



# Mennonite Historical Society of BC Newsletter

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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, with help from Loretta Krueger and Hugo Friesen. Contributions are welcome.

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

## *Women Without Men:*

### *Mennonite refugees of the Second World War*

Marlene Epp, who has written extensively about Mennonite history, presents the story of Mennonite women who, having lost husbands and fathers to Stalinist work camps and WWII, made a desperate flight across Europe in search of freedom and security for their families. Many ended up in Canada and Paraguay—the less fortunate were repatriated to work camps in the Soviet Union.

Dr. Epp is an instructor of History and Canadian studies at the University of Waterloo.



**Place: Garden Park Tower-Dining Hall**

**Date: Saturday, May 11. Time: 7 PM**

**For your calendar: The next event of the Historical Society will be our fundraising dinner and lecture with historian Lawrence Klippenstein, October 19, 2002 at 7:00 pm.**



## Editorial: The Other Side

Mother's Day is imminent, and perhaps it is timely that the theme of this newsletter is women. Mother's Day in the past included poems in church, memorized and recited nervously by selected youngsters in honor of all mothers present. We had crepe paper carnations pinned to our clothing as we entered church: red if our mother lived, white if she had passed on, and I believe some churches even had a red and white mixed carnation for those with stepmothers. Our senior girls' Sunday school class spent many happy hours giggling and visiting as we cut and twisted the crepe paper into recognizable flowers.

As this issue unfolds, we are eagerly anticipating our next event: a lecture by Marlene Epp entitled "Women Without Men: the Stalin Years". The terror, horror and dislocation of those years, and the strength of the women, our mothers, who had to take leadership of their families during that desolate time, can hardly be described or grasped. In our last newsletter we solicited stories about women who had lived through this fateful time in our history. We received none and we had to mine the life stories of family and acquaintances ourselves to produce this issue of the newsletter. One wonders why the stories are so hard to share. What makes close knit ethnic groups want to show a triumphal face only? Or are we protecting our loved ones?

For there are countless stories that could be told. Besides the stories of love and loyalty, of overcoming, of sharing the last crumb and blanket so that the little ones could survive, we have stories of burials in unmarked graves along the roadsides; of mothers and fathers, separated from family by the "front" and later, the "Iron Curtain", who gave up on ever seeing their loved ones again, and entered into new family relationships. We have stories of betrayal, lust, and disloyalty; of children born of rape or of dangerous and illicit liaisons during lonely and desperate times.

Where are the stories of loss of faith and redefined spirituality when circumstances were beyond understanding? Are we also losing the stories of grace and forgiveness when we do not acknowledge the difficult truths of those years? Perhaps some stories were not spoken to protect the children; to draw a line and make a new life in this country, to try to forget the past and forge a future in a land of peace and plenty. But they are there nonetheless, just below the surface, waiting to come forth unbidden.

Yes, those years had many dark stories, usually hidden and taken to the grave. Verity Harms in a letter to the editor suggests that "We are eager to tell only one side of our ethnic story. The other needs to be honored also." She says that these hard stories need to be told, and that she would like to see a "celebration of artists, writers, and voices that have been repressed by the culture. The ones who have perhaps not been pietistic enough for the mainstream; the ones who have dared to air their doubts, or have not necessarily painted pretty pictures of the Mennonite world; those who deal with the failed experiences, the tensions in the community.....".

Perhaps what is needed, our writer suggests, is "a simple non-pietistic ceremony of acceptance and blessing of the dark stories, releasing of shame over them, giving them back to the God who allowed them to occur, and trusting the doubt while searching for faith. There is no darkness that does not have light in it, and no light that is not muted by the dappled dance of the darkness that attends it. It is in shadow that the nature of light is revealed."

Perhaps those of us who still have parents, grandparents, older friends and relatives should be asking questions and bringing to light our family histories, both the stories of grace and provision, and those of disappointment and hardship. We owe it to the next generation. "Those who know not the past, have no future" HRP

## Book Review

*Whatever it takes* by Dorothy Siebert, Christian Press, 2001, reviewed by Helen Rose Pauls

For thirty years, Albert and Anna Enns worked as MBMS International missionaries in Paraguay. This story traces not only their public life, the "Thrust Evangelism" and tent meeting campaigns, but also paints a candid portrait of their life together as a couple committed to serving the Lord.

