



Mennonite Historical Society of BC Newsletter

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The MHS of BC Newsletter is produced quarterly 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 Hugo Friesen and Mary Ann Quiring. Contributions are welcome.

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**WHAT WE HAVE
HEARD AND
KNOWN, WE
WILL TELL THE
NEXT**

“Russian Mennonite Architecture” *a lecture by Architect Rudy Friesen*

The lecture will take place **Saturday, February 22 2003, 7 pm**
at **Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church** (corner Windsor and Marshall in Abbotsford)

Rudy Friesen (Winnipeg) and Sergey Shmakin (Ukraine) wrote and compiled the book:

“Into the Past: Buildings of the Mennonite Commonwealth”



Teacher's College, Chortitza-Rosental, built 1913, photo 2002.

Next event: “Songs for special occasions: weddings, funerals, Mother’s Day...”
A wonderful Sunday afternoon of music and singing is being planned
to take place in May.
Watch for further details soon.

Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. #211-2825 Clearbrook Rd., Abbotsford, B.C. V2T 6S3
Tel: 604 853-6177 Fax: 604 853-6246 Email: archives@mhsbc.com
Website: www.mhsbc.com Hours 9am-4pm Monday to Friday

"Nostalgia defeats people. It destroys achievement and makes people lose sight of a better future. To call back to the past is easy, but to strive to the future is a painful passage that everyone must go through to accomplish anything."

Gio Xiong

Gio Xiong knows what he is talking about. An artist in China who protested the practises of the government, he had to leave his homeland and start over in Canada. As Mennonites, we are often in danger of glorifying our past, of dwelling in nostalgia of the 'golden days,' sometimes even vilifying those who we feel have done us wrong. That is not productive. But what is productive and exciting are the efforts of Mennonites to help Ukraine reconstruct, to help those most vulnerable in the new society there. The center in Moloshansk is one example. I visited this centre as part of the Mennonite tour group to Ukraine, and was thrilled to see the pile of suitcases of clothing, medical supplies donated by tour group members to the Centre. Mennonites have also helped provide extra funding for the Mädchenschule in Chortitza. My grandmother attended this high school for girls in the early 1900's.

Now our group was welcomed by smiling, enthusiastic children, still sitting in the same clean, sunny classrooms, still entering the school on stairs that had the 'Lepp and Wallman' on the stair treads. On our tour here, the principal explained that they receive government funding only for salaries—supplies and maintenance of the building and grounds must come from other sources. Last year, the school was able to fence the property to protect it from vandalism from funds donated by tour group members. In the city of Zaporizhzhya, the Mennonite Benevolent Society of Manitoba provides a home care program with support for the elderly and the people with disabilities in the Zaporizhzhya area. (See following article by program director, Louis Sawatzky)

It is exciting to see and participate in these new initiatives in Ukraine. As Paul Toews, Russian Mennonite historian has said, *"There are opportunities that come to a people because of their history. It would be a great irony if the greatest Mennonite contribution (in Ukraine) were yet to come."*

LBP

Report from The Mennonite Family Centre – Ukraine

by Louie Sawatzky

The Mennonite Family Centre (MFC) is sponsored by The Mennonite Benevolent Society (Manitoba) and is legally registered as a "local" charity in the Zaporozhye region under Ukraine law. It was organized on December 14, 2001 and was registered early in 2002.

Our mission is to develop and initiate delivery of health and social services programs based on Christian values from a Mennonite perspective in the Zaporozhye community

- for needy individuals with a primary focus on the elderly
- that train service providers and caregivers, and
- that demonstrate and promote the principles of volunteerism, sustainability and a civil society.

We are excited about the progress being made, and the help provided to needy persons through this program. The project consists of several phases:

First, the Home Care program was begun under the leadership of Ann Goertzen from Winnipeg. The local Mennonite congregation in Zaporozhye is very much involved, working alongside Ann, and referring persons needing help in their own homes, to the program.

Second, a Home Care training program was begun. This is an exciting program, where individuals are enabled to nurture and care for seniors in their homes or their area of work. Lasting skills are taught that increase self-reliance, and improve the quality of life. The first graduating class completing training in August 2002; the second training course, with 20 persons enrolled, is now nearing completion.

Third, the vision is to equip and operate a residential care facility, where seniors not able to care for themselves can receive a warm and comfortable 'home', preserving their own dignity and quality of life during the time they are most vulnerable. This phase of the project is a longer-term objective and fund raising for this venture has begun. There are virtually no homes like this in Ukraine.

