



Mennonite Historical Society of BC Newsletter

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

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

***Einwanderungszentralstelle* Documents: immigration records of ethnic Germans re-settled during the Third Reich now available for genealogical research**

by Richard Thiessen

What do Russian Mennonites, Heinrich Himmler and the SS, the U.S. Third Army, and the U.S. National Archives have in common? They are all components in the story of how the EWZ (*Einwanderungszentralstelle*) documents and the Berlin Document Center came into existence.

During World War II approximately 35,000 Mennonites from the Soviet Union were temporarily resettled in the Third Reich (only approximately 12,000 remained in Germany after the war with the rest having been repatriated to the U.S.S.R.). They represented only a tiny fraction of the more than 2.9 million individuals processed by the Deutschland Einwanderungszentralstelle (German Immigration Center), headed by Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler to facilitate the resettlement of ethnic Germans from other parts of Europe.



A group of Mennonite refugees at Lager Treffling, Austria, 1947.

(cont'd p. 3)

Refugees. Immigrants. Asylum seekers.
Economic migrants. Convention refugees.
Displaced persons. Sojourners, Emigrants.
Aliens. War refugees.

What these people have in common, regardless of the label we apply to them, is the desire to be elsewhere, to be away from their homeland. Some flee persecution, some seek economic opportunity, some simply want to live in a safe place, some want to be united with extended family, some want religious freedom, and others seek education and opportunities for their families. The search for new havens is as old as the story of humankind.

Many of our ancestors fled for a mixture of these reasons and whether we call them refugees or immigrants is not that important. Mennonites benefited from a Canadian immigration system that allowed them to come to Canada, often with the help of North American Mennonites.

The Canadian government allowed Mennonite immigration in large waves in the late 1800's, the 1920's and again after WWII. Marlene Epp reminded us recently of the horrors of fleeing war, the tearing apart of families and the difficulties of starting anew in a strange land. Despite being the beneficiaries of Canada's acceptance, we today complain about "queue jumpers" arriving in Canada. How soon we forget our own story and the generosity of a country that accepted us.

"I've been thinking the last couple of years that maybe "hospitality" is the replacement word for "evangelism." In the popular understanding of the postmodern world evangelism has become a propagandistic term. People see it as us imposing something - or feel that in some ways it is a disembodied message. But "hospitality" is different; there are a lot more "hospitality" stories in the Bible than "evangelism" stories."

Eugene Peterson.

We are reminded of Moses' instruction to his people en route to the promised land: Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. (Exodus 20/21) Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt to save Jesus life.

Refugees, like the poor, will always be with us. Today we have over 15 million in UNHCR refugee camps. We have masses of ordinary people struggling to survive.

Mennonites have a commendable record of assisting their sisters and brothers as well as other needy newcomers. The sponsorships in recent years of asylum seekers from southeast Asia is a commendable record. Canada's "whites only" immigration policy was changed in the 1960's to a fairer points system and now, most newcomers arrive from Asia, Africa and South America--countries that experience instability and poverty. Many want to share in the wealth of North America. If Canada accepted no immigrants or refugees, by 2050 our population would be about half of what it is now.

These immigrants are ... *"the most stupid in the nation, few of their children speak English and through their indiscretion or ours, or both, great disorders may one day arise among us."* Asians? No. Africans? No. The speaker was Benjamin Franklin talking about German immigrants to the USA 200 years ago!

The biblical instruction is clear: Do not mistreat or oppress the aliens in your midst.

H.N.

Future Events:

October 19, 2002

**Mennonite Historical Society Annual
Fundraising Dinner
Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church
with Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein
"Mennonite Response to WWII"**

November 9, 2002

**4th Annual Genealogy Workshop
with Dr. Glenn Penner & Dr. Tim Janzen
at the Garden Park Tower**

Immigration documents (cont'd from p.1)

As these ethnic Germans arrived in Germany, all individuals over the age of 15 were registered and photographed. Everyone was subject to a health and racial examination to determine their qualifications for German settlement and citizenship. This resettlement was part of a much larger plan by Himmler and the Schutzstaffel (SS) to create a pure race of Germanic people throughout the Third Reich.