Albert Enns' preaching brought the gospel to thousands of Paraguayans, and founded many of the churches that make up the Paraguayan Convention today. Albert Enns knew how to communicate within the culture and how to gain an audience. People flocked to his meetings.

As counterpoint to the drama of reaching Paraguay for Christ, is the relationship between Albert and his mail order bride. The stark history of deprivation that both partners experienced as refugees after WW2 is similar, although they did not meet until their marriage. Albert and Anna raised five children, of whom they are justly proud.

Dorothy Siebert has written a very readable story about two people with a vision to reach their world for Christ. This book can be found in the library at the centre.



## A People unto themselves: MHS Lecture by Henry Neufeld

Why did some Mennonites leave Canada and move to Mexico 80 years ago? David Friesen, in a lecture sponsored by the BC Mennonite Historical Society, provided some insight to this question by tracing some of the history of that Mennonite migration and of developments in Mexico. Friesen, born in a Sommerfelder colony north of Cuauhtemoc, has been a schoolteacher and is an ordained minister currently working for MCC in Mexico with the Old Colony churches. As a child, Friesen remembers visiting BC and picking raspberries in Yarrow. "We children encouraged my parents never to move here," he said.

Friesen identified two factors that led Mennonites to leave Canada: the outbreak of World War One, and the unique Mexican situation. WWI resulted in increasing Canadian government pressure on its citizens regarding patriotism and state controlled education. The bishops in the Sommerfelder and Old Colony churches wanted to seek a new home where the church, not the state, would control the school curriculum. Historically, the indigenous peoples of Mexico had an elaborate civilization including Egyptian-like temples in Chihuahua, where Mexican Mennonites do their shopping today.

"They wanted to be a people unto themselves, where they would be able to think, teach, and preach as they saw fit," said Friesen. Had the Canadian government been more patient, he believes the issues could have been resolved.

The second factor was the land situation in Mexico: 5% of the population controlled 90% of the land. This situation led to the Mexican civil war of 1910-1917. Under the new Mexican constitution, farmers were not allowed to own more than 500 acres. Some landlords, fearing that the government would take their vast land holdings, decided to quickly sell their land. Some Mexican landlords visited the Mennonites in Manitoba and southern Saskatchewan, encouraging them to come to Mexico.

Of further interest to the Mennonites was the fact that Mexico's new constitution also ensured freedom of religion, a contrast to the previous dominance of the Roman Catholic church. Friesen noted that in Mexico an "association" [not a church] can operate a school.

A Canadian Mennonite delegation visited Mexico and was shown fertile land. "It's good land with lots of water," they reported. Mennonites bought 200,000 acres and on arrival in 1922 found stony land with no water. It turned out that the Mexican landowner had his workers haul water to the wells in the site to persuade them that there was water. One Mennonite commented, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth, but who made all these stones?" A German businessman observed that Mennonites went to a place where none other could live.

The Mexican climate and soil conditions made farming difficult, and one man left the colony to learn cheese making. He returned two years later and helped develop a cheese industry among the Mennonites. This produced a steady source of income and enabled many to survive when crops were unpredictable. Today, Mennonite cheese is known throughout Mexico.

In recent years, irrigation systems made fruit farming possible. This, in addition to a manufacturing industry and a credit union, resulted in general economic improvement. Their credit union received an award as one of the best in Mexico.

Friesen noted that the Old Colony group has a "strong community spirit" and views the motor vehicle as a worldly means of transportation. "The future of the Mennonites in Mexico will depend on how they deal with education," says Friesen.

"Progress comes at a high price," he said. Those who didn't make it had to go somewhere else. Farming is not their future." Friesen said that NAFTA is a big blow to Mexico. The last major migration of Mennonites to Mexico was a Kleine Gemeinde group in 1948 who settled in the Chihuahua area. This group had a "mission mind" and was accepting of both the Sommerfelder and the Old Colony Mennonites. Friesen estimates that there are about 40,000-50,000 Mennonites in Mexico today.

About 350 people attended this event at the Ebenezer Mennonite Church in Abbotsford on Feb. 16. Also included in the program was choral music by a male choir from King Road MB church directed by Herman Janzen. The evening ended with a *fajita* served by the Ebenezer ladies.