We thank all those who have or are considering prayer and/or financial support for this project. We would love to place you on our mailing list. Write to:

The Mennonite Benevolent Society
Att: Louie Sawatzky
1045 Concordia Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2K 3S7

Canadian Mennonite Responses to WWII

by Helen Rose Pauls

For our society's fundraising banquet this year, we decided to explore some of the difficult choices our fathers, brothers and uncles had to make in World War II, particularly after conscription began. We chose as a theme, "Canadian Mennonite Responses to World War II".

An annual banquet is made up of many parts and involves the hard work and dedication of many people. Once again we were well served by caterer Gerald Thiessen and his capable staff, who provided a delicious beef dinner.

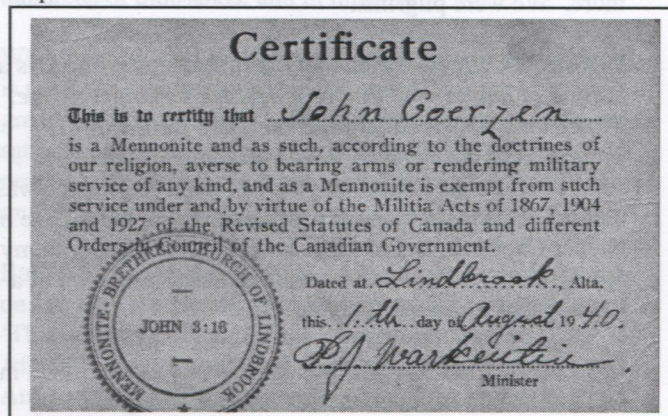
Our new office mavin, Mary Ann Quiring was busy for days, answering phones and selling tickets, and she and Jean Neufeld prepared and serviced the book table. A book which was highlighted during the evening was "Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946" compiled by MCC Seniors for Peace in 1998. It features many stories told by men who chose to become conscientious objectors [CO's], rather than serve in combat.

Jean Neufeld researched suitable pictures and photocopied them for the pictorial display, which depicted many local men in uniform, with descriptions of their service in the last war. Eben-Ezer ladies readied the tables for a 6 pm start, and the gym was full of 280 expectant Mennonite history buffs. "Springs of Joy" looked after the musical part of the evening. The group features soloist Kathy Hintz, violinist Jake Hintz, pianist Marcus Unger and Alexander Maier, who delighted all with his rich warm oboe playing.

Dr. David Ewert told a moving personal story of how conscription affected his family and how he lost a brother to the war. He

poignantly described the misunderstandings and the woundedness surrounding that event in the life of his family.

Our speaker, Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein, entitled his talk: "What weapons can a Christian use?"



Conscientious Objector Certificate issued to John Goerzen, 1940.

Klippenstein illustrated how the weapons listed in Ephesians 6, "the whole armor of God", can overcome evil, for they are truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God.

At this year's annual banquet in October, we are hoping to celebrate the Eighty-Year Jubilee of those who came to Canada from Russia in the 1920's, with John B. Toews as the speaker. Watch for details in this newsletter.

From the President: Reflections on 2002

by John Konrad

The past year has been a good one for our Society. We have sponsored three major events with strong participation by our members. We have received more microfilms from Russian archives, material that shed new light on Mennonite life in that country over the last two generations and particularly under the Soviet regime in the 1930s. We have seen double the number of people visiting our archival centre last year over the preceding period.

We have some 15 to 20 volunteers working regularly to preserve, classify and make accessible information that has been collected. We are continuing to scan and digitize old photos noting the people and places recorded on these photos for future generations. We have again assisted in funding the microfilming of records in Russian archives, which are then catalogued and shared with other Mennonite archives in North America, Europe and South America.

We would like to thank all of our volunteers for their faithful service without whom we could not have achieved these results.

To our members, we thank you for your generous support over the past year. You have contributed at our meetings and you have sent in donations unsolicited. Without your support we could achieve very little. Income tax receipts will be mailed out very soon.

We are making new commitments to acquire more microfilms from Russian archives as so far we have only retrieved a small proportion of what is available. We are hoping to fund about two projects per year comprising some 10,000 pages at a cost of about \$16,000. These costs are shared by three or four Mennonite archives. If you wish to make a contribution to this cause, please designate your donation to "Microfilming - Russian Archives".



Pilgrimage to Ukraine: a personal journal on the Dnieper Cruise, October 2002

by Louise Bergen Price

"Good morning, fellow pilgrims! We have arrived in Zaporozh'ye." Walter Unger's voice greeted us on October 4, day 5 of the 2002 Mennonite Heritage Cruise to Ukraine. Up to now, viewing the history and beauty of Kiev and Kaniv, we had been tourists, travelers. Not any more. We were pilgrims.

Webster's Collegiate dictionary says that a pilgrimage is an *'action of journeying, esp. as a devotee seeking a shrine.'* Most of the 170 or so pilgrims on board the *General Vatutin* were in search of their own family 'shrine' somewhere in the Zaporozh'ye area. Each pilgrimage was unique. This is the story of my pilgrimage to the village of Nieder Chortitza, and to other areas that intersect with my family's story. It is not a travelogue, but a reflection of a journey that's still going on for me.