The U.S. Third Army captured the Einwanderungszentralstelle (EWZ) documents in Bavaria in April 1945 as German officials were beginning to destroy them. The documents were part of a much larger collection of SS documents and were thus of prime importance in the investigation into the acts of genocide committed by the SS during and preceding the war. These documents were transferred to the newly created Berlin Document Center in January 1946, and later transferred to the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

The records were finally returned to the German government in 1994 after they had been microfilmed and indexed by National Archives staff. In 1996 the 8,600 microfilm rolls were made available to researchers at the National Archives II at College Park, Maryland.

There are several groups of records, each with their own index for research purposes. One group of records is the E/G Kartei (A3342-EWZ57), containing almost three million alphabetically arranged cards of all ethnic Germans processed by the Einwanderungszentralstelle.

The information collected includes the following: personal information such as given names, maiden name if married, date and place of birth and date and place of marriage; names of parents and siblings, the names of family members living within the same household, and physical characteristics such as height and weight. Each individual was assigned a unique EWZ number, used throughout the collection of files. The files are stored on 1,964 microfilm rolls.

A second group of records are the Anträge, containing the files of over 400,000 applications. These records are organized by country and regional sub-groupings, and then alphabetically by family name. The series of files pertaining to the Soviet Union are identified as A3342-EWZ50. These files contain an incredible amount of genealogical information, used by the Third Reich

to determine the racial quality of the individuals concerned. The following information is included for each person as applicable: date and place of birth; date and place of marriage; names of parents and grandparents (including maiden names) including their dates and places of birth, marriage and death; name of spouse including dates and places of birth, marriage and death; names of all children including their dates and places of birth and EWZ number if they were over 15 years old; a complete listing of where each individual lived and when he or she lived there; years the individual attended school and the location of the school; dates of entry into the Third Reich; copies of naturalization applications and certificates and passports; and in many cases a life story. The U.S.S.R. records are stored on 843 microfilm rolls and contain 110,000 files. Records also exist for persons of German ancestry who lived in Poland before World War II (A3342-EWZ52) and in the Baltic region (A3342-EWZ53), along with other areas throughout Europe.

A third group of records are the Stammbblätter, or family forms. There are around one million forms on 742 microfilm rolls, organized by EWZ number and not by surname. All of these microfilms are part of the A3342-EWZ58 set of films. These can provide additional information for some families that do not appear on either the E/G Kartei (A3342-EWZ57) or the Anträge (A3342-EWZ50) files.

For the past several years a number of individuals have started to compile detailed indexes of the Anträge or application files for those Germans who arrived in the Third Reich from Russia. Elli Wise of Frankfurt, Kentucky has been the most active in indexing EWZ microfilms that others have let her borrow up to this point. She is placing all of her indexes on the Odessa Library web site at <http://pixel.cs.vt.edu/library/war/ewz/>. In the last year Tim Janzen of Oregon has identified several hundred microfilms that he feels will contain the bulk of those Mennonites who migrated from Russia during the war. He has purchased a number of these microfilms and many have also been indexed by Elli Wise and have been placed on the Odessa Library web site.

Richard Thiessen has reviewed all the EWZ files that are already on the Odessa Library web site and has created a database of just the Mennonite data. To this he has been adding the data from those microfilms purchased by Tim Janzen, and plans are under way to add Mennonite data from microfilms purchased by several other Mennonite

Immigration Documents (cont'd)

researchers in Winnipeg. The Mennonite index is available on the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society website at:

<http://www.mmhs.org/russia/ewz/ewz.htm>. This index already contains well over 20,000 entries and includes not only those Mennonites who were a part of the Great Trek in 1943 but in many cases also their parents and grand-parents.

Efforts are now under way to coordinate the efforts of Mennonite researchers who are purchasing the EWZ microfilms. They would like to see more of these microfilms purchased so that the information can be extracted and indexed. One goal is to expand the Mennonite EWZ index on the Internet as more microfilms are indexed so that eventually it will include the files of the vast majority of the approximately 35,000 Mennonites who fled with the German army from Russia in 1943. When this is done the index might very well include data on several hundred thousand Mennonites since the files include data going back several generations.

A second goal is to duplicate all of the EWZ microfilms with significant Mennonite data and make them available to all interested Mennonite archives and historical societies. The microfilms are considered U.S. government documents and as such are not subject to copyright protection. This allows anyone to duplicate the microfilms at a lower cost than the \$34 U.S. it costs to purchase the microfilms from the U.S. National Archives (the cost is \$39 U.S. for non-Americans). The compilation of several sets of these microfilms along with the EWZ Mennonite index on the Internet would allow researchers across North America the opportunity to carry out genealogical research on this large group of Mennonites in Russia. While the index already provides

researchers with names and a date and place of birth, the complete files provide much more data, including the names of all known ancestors, physical and medical information, where a person lived and went to school, and often additional biographical information.