## Village life in Nieder Chortitza during the *Great Terror* of 1938.

Excerpt from *Journey to Freedom: the story of Jakob and Maria Redekop*, by Mary (Redekop)Bergen. Mary was 12 years old at the time. "I learned early how to survive in hard times."

### Police arrests start

In the fall of 1937, the police arrested two men in our village. With those arrests, a terrible fear came into Nieder Chortitza. No one knew who would be taken next.

February 1, 1938, the police returned. When they left, it seemed the whole village was crying; every family was touched somehow, either fathers, sons, uncles, or husbands were gone. Among the arrested were Mother's brother Peter Gunther, and her brother-in-law, Abram Siemens.



Family portrait taken in 1929. Jakob Redekop, Maria Redekop and daughter Maria.

As often as possible, the women would go to the prison to bring their men whatever they could spare: clothes, footwear, and money, to get them ready for the long trip to Siberia that everyone expected they would have to make. When Tante Anna, Uncle Peter's wife, would go to the prison, she would bring her baby son Jakob (Soonja, as everyone called him) to our house. Sometimes it was late at night before she returned. Then Mother would find other women who also had babies, who could nurse him.

Often these women would stop at our house to warm themselves on their way home and I would listen to their conversations and their questions. "Why did they have to take my husband. What has he done?... We loved each other so much...we were just married. When will we see them again?"

Most of the conversations in the village centered around the arrests. Students who had gone to the cities for their education had to return home, both to help out, and because their fathers were considered traitors. The women were harassed at work; the children all had to go to daycare. It was a trying time.

The arrests didn't stop with the first group; the police came back time and again, but never as many as that time.

On June 2, my birthday, our beloved Uncle Kornelius was taken away. Now Tante Greta was all alone. We nieces took turns staying with her at night. Father had planted apricot and plum trees in the garden between our houses; through the garden was a path. The evenings were dark, so we always ran quickly through the garden to her house, especially after we'd heard scary stories.

Tante Greta saved all her non-perishable foods like sugar, for the time when her husband would return.

On a hot July evening, the black cars came again. This time our father was among the men arrested and imprisoned in the jail in Saproshje.

In our village of one thousand, seventy-nine men had now been arrested and imprisoned. To survive, the women and older children worked on the collective farm. The younger children stayed home, taking care of the babies.

As often as they could, the women would take a day off work on the collective farm and go to the prison to deliver clean clothing to their men. Since Mother was expecting a baby, and was not well, my aunts and I went to the prison in her place.

The jail in Saproshje was across the Dnieper River from Nieder Chortitza. We would leave early to catch the five o'clock boat. Usually we would go to the marketplace first to sell whatever produce we could, milk, eggs or potatoes, before heading to the prison. At the prison, we had to wait in line until we could hand our packages and the list of items that the packages contained to the jail clerk. Then we waited again to get a receipt with a signature.



A receipt was good news—it meant that the men were still there, and had not yet been transported to Siberia. As time went on, the waiting period became longer and longer. The jail was full of men destined for Siberia.

One day, while waiting to get our receipt, we noticed that transport trucks were backing up to the gate of the jail. We ran to see what was happening. Some of the women recognized their men among those being loaded up. You can't imagine the crying and wailing that went on. The police would not allow the women to come closer to the trucks, so the women sent their children, knowing that the police would not shoot at them.

After the pandemonium of that day, the transport trucks arrived only at night. Soon we were told we could no longer bring parcels to our men. The transports to Siberia continued, uninterrupted.

Not long after the July arrests, Stalin's minister in Moscow who had been in charge of the *Reign of Terror* was also arrested and tried. That marked the end of arrests in our area.

Summer went on. The families tried to support each other, and to find out what was happening with the men, but there was no more news.

Mother was not well. She'd been working in the field when she went into labour prematurely. She gave birth to a stillborn baby girl, and had to walk a kilometer home with the dead baby wrapped in her apron. We buried our little sister in the barn. Mother recovered very slowly.

When school started, those children who were in the lower grades were allowed to attend, but older children, who wanted to learn a trade were not allowed to because their fathers were considered political prisoners.

A rumour went through the village that parcels could again be taken to the prison. Tante Greta went immediately to ask for news of her husband, and also for news of our father Jakob Redekop and her brother-in-law, Jakob Wall.