My mother, Irene Bergen, was born in Nieder Chortitza in 1921. She had never been back. Now I, along with my brother Henry Bergen and his wife Norma, have accompanied her back to her homeland.

It's a warm day, slightly windy, when we meet Sina, an old acquaintance and former neighbour of my mother's and hire a car to take us to Nieder Chortitza. The road is a good one, paved and lined by trees on either side.

I know these trees. Perhaps not these trees in particular, but the trees that were here 69 years ago, when my grandmother and her good friend Anna Penner (Taunte Nuut) walked back to Nieder Chortitza down this road in February 1933. The service had been for 33 people from the surrounding area who had died in Siberia that winter, among them my grandmother's parents Jakob and Katherina Janzen of Neuendorf, and their two sons, Heinrich and Wilhelm. "The service was so sad," Anna Penner told me years later. "All these people crying, screaming." Since it was late, they spent the night in Chortitza. It was very cold when they left for Nieder Chortitza early the next morning. Near Burwalde, it began to snow, and they stopped at a house along the way—"this must be the house where

Oma and Anna stopped to warm up," Mom says, pointing. "Right here, along the road". The house hugs the shoulder of the road—we catch a quick glimpse of it as the taxi moves on, but I know the rest of the story. How Oma and Anna Penner followed an old Russian man through the snow and the blizzard to safety. How in the midst of all this sadness, Oma wondered what would happen if the old man would stumble into a hole; the thought of all three of them tumbled on top of each other made her smile at first. Then

she tugged at Anna's arm. "Anna," she said, "if he falls into a hole, we'll fall in too." And they stopped where they were, and laughed until they could hardly stand. "We were so sad," Anna told me years later. "But we laughed and laughed."

In our taxi, we continue down the road to Nieder Chortitza. A woman is gleaned a field of harvested sunflowers. A few fields are already green with winter wheat; others are infested with weeds. The harvest last summer was not a good one, we are told. A drought, and the sandy soil does not retain water well.

There was a drought here in the summer of 1932 as well, but that was not the reason for the famine in which at least 5 million Ukrainians died. (Some estimates are as high as 7 million, or even 10 million.) The famine occurred because grain was confiscated from the communes and farms and exported. And millions of Ukrainians, including some Mennonites, died. Mom's family survived because her father had a job in the factory, and received bread ration cards, but that fall, just when it seemed that conditions were easing, her father was kidnapped by the NKVD and imprisoned in Zaporozh'ye for 3 months. Without bread rations, the family barely survived.

At the entrance to the village we stop at the Ruhestätte, the graveyard where Mom's Sawatzky grandparents are buried. We find the place the grave mounds used to be. A footpath runs diagonally across the graveyard and to the road. "It's still here. This is the same path," Mom marvels. "And the small house we lived in, after your grandfather was released from prison Christmas 1933, should be right on the corner."

Here it is. A little house, ramshackled, doors, windows boarded up. They traded the large Sawatzky farmhouse for this small house and in addition they received two sacks of potatoes, and two sacks of flour. Enough to see them through the rest of the winter.

The property is fenced off, but the fence is falling down and we lift a wire and walk onto the yard. We look through the windows that are not boarded up, but there's little to see. The yard is a tangle of weeds and bushes. When I have a few minutes to myself, I go to the garden, get down on my knees, pick up a few handfuls of soil and let the dirt sift through my fingers. Enough potatoes grew here once to keep the family from starvation, and I am grateful. Someday I would like to plant another garden here, I think. I would like to clean the house, to redeem the past. In my mind the house stands strong again, the garden is lush, children play in the front yard. I dust my hands off, take a final photograph, wander around the yard one more time.

From 1934 to 1937, conditions were tolerable for most people in this village. Then the repressions started again—a time that later became known as The Purge or the Great Terror. 800,000 people died. More numbers. Without faces, numbers lose their meaning.

Here's what the *Great Terror* meant to the people who lived in this small house in Nieder Chortitza on February 1, 1938. The news of the arrests had circulated—my grandfather took his guitar down from the wall, and he sang, "Take thou my hands o Father, and lead thou me." and then he said to my Grandmother, 'I can't help you anymore, I can only pray.' Then came the knock on the door and he was led out into the night.



Faces of men killed during Stalinist repressions at the 'Room of Remembrance' Dnepropetrovsk museum.

That same night, and in the days and nights to follow, there were many knocks on the doors of Nieder Chortitza until, from this small village, 79 men had been taken. Only 3 of these survived.