A number of Mennonite archives and historical societies have agreed to contribute funds to purchase some of these microfilms. The Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. wishes to support this project through a special fund-raising appeal to its members. The cost for each microfilm is approximately \$60 CDN. We do not have the necessary funding in our budget and are looking for additional donations for this valuable project. If you would like to contribute, please use the envelope provided and mail your donation to the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C., 211 – 2825 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford BC V2T 6S3.

(Partially based on an article that first appeared in the September 1998 issue of the Mennonite Historian.)

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Information wanted

Information wanted about self-published document: *Wie Gott Führt*, von J. Riediger and Susie Hamm. I picked up a copy of this at MCC, and would like permission from Mrs. Hamm's family to reprint a few excerpts in our newsletter. If you have any information, contact me at Louise_Price@mindlink.bc.ca

Announcement

On August 4, 2002, beginning at 3PM, a special commemorative service will be held at the *Gem of the West Museum* in Coaldale, Alberta. It will honour the contributions of **Benjamin and Maria Jantz** to the migration of over 20,000 Mennonites from Ukraine and Russia during the 1920's. A part of the program will feature a concert in honour of her grandparents by the European soprano **Edith Wiens**. For tickets (free) contact: *Gem of the West Museum*, 2206 18th St., Coaldale, AB. T1M 1G2.

May 11 Lecture: Heroines and Victims: Women without Men by Henry Neufeld

In times of war, women are usually left with the responsibility of being both mother and father, breadwinner, nurturer, moral guide, and disciplinarian, said Dr. Marlene Epp in a lecture to over 300 at a recent BC Mennonite Historical Society event. Epp, who is dean of Conrad Grebel College, is the author of *"Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War."*

In times of war, women have to survive in an atmosphere of fear, threats, deprivation, and uncertainty. They are "heroines, surmounting obstacles and taking on challenges for the futures of their children that I as a mother can hardly imagine." Since most men are conscripted, exiled, imprisoned or executed, in custody or otherwise engaged, women are left to fend for themselves. Victims of the circumstances, they often have to make major decisions alone.

These women raise their children as single parents, they struggle to survive, and they must decide whether to stay in their war-ravished homeland or to risk travelling thousands of miles to attempt a new and hopefully peaceful life.

While Epp focused on the immigration of Mennonite Women after WWII, she noted that 80 per cent of the worlds' refugees today are women and children. In the aftermath of the war in Rwanda in 1994, over 60,000 children, most of them girls, became 'heads of households.'

For Mennonite women, "protecting one's children and working to safeguard their futures became the most important goal," said Epp. They "...faced the stigma of being a single parent in a society (and church) that values whole nuclear families," and further discrimination as "DP's" (Displaced Persons).

Epp grew up in a family that "breathed Mennonite history" and later, in graduate studies, she began to uncover the little told stories of Mennonite women in the post WWII era. She noted that of the almost 4,000 Mennonite refugees who arrived in 1948, 75 per cent of those over the age of 30 were women.

As a result of the Stanlinist purges before WWII, about 50 per cent of the of Mennonite families in USSR were without a father. In some villages, this figure rose to 85 per cent. When the German army retreated from Ukraine, it took with them about 35,000 Mennonites. In this trek women drove horses, fetched feed for the livestock, cooked meals, and cared for the children, the sick and the

elderly. One woman was a nervous wreck after driving the family wagon all day, yet she still had to care for her three sons who had whooping cough. "Women had to be both mother and father: they had to be brave and strong, physically, emotionally and intellectually, and also be nurturing and caring of their families," said Epp.

Mennonite women tried to speed the escape as they heard of women being raped by Russian soldiers. "It is impossible to know how many women were raped. Some have told their stories: others never will," said Epp, noting that "these women were also heroines, sometimes allowing themselves to be assaulted to protect their children, or in exchange for food for their families, or to ensure an escape to the west." Situational decisions, including lying, stealing food and changing identities were used to survive—actions later criticized as moral compromises by churches in Canada.