She was told that her husband and Jakob Wall had both been sent to Siberia, but that our father was still in prison and that she would be allowed to give a parcel to him. The parcel could contain food as well—this had previously not been permitted. Tante Greta went to a store and bought whatever food she could and made a parcel for Father. The parcel was not accepted, but she was told to come in two weeks and try again. Tante Greta tried a second time, and this time she came back with good news. The parcel had not been returned. We believed it meant that Father

was still alive and in jail. Over the next few months, several other parcels could be delivered to Father in this way.

Rumours were flying in the village that the charges laid during the time of Stalin's Moscow minister would now be dropped, and we started to hope that we'd see Father again. For those men already in Siberia, though, there would be no pardon.

During the long winter evenings, the women would gather in groups to support each other. Religious meetings were banned, but the women sang together, and prayed in the silence of their hearts. Common griefs and sorrows, and their trust in the Lord, bound them together. Of the seventy-nine men who were sent to prison from our village, only Father, Peter Gunther (Mother's brother) and a Mr. Thiessen three remained in the city jail; the rest were all sent to Siberia and were never heard of again.



The Redekop family in front of the Villa Roverstein, Holland, 1946. Standing (l-r) Maria, Peter, Jakob, daughter Maria. Seated: Jake and John.

The author emigrated to Canada with her parents and brothers in 1948, where she married her childhood sweetheart, Hans Bergen, and raised five children.

***Journey to Freedom: the story of Jakob and Maria Redekop and family***, will be published in the fall of 2002. For more information, or to order a copy, call Mrs. Mary Bergen at 604-853-1562.



## One Who Survived

As told to Helen Rose Pauls

My white sleeve brushes the gold rimmed edge of the China tea service, "Old Country Rose", bought and paid for with raspberry money. The red and white dinner plates lean solidly against the dark mahogany buffet. The cabbage roses seem to leap out at me, so like the red ones on our farm in Russia... yes, red like blood.

Father was the choirmaster. How he adored my sister who could play the wonderful oak piano in the parlor and perform for the guests in her silk dress; white and virginal like the long white flower tassels on the acacia trees lining the village street... pure white and unspotted.

How I felt loved as he helped me up onto the high seat of the wagon and we toured our farm, supervising the labor of our farm workers. "My dear", he would caution, "look at your heart first, not your face. God looks on the heart."

As a young woman, I felt a pride in his agricultural talent: the rotation of the crops, the purebred cattle, orchards planted with seedlings from distant nurseries. I should have been born an eldest son, sitting at his right hand as we planned and carried out the farm operations. Surely I would marry another land owner's son and continue doing what I understood so well. We could not foresee our horrendous future.

We managed to survive the first frontal assault of the Russian Revolution; the constant requisitioning of the soldiers, the White and Red armies, the night terrors of the bandits who raped, pillaged and killed with abandon. We survived the ensuing famine, the decimating typhus epidemic, the restructuring under Lenin's Five-Year Plan.

But we did not survive Stalin. Overnight prosperous farm families from the Mennonite villages were rudely uprooted, to make way for Stalin's plan to collectivize agriculture. Eventually we were loaded onto trains going in one direction only: north to the gulag in Siberia.

I begged father for permission to leave our forest prison for I believed that none of us would survive the slave labor camp. He helped me to memorize the names and addresses of relatives in the Ural

Mountains, and I prepared for escape. I would be alone, riding the couplings of boxcars with strangers.

My father and I walked out into the night, bright with stars. Like the fathers of the Old Testament, he gave me a blessing. His body was shaking with loud and terrible sobs and his tears flowed to the ground like water out of a pitcher. I had never seen him weep before. The stones could have cried out and the mountains covered us. Bidding him farewell, I silently flitted away from the camp, and walked by the light of the moon and the stars to the railroad line.

Apparently, my sister was the first to die of overwork, cold and starvation. She was a soft girl, a pianist. Felling huge trees and loping off the branches was impossible with so little food. Later, I heard that my father had died shortly after my escape. My mother and my two little brothers perished as well. Only two sisters would survive and eventually come to Canada.

Predictably, I was caught, recognized as a hated Kulak, and thrown into a prison with cutthroats and criminals. We were all weak from hunger. I lived in constant fear. Surely the God who rewarded the good and punished the bad had been forever stilled and rendered powerless by the destructive forces loose in the country. I could pray no longer.