So *this* is where the black car came, Feb 1. Along *this* dirt road. The men came to *this* door. *We're just taking him for questioning. He'll come back tomorrow.*

My uncle was a little boy then. For weeks, he sat beside the road every day, waiting for his father.

The black cars were on the prowl all through the Soviet Union. In the city of Dnepropetrovsk, we go to the museum. In it, a 'Room of Remembrance.' The room is large, dominated by a pyramid of faces, each lit by an electric candle. All of these men were killed by Stalinist repressions. One of these faces belongs to a Mennonite. I walk around the pyramid, trying to guess, looking for typical Mennonite features. This one could be, or that one. Or that one, over there. Put them into a suit and tie, and few of them would have looked out of place in Eben-Ezer

church on an Easter morning, singing *Friedensfürst*. Or at Langley Mennonite Fellowship, in jeans and a sports coats belting out *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*. But only one man is Mennonite, and after a while, the guide shows us his picture and reads his biography.

On the walls of the museum, a list of years, and numbers showing the deaths, not in hundreds or thousands, but in hundreds of thousands, and in millions.

What I really want to do, what I need to do in this museum, is to sit for a while, to grieve for myself, for my grandmother, my mother. For the little boy, my uncle, who sat patiently waiting, day after day, for a father who would never return. For these numbers on the wall, for these faces on the pyramid.

But we're on a tight schedule. Already some of the people on our tour are grumbling, milling around, complaining. 'This is boring. The guide is taking too long.' After the group leaves, I sit for a few minutes on the bench. And perhaps it is long enough. It's not the details that count anyway. The image of the pyramid of candle-lit faces will stay with me for a long, long time.

In the city of Kiev, we visit the site of the famous memorial of Babi Yar. The buses drop us off along the road. A walkway leads to a memorial that is shaped like a menorah. It is surrounded by flowers. From the memorial, a path to the ravine. It's not a steep one—I had imagined something deeper, more threatening. It looks much like the ravines left by glaciers here in the valley, ravines where people dump their garbage at night.

In 1941, the German troops occupy Ukraine. For most of the Mennonites and for many Ukrainians who have suffered for 2 decades now, they are seen as saviors. Here in Kiev, the Jewish population, 35,000 men, women children, have been told to assemble at the ravine for transport. They are to bring their belongings. Some arrive early, eager to leave the city. They never do. In groups, they are stripped, lined up along the ravine, and machine-gunned to death. Their bodies plummet to the ravine below. By 1943, when the Germans retreat, the number of deaths here will number 100,000. I stare down at the trees and grasses, imagining my own family, standing at the edge, the rapid red spurt of machine gun fire.

Someone has placed a bunch of flowers at the edge, right in among the grasses. At home, I read a poem by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a Russian poet:

*The wild grasses rustle over Babi Yar.
The trees look ominous
like judges,
and baring my head,*

*slowly I feel myself
turning gray.*

*And I myself
am one massive, soundless scream
above the thousand thousand
buried here.*

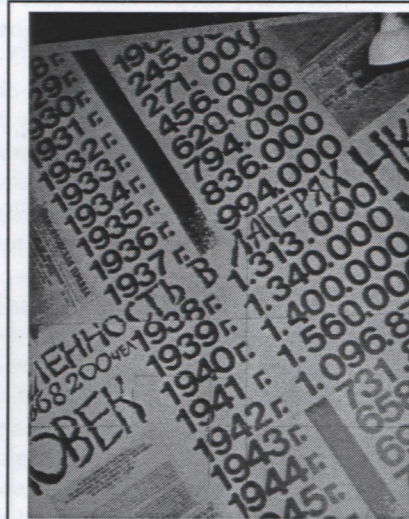
From Babi Yar, we return to our buses. Most of us are subdued. One woman is crying. I hear another woman say, "There's no memorial for *our* dead..."

One last stop in this journey of remembrance. Our bus tour takes us to Yalta, where we visit the czar's palace. Here, at this long, polished table, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill signed the agreement that took the lives of further millions, and displaced millions more. The agreement stipulated that all peoples displaced by war were to be returned to their country of origin. Whether they wanted to go, or not. And of the 35,000 Mennonites who left Russia in 1943, only 12,000 were able to emigrate; the others were repatriated according to the Yalta agreement. They were not sent to their homeland, Ukraine, but to Siberia. Again, the Mennonites were only a tiny percentage of people affected by this agreement. In the museum, the guide tells a funny story about how the three men couldn't agree on who would sign this infamous agreement first. If you went by their last names, Churchill would be first; by first names, it would be Stalin. And apparently Stalin decided it would go by their last names. Nice old Stalin. And the people smiled at the joke. I burn with anger. This flourish of the pen banished my Dad's mother and his 4 sisters to Siberia. That they all survived is a miracle and the subject of another story. Countless others died of hunger and cold.