These women were viewed with ambiguity by their Canadian host churches; on the one hand they were considered heroic for all they had been through, on the other they were viewed as weak and dependent. "In one family, the daughter of an Mennonite woman and a Russian officer was viewed with suspicion as she grew up in Canada and doubt was cast on her own moral disposition." Some Canadian Mennonite churches refused baptism to single mothers, said Epp.

The presence of female-led families had an impact on the church. In the 1950's First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon had 478 members, 280 of them were women and 113 were single or widowed.

Epp summarized: "We learn that the respective roles of men and women can be altered dramatically by circumstances... that intense personal and community faith can be maintained and even grow when there are no churches, ministers, hymnbooks, even Bibles... that close caring families happen in many ways."

Epp concluded her lecture with a challenge: "... we can use our own history to teach our children, not only about their own rich and faithful heritage, but also to help them understand the newcomers in their communities."

The evening also featured a Mother's day poem in German by 9 year old Julia Harder, congregational singing led by Louise Price, and Mary Ann and John Taves.

MHSBC Annual Meeting by Henry Neufeld

A brief annual meeting was held just prior to Marlene Epp's lecture on May 11. President John Konrad noted that the written annual reports were available.

The year 2001 saw an increasing number of visitors to our centre in the Garden Park Tower, noted Konrad. He expressed appreciation for the work of volunteers, Board, and the support of members. He noted with sadness the passing of long time member and supporter, Bill Riediger, in September 2001.

Special projects funded by MHS of BC included the microfilming of documents from the Zaporozhye archives, the acquisition of records from the Odessa Archives, and the translation of these documents from Russian to English.

Events

In the 2001 calendar of events, one evening focused on the Mennonite settlements in South America, one on Prussian and Polish Mennonites, and a "Music in the Valley" afternoon.

Archives

A number of volunteers continue to work at organizing archival materials. 2001 saw the addition of 15 family histories to the collections. Another computer has been added to facilitate genealogical research. A genealogy workshop was held in October and the indexing of obituaries from the *Mennonitische Rundschau* has been completed from 1940-2002.

Finances

The financial statements as presented by treasurer Ed Hildebrand showed a modest surplus for the year. Ed expressed appreciation for the hard work of volunteers and the generous support of MHSBC members. He acknowledged the receipt of a portion of the estate of Agnes Neustaedter, which has been added to our endowment fund. Copies of the financial statement are available from our office.

Board appointees

The following were appointed to the Board of the MHSBC: John Konrad, Henry Martens, Peter Neudorf, Louise Price, and Henry Rempel.

Book Review: *Men of Stone* by Helen Rose Pauls

Men of Stone by Gayle Friesen has received accolades in both the United States and Canada. It was selected as a "Best Books for Young Adults" by the Young Adult Library Services [of the American Library Association], and was presented the 'Young Adult Book Award' by the Canadian Library Association.

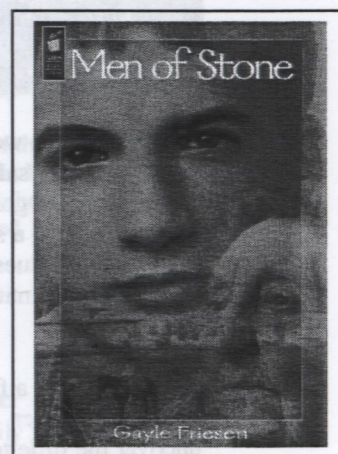
The universality of the theme of bullying has made this work very popular indeed with youthful readers. It is appearing on most school and public library shelves, in Book Fairs and has been reviewed in the Vancouver Sun and the National Post. What makes all this popularity even more exciting for us B.C. Mennonites, is that Gayle Friesen was raised in Chilliwack by Peter and Martha Neumann, and draws lessons about very current problems from Mennonite history.

Young Ben, who lives with his widowed mother and three sisters, is being violently bullied by a thug at school. His fear and rage are taking control of his life. But Ben learns about forgiveness when his ancient Great-Aunt Frieda comes to visit and tells about her former life in Russia. She tells how she was finally able to forgive Stalin's brutal

henchmen, bullies from her own past. After Stalin's "men of stone" took her young husband from her, she returned from a desperate visit to the prison to find that her son had disappeared as well.

Slowly, as Frieda shares how she coped with such profound loss, she helps Ben make sense of his life. He needs to get past the rage that has taken control of him and stop hating. He must go back to doing the things he enjoys most. Great Aunt Frieda, with her insight and wisdom, seems to stitch Ben and his dysfunctional family back together like a quilt.

