000). In November 2000, Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen assumed pastoral leadership at West Abbotsford, having come from ten years of pastoral ministry in Winnipeg. Terry and Karen Zimmerly served as Assistants to the Pastor from 1987-92.

Choir members could be summoned from the strawberry fields in early summer to sing at a wedding, and as the choir conductor's raised his hands, one could see the strawberry juice running down his arm.

West Abbotsford's Trademarks

The need for and appreciation of music in the worship service was recognized from the church's beginning. Within two years of the founding of West Abbotsford, the first church choir was formed by Jacob Regier.

Henry Wiebe was director's position for 22 years. The church choir was a vital part of the church's worship service, and was often expected to serve at other functions as well. George Wiebe, a former choir director, notes that such assignments did not always fall at a convenient time. Choir members could be summoned from the strawberry fields in early summer to sing at a wedding, and as the choir conductor's hands raised his hands, one could see the strawberry juice running down his arm. Although exaggerated, this story does illustrate how indispensable the church choir was.

Special groups were formed; best remembered is the "Messengers of Peace" quartet of the early 1950s. Together with Peter Derksen, they served in a live radio broadcast and itinerated throughout BC.

George Wiebe said:

Personally, the musical experiences during my stay at West Abbotsford were some of the most significant influences in shaping my spiritual life, my personal and social life, as well as my future vocation.

Christian education was foundational for this congregation. Cornelius G. Tilitzky had organized a Sunday School in 1936. In the formative years, Sunday School teachers were elected by the congregation; in later years, they were selected from baptismal candidates. The local community German School, presently held at the MEI, had its birth in West Abbotsford

Limited copies of Living Stones are available from West Abbotsford Church. The book can also be seen at the offices of the Mennonite Historical Society.

during the 1940s. West Abbotsford was the first General Conference Church to join the MEI Society in 1951. It supported the Bethel Bible Institute, located next door, and more recently, Columbia Bible College.

There was a conscious attempt to include evangelistic thrusts in the year's calendar. In the early years, people were poor. Still, they were open to missions beyond their immediate community, extending from Sunday School and Vacation Bible School outreaches to a children's camp in the North, to the support of life-long missionaries to Japan, Peter and Mary Derksen.

In recent years, West Abbotsford has experienced the pain of seeing many young families leave and its membership shrink. Nevertheless, it remains a vibrant faith community of individuals who appreciate and enjoy the fellowship of those who call West Abbotsford home.

Like any other institution or organization, West Abbotsford has had its share of growing pains as well as blessings. We, who are "earthen vessels", are grateful that the "treasure" is not bound by our weaknesses. God has transcended those weaknesses and empowered us to share the "treasure" with those around us.

Reference: Loewen, David F. *LIVING STONES: A History of the West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, 1936-1986*

What's in a name? We still need a name for our newsletter. The winning entry will receive a pair of tickets to our fall banquet with speaker Peter Klassen "Creating the Garden of Eden in Poland"

Mother's Flowers

Helen Rose Pauls

Her hands are plucking at the unfamiliar afghan spread across her knees. Hands that have never been still, continually seek to do purposeful work, even in this place. Her bed is smooth and pristine, and she can see beyond it through the window to the flower garden outside.

She yearns to be close to flowers again, so I wheel her chair out among them. Her hands reach for them. How she longs to pull the weeds and feel rich black soil under her fingers once more!

I can visualize the huge garden she kept beyond the kitchen door on the farm-- her form of daily worship as she co-created with God. She tended not only the vegetables for summer soups and salads, but also the potatoes and root crops for winter. She tended, with her children, one acre of raspberries and three acres of pole beans for market, while dad worked long hours in the city.

Still, she found time for flowers: two plots by the front door, and rows and rows of them around the perimeter of the garden. "To keep the bugs out," she'd explain but we sensed that they existed for their colour and for their capacity to delight her.

How can this endlessly energetic mother be now so weak, so vulnerable? At first the stroke seemed minor, but soon it was apparent that many tiny strokes had followed, affecting both mind and body. How can I enter her eyes - the window of the soul - and know what she is thinking? What is she feeling in this strange place?

Sometimes, she cries, and once, in a lucid moment, she said, "We moved and we don't know anyone here." I explain that she is in Menno Hospital with lots of caring friends.

She knows who I am, but it seems she sees the child, not the adult with a family of her own. She strokes my arm and nods, saying over and over,

"You're a good girl, a good girl!" I feel as if I have received a blessing.

Somehow, she raised five of us, and in spite of the relentless farm work, she found time to teach the senior girl's Sunday School class; lead the Ladies' Aid Bible study; stitch quilts for all of us and for Mennonite Central Committee; and sew dresses for orphanages in India.

If I woke up early, she was at the dining room table studying her lessons. At night, I fell asleep to the sound of her whirring sewing machine.

All summer, she told us stories to keep us busy picking and preserving the wondrous fruits of her garden. In the evening we cut bright blooms and arranged them in vases, one for each room.

"God loves me," she writes in her cramped backhand at the patio table outside her room. "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world." In all the confusion, this goodness still pervades.

She looks out again at the vivid flowers. I stroke her arm. To her, I am the little girl again. "You are a wonderful mommy," I say. "A wonderful mommy." She cries. I sob. It is time to go.

I stop on the way home to buy seeds for my garden. I grasp a red basket with one hand and begin to fill it with bright packages. I find myself choosing zinnias, cosmos, larkspur, marigolds, sunflowers, geraniums, clarkias and alyssum: hardy, faithful durable flowers. This is not my garden I am planting. These are my mother's flowers. Together, we will co-create with God.