One night my name was called. I was free to leave, but since I was a landowner's daughter, I was denied a pass. Without a pass, I could not work legally. I could be arrested and returned to jail at any moment. I walked out of the prison, starving and cold, and wrestled with God.

Death would come easily, I thought, as I sank gratefully into the soft inviting snow. A pleasant numbness... a sweet forgetting and all would be over. Desperation weighed down each cell of my tired body, as I shifted my light frame for some comfort. Even at this distance, the din of the heaving rabble at the train station fell on my ears. I had walked thirty-five miles in the snow for this- a last chance- and now it seemed impossible. My body shook and retched. For two days, I had not eaten or slept, filling my mouth with snow to ward off fainting. And now Control at the train station cried, "Your pass, Madam. Your pass, Sir!"



A pass! I had no pass. They did not issue passes to Kulaks, and it was the ticket to my continued existence in Soviet Russia. Without a pass I dared speak to no one. My spirit sagged. Surely God had forsaken me. For me there was no future. All was hopeless. I would die alone here, far from my loved ones. I tried to pray one last time, bargaining with God. If he would give me one more chance to live, I would be generous at every opportunity. I waited in the snow for Death to come...

Then I saw an ethereal light. A voice seemed to call to me; "You are my child. Get up, shake the snow from your clothes, and walk." I walked until I saw a small house, which somehow exuded safety, and knocked.

A shuffling tread approached the door. Lights. Muted voices. The door opened slightly and kind, though sad eyes took in my desperate situation immediately. The door opened wider and I was motioned inside. Did I not know, inquired the man and his wife, that they could be imprisoned for sheltering me? I looked down and they relented.

Warm broth was prepared and my body tingled with a pleasant pain, as the life giving liquid seemed to reach every pore. For the first time since we were forced from our home, I had a soft bed, pillows, and a warm blanket. I slept as if dead. The next day, these kind people paid the fare to my home village and saw me onto the train. "Here", they said to an acquaintance going the same way. "Here is your daughter for the trip. Be sure she lies well back in the compartment and appears to be ill or sleeping. She travels under the authority of your pass."

I crawled well back into the crowded compartment. Tears of relief flowed unendingly. God had not forsaken me! I was inside the train and God was very near.

I reached my home and with the help of my future husband, whom I had met in better times, I was eventually able to get a Pass and did not have to live in the shadows any longer. We married, had two children and acquired a small home. As soon as we heard that the German army was retreating during the Second

World War, we booked train passage to Germany and left Stalin and Communism forever. MCC eventually helped us get in touch with relatives in Canada who sponsored us as refugees.

What a wonderful country we entered! For the first time since the Revolution, honest work meant honest gain. We dared to hope again. We picked hops, living in the hopyard shacks until we could afford a patch of earth of our own.

Then I sifted the rich river bottom loam between my fingers and thanked God for a new start. I cried tears of gratitude and kissed the earth. We planted trees and made a huge garden. How we ate potatoes! We planned, worked and sacrificed to build a house, a barn; acquire cows and chickens. God blessed us with two more children and we prayed to live long enough to see them reach adulthood.

The raspberries gave us our renewal. I pruned the raspberry plants in the spring until the blood from the prickles ran down my shirtsleeves. I tied the vines to the wires, thinned the shoots, hoed the weeds and, together with my children and the neighborhood's children, picked the berries, rain or shine, while my husband worked long hours at the local sawmill. My little sons played and slept between the raspberry rows.

We were able to build a pleasant house with hardwood floors and velvet drapes, not like what had been left behind, but comfortable. I tried to remember my promise to God to be generous.

My husband died of old age and now I am left behind. When my children take me shopping at the Safeway, I still marvel at the rich rows of fruit, the abundance of food and my ability to buy as much as I want. After shopping we return to my house by the church for coffee and Zwieback with red raspberry jam. Putting on an apron over my white blouse, I prepare a snack, using my white and red rose dishes. I thank God for my life, for my children, for this wonderful country, for safety and for having more than enough. My questions about the past I must quell for now. I can only give thanks.