At our stopover in Germany, I walk in the autumn woods with my aunts. I ask questions about those years in Siberia. *I ran away from that first camp, said Tante Liese. I was 16, just skin and bone. If I had stayed any longer, I would have died. I walked 50 kilometres to another camp, and they took me in.*

So, how was my trip to Ukraine? I'm still struggling with that question. Yes, the trip had been great, the food plentiful, the lectures and tours informative and interesting, the scenery astounding. But precisely because there was so much to see and do, there was little time for introspection. I'm still in the process, still wondering, still grieving. Still thinking about that little house in Nieder Chortitza and the stories surrounding it and the people who lived there. Back at home, I put my photos into albums. I stare at the pictures, recreate the experience of wandering through these streets with my mother, of touching the soil that nourished our ancestors for generations. I see the pictures of the fertile countryside, and the surrounding poverty. I think about the cocoon that we live

in, and that when we travel, we take this cocoon with us. On the cruise ship, we had meat 3 times a day while out on the dock, old men and women supplemented their meagre pension by selling sunflowers seeds, fishing, begging.



Numbers of people 'repressed' in Stalinist Russia. From the museum room in Dnepropetrovsk.

I read books on Ukraine and the whole Soviet experience. Twenty million dead, says one historian. Twenty five million, says another. I read excerpts from *Koba the dread*, a book about Stalin, subtitled: *laughter and the twenty million*. Ironical that my travel journal from Yalta reflects the same thoughts

Martin Amis voices in this book. Why is it possible to tell jokes about Stalin? Is it possible to draw comparisons? Hitler vs. Stalin? Can you compare numbers? What kind of sense do we make of this? And why doesn't the rest of the world seem to care?

As I'm thinking through this, I remember a story. I was walking back to the bus from the Babi Yar memorial. "It's terrible." I said to the woman who walked beside me. "They lined them up and they shot them. Whole families."

I know, she said. I had an aunt who lived in Chortitza, and she told me she knew of a Mennonite girl who'd married a Jewish man. They had such beautiful children. This was when the Germans were occupying Ukraine. The man escaped, but one day they came to take the children. She had dressed the children up in their best clothes. She cried, inconsolably, for days."

I think about this story, and I realize I don't have to decide who was the greater tyrant. We're all in this together; the blood of innocents killed the world over cries out to God and to us.

And I think the hardest thing to think about, it that it doesn't stop, this slaughter of innocents.

My questions continue. How do I mourn my dead? Most of them weren't martyrs in a religious sense. They were

people of faith, but that is not why they were arrested. They died because they were of German background, because they lived in Ukraine, because they owned property, because their parents had been wealthy, because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. How important is it to keep their stories alive? So far, at least, their graves are still unknown. I can't lay flowers on the mass graves in which they lie.

I like to think that by telling their stories, I can connect my life, connect our lives to the lives of those who are facing similar situations right now. But I'm not sure...

In the end, I don't know if I'll ever make any sense of it. I can only tell my stories, and sing, as my grandfather did, "Take thou my hands o Father, and lead thou me." ✨

Borosenko Memorial Service

based on a report by University of Toronto historian, Harvey Dyck, updated by Louise Price.

On the afternoon of Saturday, October 5, 2002, a service of



dedication, including the unveiling of a memorial, was held in the small Ukrainian village of Ebenfeld/ Ulianovka. The memorial honours the memory of 136 Mennonite victims of massacres that occurred in the Borosenko villages of Ebenfeld and Steinbach in December 1919. They were at the hands of peasant anarchists led by Nestor Makhno.

These were unquestionably some of the most savage attacks on Mennonites during the Russian Civil War. They involved the indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, children, and infants.

The memorial replicates the form of a milling stone, common in Mennonite villages at the time. Its designer is Paul Epp, well-known craftsman and designer from Toronto.

Like the memorial at Eichenfeld, this memorial has a low profile. It lies on the ground; it is not erect. To view it, one must bow one's head. A posture of humility is thus assured. What is being remembered is loss, not heroism.

The memorial is circular. This represents continuity. Both the past and the future have linked relationships between them. To read the inscriptions, viewers must walk around it, in a circle, thereby participating in this gesture of continuity.

The incisions on the stone are visually similar to those of a millstone, such as those used in windmills. This humble artifact represents a simple life, linked to work and to the soil.

The anchor at the center is the historical Mennonite symbol of Hope, and Faith, those enduring and sustaining values.

Margaret Bergen, a niece of Johann Bergen, one of the victims, spearheaded the fundraising efforts to put this memorial in place.