A mainstream book ending with the words "Nah yo"? Gayle manages to pull it off. This book is available at the Archives' library, your public library, and wherever good books are sold.



Board Profiles: Louise Price by Henry Neufeld

Louise Price was born in the Seeboden, Austrian refugee camp, the oldest of five children born to Henry and Irene Bergen. Even though she was born in Austria, Louise is not a citizen of Austria; citizenship was not given to "Displaced Persons." Neither does she have a birth certificate.

The Bergen family came to Canada on SS Samara in 1948. Initially they lived with relatives in Yarrow, then settled on a berry/chicken farm on Peardonville Road, Clearbrook.

Louise attended Simpson Elementary School (where her children also attended) and the MEI. She received her sociology degree from Simon Fraser University where she also met Vic Price, in an anthropology course. They married in 1969 and both completed their teacher training and settled on a small acreage on Peardonville Road.

Louise was a stay at home Mom until her three children were in school. She completed a library technician course at UCFV. Since then, Louise has been working for the Langley school district. Now that the children have left home (they live in Abbotsford, Winnipeg and Kingston) Louise has more time to pursue her writing. She's been focusing on stories on the experiences of her parents and grandparents in Ukraine. She's active in the Langley Mennonite Fellowship where she enjoys planning worship services, leading worship and telling stories.

Louise and Vic enjoy travelling; last summer they travelled to Bolivia to visit a former MCC 'trainee'

who lived with them in 1999. This fall Louise and her mother are planning to join the Ukraine cruise to visit places where her mother grew up.

Vic's parents emigrated from Wales in 1947. "We occasionally go to Welsh hymn sings, where at least half the time, we sing in the Welsh language, and the conductor often speaks Welsh. Suddenly, I'm the Englaender in the community! The Welsh do NOT consider themselves English, any more than Mennonites in Ukraine would tolerate being called Russian," said Louise. At one of these events, a woman said to Louise, "I hear the Mennonites also sing in 4 part harmony?" "Some still do," she said.

Louise joined the MHS Board in 1999. She enjoys telling stories of our past, meeting people, and she contributes a significant amount of work to the Newsletter.

Recently Louise has been reading *Borderland--a Journey through the history of Ukraine*, by Anna Reid, *Glauben, Lieben, Handeln*, by Albert Schweitzer and *Whylah Falls* by George Elliott Clarke.

Louise recently heard this story. There's choir practice in Heaven. Gabriel is conducting thousands of sopranos, thousands of altos, thousands of bases, and one Welsh tenor. The choir practice starts, and it all sounds so wonderful, all this beautiful singing, when Gabriel calls a halt. "Good, good, good," he says. "Sopranos, altos, bases, you're doing great. But could the tenor section please tone it down a bit!"

Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) by Henry Neufeld

When my parents became citizens at the Court House in Chilliwack in December 1950, they each received a certificate from the IODE. Some of the statements are impressive: "Weapons are unnecessary, our courts provide for the righting of wrongs" and the fact that "Canada has set her feet upon the paths of peace" thus old hatreds should be cast off.

I contacted the IODE to learn about this practice. The IODE has a citizenship branch which used to provide these certificates (sometimes along with

tea and goodies) to welcome people into Canadian citizenship as part of the citizenship court ceremony. This practice has fallen into disuse with the changes to Citizenship courts a few years ago.

The IODE, a Canadian organization, was founded in New Brunswick in 1900 during the Boer War to assist soldiers, their wives and children. Currently the IODE has 9,000 members in Canada and provides scholarships, funds health clinics, provides school lunches on northern areas, and assists numerous local charities. Membership is open to Canadian citizens.

Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire Present Greetings

To You Herman H. Hunsfeld
on the occasion of your becoming

A Canadian Citizen and A British Subject
by Naturalization

At Chilliwack, B.C.
On February 6, 1920.

You are now admitted to share, with us,
all the ancient liberties of the British peoples.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH: FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY:
FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION: FREE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT
insofar as these great privileges are not endangered by abuse.

But these GREAT RIGHTS are built upon DUTIES binding us as CITIZENS.

FEAR and LOVE OF GOD:

Our laws do not suffer blasphemy.

LOYALTY TO HIS MAJESTY, THE KING:

To His Dominion of Canada, and to
His Empire—our laws do not suffer
sedition.