*The storyteller wishes to be anonymous.*



## Books, Resources and News from the Mennonite Historical Society's office and library

by Hugo Friesen

**Books for sale.** The Russlaender- a novel by Sandra Birdsell [\$37.00] 3 copies left for sale.

**Videos for loan** about the Mexican Mennonite experience:

1. Old Colony Mennonites - emigration from Canada to Mexico
2. Pioneers in Mexico - Canadian Mennonites colonize in Mexico
3. 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Mennonites in Mexico - 1922 to 1997

{All are produced by Otto Klassen productions}

### **Research tools:**

#### **A. 1920 Chortitza Census-**

This census is being translated by Jacob Quiring and will be available later this year at our centre. It is found among the microfilms received from the *Zaporozhye Archives* through Harvey Dyck.

According to genealogist Tim Janzen, "This is clearly one of the most important collections of genealogical data we have retrieved from the Ukraine relative to the Russian Mennonites at this point." It contains over 9,00 names, giving birth dates of husband, wife and children.

**B. Mennonitische Rundschau Index** - The production of an index of obituaries in the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, which has been in progress for the last two years, has been completed for the years 1950 to 2001. Nine different fields can be accessed on this database, including maiden names of females. Plans are underway to put these names on our website in the near future. The index for 1940-1949 is partially completed and can already be used at the centre.

A major portion of these obituaries, 29,000 names, has been entered into the Brother's Keeper program and eventually will be merged with the Grandma data.

## MHS Board Member Profiles: John Konrad, by Henry Neufeld

John Konrad has been President of the BC Mennonite Historical Society since 1997, succeeding the late Bill Riediger. John brings a lifelong interest in Mennonites and their history to this position.

Born in Manitou, Manitoba to John and Anna (Funk) Konrad, young John's formative years were spent in Manitou, Winkler and Winnipeg. He attended school in La Riviere, Winkler High School, Winkler Bible School and took some evening courses at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (now part of Canadian Mennonite University) in Winnipeg. He graduated from the University of Manitoba in electrical engineering and received an MBA from McGill University.

John and Irmie Neufeld were married in Winnipeg in 1956. They have three children.

In his work as an engineer and management consultant John has been involved in several large CIDA and World Bank aid projects in Asian, African, South American and Caribbean countries. He retired from his consulting work with Price Waterhouse in 1997. Since retiring he keeps busy with BCMHS work, playing chess, traveling and reading. He recently read "Die Russlaender" by Sandra Birdsell.

John joined the BCMHS Board in 1996. "I enjoy working with a very competent and committed group of people on the Board," says John, "and seeing the volunteers work together to achieve our objectives."

He appreciates interacting with the growing number of interested members.

John and Irmie's strong interest in Mennonite history and genealogy has taken them on trips to Ukraine (twice), Holland, Poland, Paraguay and Brazil. Of his travels John recommends the Ukraine tour if one has a family history there. "There's powerful history in Molotschna," he says.

John grew up in the Mennonite Brethren church and attended Mennonite churches in Edmonton (Lendrum) and Vancouver (Killarney Park). Currently the Konrads attend West Vancouver Baptist Church near their home. "Historically and theologically, I'm a Mennonite," says John, noting there are about a dozen Mennonite couples at their church. John is Moderator of the congregation and he and Irmie lead a church home group.

During John's time as President of BCMHS the organization has grown and become more stable. John sees the Society as essential in helping those with a Mennonite heritage appreciate the commitment, teaching and sacrifice of their parents and ancestors in living their faith sometimes in very difficult times and instilling in us a desire to emulate this example.

His favourite Mennonite joke: A man was dutifully visiting his aging Aunt in Tabor Home. He walked up to her and asked in a loud voice, "Do you know my name?" The old lady looked at him carefully, then responded, "If you go to the front desk I am sure they can tell you."



## Letters from the past:

**Good day, dearly loved Son, wife and children**

March 1956

The Lord who watches over us neither slumbers nor sleeps. This is what it says in the Bible-- isn't this true for us? So we want to put our trust in him; he'll make everything all right.

Before I write any further, I would like to wish you God's presence, good health and prosperity, which we all enjoy now, thanks to God.

Yes, dear Son, yesterday evening we received your letter written March 14. We thank you a thousand times for it. Even I can now believe that you are alive! I just couldn't bring myself to write to you until I had seen your handwriting with my own eyes.

Dear Son, we've been parted so long, not knowing where the other was. And now, after 12 years, good luck has arrived. And so wonderful--all three sons are alive! God has given me such a miracle. I can't be thankful enough. Now I can finally believe that God loves me.

When they took everything away from us, Heinrich Neufeld said, "Those whom God loves, he disciplines." And I couldn't understand that. But the time comes when one can understand everything.