Present at the ceremony were family members and friends of the victims, officials, Ukrainian Mennonites, villagers from the surrounding area, and a large group of tourists from the Mennonite Heritage Cruise. The service began with the singing of "Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe" (O power of Love), and greetings from the local village council. Also included was a reflection, "Those evil days" by Svetlana Bobyleva from the Dnepropetrovsk National University, followed by a song by pupils from a local school. Helmut Epp, pastor of the Kutuzovka Mennonite Church, spoke on "Let us seek peace." The event was sponsored by the International Mennonite Memorial Committee for the Former Soviet Union." ✨

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC is continually interested in collecting photographs of villages, farms, businesses, schools and churches from our past. Of special interest are photos of the Molotschna colony, for the event of their Bicentennial Celebrations that will take place in 2004. Please mail photos or drop them off at the Centre. Pictures will be returned upon request. Thank you.

Book reviews:

Rudy Friesen with Sergey Shmakin, *Into the Past: Buildings of the Mennonite Commonwealth*. Raduga Publications, 1996. Reviewed by Helen Rose Pauls

Those who have explored their ancestral home in the Ukraine on the popular Dnieper Cruise will be familiar with this book as it is considered required reading in preparation for the trip, and proves to be a fascinating resource on the journey of discovery.

Many of us received our first impressions about Mennonite architecture in Russia from the sometimes crowded and inadequately captioned pictures in "Heritage Remembered" by Gerhard Lohrenz and "In The Fullness of Time" by Walter Quiring. Rudy Friesen, a practicing Winnipeg architect, realized that with greater ease of travel to former Mennonite sites in the Ukraine, a more complete resource and guidebook would be welcomed.

Into the Past contains information about buildings in the two original Mennonite colonies, Chortitza and Molotschna, as well as several daughter settlements. Friesen includes only those buildings for which adequate information exists. He also includes information about some significant buildings that have been destroyed, as well as village lay-out plans, and maps as needed from William Schroeder's "Mennonite Historical Atlas".

Early buildings were very functional and utilitarian, but as the colonies prospered, the impressive buildings the Mennonites constructed "move beyond mere function and in their form and decoration reveal a new sophistication and esthetic as well as a remarkable understanding of the wider world of architectural design and decoration developing in contemporary Russia and other parts of Europe.....these new buildings often spoke loudly with the language of pride, progress and achievement". [James Urry writes in the book's Foreword.]

Pictures and detailed description include farmhouses, schools, estates, sheds, factories, church edifices, hospitals, barns, cemetery grave markers, fences, gateposts, and shots of unique window detailing, which make these buildings easy to identify as having Mennonite origins.

When the political climate in the Soviet Union changed over a decade ago, Friesen realized that the time was opportune to take detailed stock of the remaining Mennonite buildings. He traveled to the Ukraine several

times to document this part of our heritage for us. Although this book is now out of print, Friesen is at work on a revised and enlarged version, which could be ready within the next year.

Rudy Friesen is planning to be in our midst for our next historical lecture on Feb. 22, 2003: "Russian Mennonite Architecture".

Yarrow, British Columbia: Mennonite Promise, edited by Leonard N. Neufeldt, Lora Jean Sawatsky, Robert Martens. Touchwood Editions, Victoria, B.C. 2002. Reviewed by Helen Rose Pauls

Years of meticulous organization, research and writing by numerous authors came together in two volumes about the first Mennonite settlement in British Columbia: "Before We were the Land's" and "Village of Unsettled Yearnings". The long awaited companion book set was feted at enthusiastic book launches in Clearbrook, Yarrow and in Chilliwack in the second week of December. These were well attended and the book is 70% sold. In fact, the book launch in Yarrow took the form of a village reunion as many former and present residents came together to celebrate and visit. Both local MLA's, as well as Mayor Clint Hames attended the event in the Chilliwack Museum.

The purpose of the book was not to list and describe all former inhabitants, but to paint a broader picture of a place, a people and a culture in a time of change. Lora Sawatsky explains: "The overall theme is the tension between the Mennonite promise to recreate a Russian village utopia set apart from the culture at large, and the reality of rapid integration and assimilation." Combining traditional historical research with memoirs and personal essays (half of the second book is from journals and memoirs) provides a mosaic, which gives the reader a truthful image of pioneer life in the Mennonite settlements of British Columbia.

The first book, *Before We Were the Land's*, is chiefly about settlement. It begins with a chronological table spanning the years from 1862-1976. Acknowledging the presence and contribution of aboriginal people and existing white settlers, the book profiles the early pioneers before the Mennonites began to arrive in 1928. Stories of these early Mennonite settlers are also told: how and why they came, their struggles and triumphs on land between

mountain and river that was subject to flooding, but whose fertile soil yielded a vulnerable prosperity for a time, when they became the land's. We learn of medical care and midwifery, burial rites, the establishment of churches and schools; and the relentless work of dairies, hop yards, kitchen gardens, and the berry fields.