RESPECT FOR LAW AND ORDER:

Weapons are unnecessary. Our Courts
provide for the righting of wrongs.

RESPECT FOR OUR SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENT:

Our free and democratic system of
government provides for changes by
constitutional means.

THE CASTING OFF OF OLD HATREDS:

Canada has set her feet upon the paths
of peace, at home and among the
nations of the world.

WE WELCOME YOU TO SHARE WITH US AND TO PROTECT, EVEN TO DEATH,
THESE RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES.

Remember Your Naturalization Oath Always.

The Union Jack is the Flag of Canada.

God Save The King is the National Anthem.



The way we were: Coghlan by Henry Neufeld

It was called Coghlan because of the postal address; the nearest post office was on the Coghlan Road (256 St.). When that post office was closed in 1951 the church became Bethel Mennonite Church, Aldergrove. Only a few people remember it as Coghlan.

In 1933 there wasn't much new land available in the Yarrow-Sardis area. Jakob Reimer, who came to Canada via Mexico, bicycled to the Murrayville municipal office to seek land. 160 acres were available on the northwest corner of the Otter and Roberts Roads (248 St. and 56 Ave.) Reimer and Daniel Schmidt bicycled from Greendale to inspect the land, carrying a fence augur to check the soil. Seven families were interested in this venture and Johann Jantzen (father of Rev Aron Jantzen) who spoke English went to Kamloops to negotiate the purchase with the landowner.

The land was sandy, rocky and deemed infertile by the local government. It was feared people settling there might become dependent on the government. The sale was allowed and eight families bought the land at \$7 per acre.

The struggles of the Coghlan settlers were those of many Fraser Valley pioneers: poverty, land clearing by hand, wells dug, and the annual trek to pick hops in Sardis. In 1937 things got desperate and the new settlers went to the local municipality for assistance; the men had to work on road construction as repayment. The economic prospects began to improve when they learned from local Japanese farmers that the "infertile" land was good for growing strawberries.

Jacob Krause saw the difficulties, and decided not to stay. He sold 14 acres to Julius Hoock and his son Nick and donated one acre for a church building. That is still the site of Bethel Mennonite church.

Worship



Coghlan church under construction, 1936.

Beginning in 1934, worship services were held in homes with Mennonite Brethren, Lutherans, and Seventh Day Adventists often attending. Construction of the first church building began in 1936. This building was expanded in 1948 and was eventually bought by a Christian Reformed group in 1957 for \$1500 and moved to their site.



Coghlan church after 1948 addition

Martha Braun (Hooge) was nine years old when her parents bought 15 acres near the church in 1936; she has been part of the church since then. The Hooge home with a large veranda, built by her father, still stands immediately west of the church. Martha remembers helping her father work on the first church building. Martha was baptized in the church and she and Albert have been active in the congregation continuously. Albert was choir leader for many years; he recalls singing to a pump organ and remembers when he, Wadena Janzen and N.N. Friesen bought the church's first piano.

A new sanctuary was built in 1956/57 with contractor Walter Goertz, a member of Bethel, employing many members on the project. The new sanctuary had red "Exit" signs and one church leader said this made it look like a theatre, prompting some younger folk to wonder how that man knew what the inside of a theatre looked like. The exit signs were covered. The current sanctuary was built in 1987-88.

In January 1946 the church decided to allow women to vote at annual congregational meetings, but not at "Bruderschaft" meetings.

Leadership

In 1934 the church had one minister, Rev. Heinrich H. Dueck, who was ordained in Chinook, Alberta in 1930. Aron Jantzen, one of the first settlers, was ordained in 1935. In 1935 Rev. Jacob J. Baerg moved to the area. These three men are credited

with providing the spiritual basis for the church; they served without pay.



Aron Jantzen and Family, 1938.

In the early years Rev. Jantzen and Dueck would bicycle to Abbotsford to serve settlers there who had no minister.

Only an "Aeltester" could serve communion; and Jacob H. Janzen and later Jacob J Wiens both from Vancouver, provided these services in Coghlan.

Aeltester N.M Bahnman served the congregation from 1944 till his death in 1945. In 1947 Rev. Johannes Regier from Tiefengrund, Saskatchewan became the *Aeltester* at Bethel. He was the first paid minister of the congregation, in 1950 he received \$300.00 per year as a token of appreciation.