May God give both you and us good health, so that we can be reunited.

In Germany, we lived together with a Mrs. Von Ramyer. Both of her sons came home from the war. She was lucky--both came. And we went to the railway station every day, and thought, out of the three, at least one should come, but we waited in vain. You can imagine how many tears we shed. And then we travelled on to Siberia where we are now. The first years were like the years at home, when we lived in one room in Tante Tina's house. But now we can't complain.

The past four years, I've been able to work at home. I do the housework, to cook supper, and also I sew for others. Don't earn very much, but I can buy what I need. Liese works on the collective farm. Katja works as a seamstress. And so life goes on. ..the only wish I have in this world is to see you all again. Then God can do what he wants with me; I'll be completely satisfied...

I still can hardly believe that you are really all alive. That is a great miracle of God, that He has protected all of you. I could write so much--but I hope we can all talk face to face very soon. May God also further lead us. And we owe Him so much thanks, that He has led us so wonderfully. And we should not get discouraged, but trust in God; he will make sure that all things go well.

Tonight I will also write to your brothers Jasch and Pet. Hope I will also get a sign of life from them.

Must hurry to conclude. May the Lord protect us from all evil and danger, and help that we can see each other soon. From Siberia, your loving mother, who never forgets you, greets you.

Till we meet again. Goodbye.

Elizabeth (Boldt)Bergen, her four daughters and three sons left their home in Ukraine in 1943. At the end of the war, she and her daughters ended up in a refugee camp in Thüringen, Germany. Her sons had been drafted into the German military. Elizabeth refused to leave this camp even when it became dangerous to stay--she was sure her sons would return. In 1945, the Soviets entered the camp, and everyone was forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union. Elizabeth and her daughters were sent to a forest work camp in Siberia. She'd had no news of her sons. For all she knew, they could all have been victims of the war.

In 1956, letters started to flow again. Suddenly, within a period of two weeks, Elizabeth found out that all three of her sons lived. The eldest, Henry, was in Canada; Jakob in Germany, and Peter, the youngest, lived in Siberia, not far from where she lived with her daughters.

1956 was a year of great rejoicing, and of great hopes and dreams. Sadly, Elizabeth's dreams were not realized; although Peter moved back to his family, she was never to meet Henry or Jakob again. She died in Russia in 1985. Her children emigrated to Germany, and in 1993, fifty years after the separation, the family was finally able to celebrate a joyful reunion.

Louise Bergen Price



**Beatitudes of a Family Genealogist**  
**Wilma Mauk**

Blessed are the great grandfathers, who saved embarkation  
and citizenship papers,  
For they tell whence they came.  
Blessed are the great grandmothers, who hoarded newspaper  
clippings and old letters,  
For these tell the story of their time.  
Blessed are all grandfathers, who filed every legal document,  
For this provides the proof.  
Blessed are grandmothers, who preserved family Bibles and diaries,  
For this is our heritage.  
Blessed are fathers, who elect officials that answer letters of inquiry,  
For – to some – the only link to the past.  
Blessed are mothers, who relate family tradition and legend to the family,  
For one of her children will surely remember.  
Blessed are relatives, who fill in family sheets with extra data,  
For to them we owe the family history.  
Blessed is any family, whose member strives for the preservation of records,  
For theirs is a labor of love.  
Blessed are the children, who will never say, "Grandma, you have told that  
old story twice today."

The above was taken from the St. Louis Genealogical Society Journal.

## Book Review

by Lawrence Klippenstein, Former Director, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Henry D. Remple, *From Bolshevik Russia to America: A Mennonite Family Story*. (Pine Hill Press, Inc., by the author, 2001, Hardcover, 366 pages, \$20.00 USD). May be ordered from Loring W. McAllister, 16368 South Swede Hill Drive, Afton, Minnesota, 55001, USA; [loringmcallister@earthlink.net](mailto:loringmcallister@earthlink.net)

Memoirs of Mennonites from Russia and the Soviet Union have become a very special genre of research and writing in North America. Some will say the stories are really all more or less alike, and it can be conceded that many themes do reoccur. But each one is still one individual's account and telling of what has been experienced, and these are never identical. Remple's story, as told here, is a case in point.