The second volume provides a narrative of settlement and cultural development. Part One: "A Cultural Mural of Yarrow", is a series of stories told by various authors, many of whom grew up there. They tell of cooperative ventures, caring and sharing, dedication to the group as a whole; and strong community spirit with the churches as focal points. Coming to the surface also are stories of conflict, pride and shame. "Consensus and dissent; persistence and rapid change; tensions and assimilation" [says the publisher's description] of the settlers, is a common theme. The generation educated in Canada was eager to embrace the Canadian culture and language, and was not absorbed into the Russian ethos of villages set apart.

Part Two of volume two is entitled "A Gallery of Sketches and Tributes", and it is just that, drawn from the descendants of various pioneer families. Memories of a way of life that has ended are intertwined with webs of relationships that sustained a struggling community. The stories are selective, but paint a picture big enough that surely everyone who grew up in Yarrow can find themselves.

This book is important to all British Columbians and especially to those who grew up in one of the numerous Mennonite villages of the Fraser Valley, before integration changed them forever. For the book not only brings back memories of the past, but also interprets experiences and puts them into a broader perspective. Those who cannot go home again, save in memory, owe Neufeldt, Sawatsky and Martens a huge *Dankeschoen* for all their hard work.

Yarrow, British Columbia: Mennonite Promise is available at the Mennonite Historical Society of BC Archives in Abbotsford, the Chilliwack Museum, Coles Bookstores, Save-on Foods, and Yellow Barn (by the Yarrow exit from Highway#1). ☼

Einwanderungszentralstelle Documents at the MHSBC Archives

by Richard Thiessen

As reported in an article in the Summer 2002 issue of this newsletter, the EDZ files (**Einwanderungszentralstelle**) were created by the German Immigration Center to document ethnic Germans from outside the Third Reich who were applying for citizenship. Included in this group were approximately 35,000 Mennonites from the Soviet Union who had fled with the retreating German army in 1943. These documents were captured by the U.S. Army at the end of the war and later microfilmed by the U.S. National Archives in Washington, D.C. and incorporated in to the Berlin Document Center collection at the archives.

The files contain an incredible amount of vital statistical information on each family unit, including dates and places of birth, marriage and death if applicable for the head of the household and their spouse, the names and often dates and places of birth of the parents and grandparents of both spouses, complete information on their children, a listing of where each spouse lived throughout their life, their current address in Germany, copies of their naturalization applications, certificates and passports, their educational history, and often a hand-written biography. In some cases additional genealogical information was also provided.

In recent months the MHSBC archives has been able to purchase 17 of these microfilms at a cost of around \$70

CDN per roll through the generosity of a number of society members. Several of these microfilms have now been indexed and a group of archive volunteers are currently indexing several more. Since the microfilms can contain as many as over 2,000 individuals, the task is a lengthy one. Nonetheless, the genealogical data contained in these microfilms makes the long hours of indexing well worth it

Several individuals and groups are busy carrying out similar work across North America, and the purchasing of the EWZ microfilms is being done in a way so as not to duplicate the purchases that the others have made. As of the end of 2002, approximately 200 microfilms had been purchased and indexed, and another 40 microfilms had been ordered or were in the process of being indexed. The indexes that have been created are also being shared on the Internet and are available at <http://pixel.cs.vt.edu/library/war/ewz/>

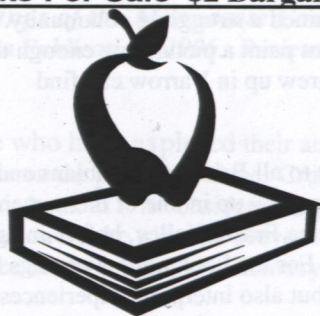
Richard Thiessen has created a database of the Mennonite families appearing in the EWZ files. Currently the database contains approximately 40,000 Mennonite entries from the 200 EWZ microfilms that have been indexed. (See example on p. 12) The Mennonite EWZ index is available at the MHSBC archives and is updated periodically on the Internet at <http://www.mmhs.org/russia/ewz/ewz.htm>.

(Cont'd p. 12, EWZ)

From the Archives

by Hugo Friesen

Books For Sale \$2 Bargains !!!



We are in the process of reducing our inventory of books (in new condition) that we have had in storage for some years. Most of these books will be recycled if they are not sold by March 31, 2003. The price for each of the books listed is \$2.00 per copy plus shipping costs (if required).