Rev. N.N. Friesen from Black Creek, who had been ordained in Saskatchewan by Rev. J. Regier, moved to the community in 1954 and assumed leadership of the church. His salary was \$150.00 per month. Walter Goertz, who moved to the community with his parents in 1937, credits Rev. N.N. Friesen with reaching to the broader community and joining the Langley Ministerial. "He was very progressive for his time," said Goertz.

Other clergy in the congregation included John Goertz, Leonard Ewert, Richard Friesen, Jacob J. Baerg, and locally ordained young men Henry T.

Dueck and John H. Neufeld. Clergy serving the congregation since 1966 include Rudy Goerzen, Art Regier, John Friesen, Peter Retzlaff, Peter Bartel, and George Hoeppner, the current pastor.

Education

Rev. N. Bahnman established the first General Conference Mennonite Bible School in BC in Coghlan in 1939, with 22 students. No tuition was charged and none of the teachers were salaried. In later years teachers were paid through the Bible School Society. Eventually the BC conference assumed full responsibility for the school and relocated it to Abbotsford and became Bethel Bible Institute.

Martha Braun attended the Bible school at Coghlan and remembers a class photo retaken because on the previous photo some girls were wearing short sleeved blouses, a practice considered inappropriate by one of the teachers. "Now things have changed," says Martha, "anything goes in church, you can wear shorts, torn jeans, or be dressed up."

The church had German school on Saturday mornings; this ended in 1968 when only 11 students registered; they were driven to MEI for Saturday morning German classes. By the 1950's a number of young people attended the MEI, traveling there daily, often in pick up trucks.

Peter Kehler was the first youth leader at Bethel in 1954. Albert and Martha Braun credit Marvin Kehler with drawing many youth into the church in the early 70's. In addition to weekly youth meetings a coffee house near the church became a popular gathering place for youth.

In 1973 homes within a 3 mile radius of the church were surveyed to determine if there were children who wished to be picked up for Sunday school and a busing ministry began.

There have been changes in and outside the church: the tar paper and shiplap building is long gone, the name changed from Coghlan to Bethel in 1951, the choir is no more, the music is louder, salaried pastors replaced lay ministers, formerly solemn baptisms now might be greeted with applause, and the strawberry farms which surrounded the church have given way to urban sprawl. The church has experienced growth; beginning with 38 members in 1939, it now has 252 members and has influenced the spiritual lives of hundreds more who have passed through its doors.

(For more information see: Bethel Mennonite Church, 1936 -1980, available at the archives.)

Bethel was our primary nurturing community, both socially and spiritually. Within its embrace we learned about our faith heritage and many of us came to a personal faith in God through Jesus Christ through the efforts of our families and the congregation. They believed that "mortals do not live by bread alone" and so they committed themselves, in addition to working hard on their farms, to provide facilities, opportunities and settings for worship and Christian education for themselves and their families.

Our church group, youth and choir, was for most of us the social group we belonged to. Friday evening choir rehearsals with Wally Janzen were good for singing and socializing. I recall the catechism instruction that Rev. Johannes Regier gave us - very structured (the question and answer Katechismus) and certainly there was no discussion in the group, or with him one-on-one during the months we took the classes. The baptism and communion services were known for their solemnity.

Language transition (German to English) was a hot potato in the late 50's. That's how I ended up becoming a preacher - through the side door of five minute "sermonettes" within a German service. Later they got longer. I remember one man walking out whenever I got up to speak - I think it was the English or the fact that I was not yet ordained and stood behind the pulpit.

In those days ethical issues were black and white. People were utterly sincere but in retrospect they were sincerely wrong on a number of counts. You were in the world or not according to a set of key issues: makeup, movies, cards, drinking, dancing. No latitude was allowed. Those who pushed the boundaries, were isolated and avoided. Fit in or ship out!

When I preached on the short-sighted usher (James 2) I gave six examples of how we continued to do today what they did then, judging according to appearances - and the next day Rev. N.N. Friesen called to say that the phone lines were getting warm. I asked why and he said, it was because of my sermon and I should come to a meeting of the "Lehrdienst" that evening.

I was being called to account. This group of solemn deacons and ministers greeted me and asked me to recant since people were objecting to some of my examples - lipstick, praying

without folded hands, etc. I said I wasn't prepared to do that but wanted a chance to preach the sermon again on Sunday to clarify an obvious misunderstanding. They finally agreed. Somehow the people were able to understand it better the second time.