Henry's parents, Dietrich and Aganetha (Fast) Rempel, were part of a group of families who decided to leave the recently-formed Soviet Union and emigrate to the West if possible. They hoped to do this by traveling via the internationalized port of Batum on the Black Sea to Constantinople to ports in Western Europe and then on the USA. Six families left their homes together on 6 April 1922. It turned out that about 300 people would be in the total body attempting the same trip.



The story is the sketch of an odyssey undertaken under great stress, enormous uncertainties, unimaginable deprivations, and with much loss in every way. That loss would include the death of eight of the eleven member Rempel family before any of them could leave Batum. That would eventually leave only Henry with his two sisters, Agatha and Agnes, able to use the last coins sewed up in their clothes, to book passage to travel on and succeed in reaching their goal. By 20 October 1923, they had reached the homes of their Nebraska Mennonite sponsoring hosts in the town of York, where a very new chapter of life would open up immediately.



Southern Russia

From Bolshevik Russia to America is based on a diary which Henry kept from ca 1923-1928, and the memories of his sisters, along with other data which could be gathered by the writer. The book is remarkable for its details, and the dynamic of bringing the first hand reports of the three Rempels into one account. A rich collection of photos, and some excellent maps, with other visuals, and one should not forget an excellent foreword by Dr. Paul Toews of Fresno, California, augment the account.

The author, who recently celebrated his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday in Lawrence, Kansas where he lives alone after the passing of his wife, Mariana, is quite frank about some of the negative attitudes of Nebraska Mennonites toward these new "Russian" immigrants. But he also acknowledges with great warmth those who could make their new experience positive, among them his own host parents, the C.D. Epps.

Henry himself took an early interest in education so his story is also that of the making of a psychologist. His marriage to Mariana Lohrenz of Hillsboro, Kansas, and the raising of their children, is naturally woven into the telling as well.

There is a touching poignancy in the words of the author's summary of it all: "Agatha, Agnes and I have often looked back with gratitude at how it became possible for each of us to grow into a secure and mature adulthood as we made it through the years of adjustment to a new country with its unique societies, learned a new language, and became 'at home' with an extended family through the depression and WWII, establishing our families and enjoyed church and community activities, living lives of service to others...remaining true to the ideals of our mother and father, and their Mennonite tradition and teachings."

One cannot begin to review details here. The volume has just been released from the publisher, is being distributed by the author's son-in-law and will be well worth its price, whatever that may be. The author, editors and printers will have given us all something significant that is not just another immigrant story at all. It is a fresh testimony to courageous survival, enormous perseverance, energetic living, hard work and strong Christian faith which were all part of the lives of the Rempels who "made it," and thankfully have taken the time to tell us how it really was.

**The Annual General Meeting of the MHS of BC will be held on  
Saturday, May 11, 2002 @ 7:00pm  
(Just before the heritage lecture). All members and guests welcome.**



### Wenn du noch eine Mutter hast

Wenn du noch eine Mutter hast,  
so danke Gott und sei zufrieden;  
nicht allen auf dem Erdenrund  
ist dieses hohe Glück beschieden.  
Wenn du noch eine Mutter hast,  
so sollst du sie mit Liebe pflegen,  
daß sie dereinst ihr müdes Haupt  
in Frieden kann zu Ruhe legen.

Sie hat vom ersten Tage an  
für dich gelebt mit bangen Sorgen;  
sie brachte abends dich zur Ruh  
und weckte küssend dich am Morgen.  
Und warst du krank, sie pflegte dein,  
den sie mit tiefem Schmerz geboren,  
und gaben alle dich schon auf,--  
die Mutter gab dich nicht verloren.

Sie lehrte dich den frommen Spruch,  
sie lehrte dich zuerst das Reden;  
sie faltete die Hände dein  
und lehrte dich zum Vater beten.  
Sie lenkte deinen Kindessinn,  
sie wachte über deine Jugend;  
der Mutter danke es allein,  
wenn du noch gehst den Pfad der Tugend.

Und hast du keine Mutter mehr,  
und kannst du sie nicht mehr beglücken,  
so kannst du doch ihr frühes Grab  
mit frischen Blumenkränzen schmücken!  
Ein Mutter grab, ein heilig Grab, für dich  
die ewig heli'ge Stelle!  
O, wende dich an diesen Ort,  
wenn dich umtost des Lebens Welle!

Wilhelm Kaulisch