Theologically several things stand out: First, the theme of separation from the world - being worldly was certainly the worst kind of sin, being self-righteous was not.

Second, the annual evangelistic services. Evangelism was for public discourse - rarely in the privacy of a home or in one-on-one conversation. The evangelistic message that was preached was for a memorable conversion - Paul on the Damascus road or the prodigal son finally repenting. It was probably good and necessary for us to hear that, but I am sorry that we never heard about Timothy's gradual step-by-step conversion experience.

Third, the emphasis on dispensational views of eschatology/prophecy. My first English bible was the Scofield Bible and my radio church was the Radio Bible Class of DeHaan, also an ardent dispensationalist. I believe this was prevalent in many churches during those years.

Fourth, the basic approach to the Bible was fundamentalism - the Bible was to be taken literally. When we went to seminary in 1966, the farewell words of one lay minister was a warning, "pass auf dass du nicht mit einer verkürzten Bibel nachhause kommst." This warning was rooted in part in fear of higher education, especially theological education, which included the work of biblical scholars.

In retrospect, I wonder why the church leadership didn't offer clarification and a perspective, maybe even a critique of the eviction of the Japanese farmers from the community during WW11. Was it too hot a topic because it was an economic benefit for some of our people to get those pieces of land? What stands out for me was the modeling that Jake Baerg did in the youth class - he had us take turns leading our peers in that group. I still remember the first text I taught. Whether he was aware of it or not, he nurtured us toward gift discernment and a possible calling even though he had no carefully thought out approach to Christian education. He was simply doing what Anabaptism at its best said was the thing to do.

(Rev. Neufeld grew up attending the Bethel church and was ordained there. A former pastor and President of CMBC, he lives in Winnipeg.)

Snapshots

by Louise Bergen Price

Of course there are very few photographs from this time. These are snapshots in words. I page through the picture album in my mind, and here is what I see:

1. A dim, crowded room. We are facing a brick oven, the old-fashioned European kind that can heat a whole house. Beside the oven is a narrow bench—a young girl is curled up here, facing the wall. Her shoulders jut through the thin material of her dress and a frayed blanket covers her legs. She is lying very still. Yes, it's just a photo, but I can see that the girl hasn't moved in quite some time. The other people are in the shadows, except for a small boy holding a crust of bread in one hand. His other hand is on the girl's shoulder. A woman sits motionless, holding a sock in her hands. The caption—for all of these pictures have captions—reads:

October 1932: Let her be, Jascha. She's dying.

2. The train is heading north-east. It is early fall. The larches are starting to lose their needles—if this picture were in colour, the train would be a black streak heading into all this gold. If you look closely, you will see that, although it is a cattle car, its cargo is people. They stare out of the narrow slit openings, but they don't see the larches. They don't see anything around them. On top of one of the cars are a couple of shapes and if you look closer here, too, you'll see that they are children. Two girls, 8 and 10 years old. They lie on their bellies on top of the railway car, their faces propped up on their elbows. They see the larches, the golden afternoon.

September 1945: To us it was still an adventure; we were too young to understand.

3. Their faces look peaceful in death. The whole family, father, mother, teenage children. A few of the girls wear scarves around their foreheads—the only indication that this was not a natural death. They have been washed and dressed with care; the girls wear white dresses, the men suits. All hold palm branches in their hands. A photographer has set up a tripod; he has lifted a corner of the black cloth over the camera. He seems reluctant to enter the blackness under the cloth. Out of range of his camera, to the right of the picture, is an open grave. Further in the distance, fires smoulder, and smoke rises from the rubble. A dog sits, waiting. The only things at peace are the faces of the dead.

October 1919: The bandits were here yesterday.

4. A refugee camp. Long rows of barracks. A convoy of transport trucks has arrived, and some refugees are carrying bags and suitcases toward the trucks. Soldiers lean against the trucks, waiting, smoking cigarettes. In the foreground, a British military officer stands patiently, listening to three women. The women are middle aged. They wear dresses to mid-calf, buttoned-up sweaters, kerchiefs tied at the chin. Their faces show fear, anger, and stubbornness. One woman holds a paper toward the officer; her other hand rests on her hip. Her chin juts forward.

October 1945. Shoot us here, now. We are not going back to Russia.