German books (\$2)

1. Ein Jegliches Hat Seine Zeit - Abram J. Loewen (54 copies)
2. Immer Weiter Nach Osten - Abram J. Loewen (9)
3. Schauen und Erleben - Abram J. Loewen (24)
4. Schicksalswege -1929-1930 - Abram J. Loewen (12)
5. Waffen der Wehrlosen - Hans Rempel (29)
6. Der Schatz und die Perle - Heinrich H. Kornelson (13)
7. Das die Heiden Miterben Sein - Hans J. Wiens (5)

English books (\$2)

1. More Recollections... - N.N. Friesen (80)
 2. Mama Nlundi - Our Adopted Mother - Anna Goertzen (7)
 3. Mennonite Peoplehood - Frank H. Epp (13)
 4. Beast & Bird/Tier u. Voegel - Lydia Regehr (100)
 5. Remember Our Leaders - G. I. Peters (228)
- * Numbers are Approximate

For orders or information call 604-853-6177 Or e-mail archives@mhsbc.com

New to our collection

Reference Books -Genealogical Guide to East and West Prussia - Brandt and Goertz

- Neuendorf in Wort und Bild - Franz Thiessen
- Sumas/Greendale Businesses 1930- 1990—Ernie Enns

Library Books - Men of Stone - Gayle Friesen

- Fremdling im Fremden Land - Liesel Derksen
- Reflections - Jack Block
- We are Free - Myrtle V. Ebert
- Close to the Earth - Leona W. Sawatzky
- Journey To Freedom - Mary Bergen
- Mennonite Alternative Service in Russia - Lawrence Klippenstein
- Before We Were the Lands and Village of Unsettled Yearnings - Leonard Neufeldt
- Hidden Worlds - Royden Loewen

Family Histories - Elias Heritage- Mary Zacharias

- Descendants of Jan DeVeer - Don Fehr
- Family records and Diaries of Annie Goertz - Annie Goertz
- Wie Gott Führt - J. Riediger and Susanna Hamm
- Bartsch Family History - Larry D. Sawatzky
- Brandt Family Tree (revision) - Esther Born

Zaporozhye Archives - 16 rolls of microfilms from Harvey Dyck

EWZ Files—12 rolls of microfilm

The Way We Were: Pitt Meadows and Rannies Ranch

by Helen Rose Pauls

In 1930, the Jacob and Anna Peters family reached Agassiz on the train from the prairies, hoping to settle here, but were unable to cross the Fraser River by ferry because it was frozen over. Chancey Eckert, who was the main facilitator of the Yarrow settlement, encouraged them to continue on the train to Pitt Meadows, where a few Mennonite families already lived. They decided to go westward and bought ten acres in the present townsite of Pitt Meadows where Abraham and Margeret Wiens as well as the John Martens family already lived.

The men and older boys of these families found work in the Hammond Sawmill, and in the local peat bog and factory. Some of the young women found positions in Vancouver as domestics and began to send much needed money home. Their acreages soon became hayfields and kitchen gardens.

At first, church services were held in the Peters' basement where a few families from Haney joined the Pitt Meadows group. Together with Christian families of other denominations, they erected a little church, which served as a school building as well, behind the general store.

In the mid thirties, the Mennonite Board of Colonization made arrangements for settlers to purchase pieces of a huge acreage on what is now Pitt Polder, from a millionaire named Mr. Rannie. This land was reclaimed lake bottom, protected by dykes. The board, under the leadership of a Mr. Sawatsky, who also purchased land there, encouraged depression weary Mennonite farmers from the prairies to make down payments on these acreages. At least forty families with money were expected to settle there, but instead, ten without money arrived. The settlement, called *Rannies Ranch*, soon became known as *Rainy Ranch*.

The Rannie Ranch settlers attempted to develop an infrastructure, and a tiny store served them. Church services were held in various homes, and the Pitt Meadows Mennonites decided to join their group for services. A small school was established in a converted chicken barn. Abe Pankratz remembers the teacher, Mr. McRae and how he longed to taste his teacher's "store-bought white bread" sandwiches. He also remembers playing on log booms with the other boys and fishing for bass and bullheads in the Sturgeon Slough, a man-made canal nearby.

While they tried to establish a viable community, they also worked very hard to build up small dairy farms. Marie Peters Balzer remembers that her family purchased forty acres at Rannies Ranch as well, but they remained in their house near the Pitt Meadows townsite, traveling to the larger farm to look after the hay fields.

Apparently, many Japanese families farmed in the Pitt Meadows area as well, and Marie remembers that more than half the children in the Pitt Meadows school and about 80% of the children in the Hammond School were Japanese. Sometimes the Baptist pastor would give Marie and her sister a ride in his motorcycle sidecar to evening service at the Baptist Church, where many Japanese families attended. During the war, when the Japanese were disenfranchised and sent east to internment camps, some Mennonites rented their lands from the government. Marie recalls that her father bought a tractor from a Japanese farmer, and although he was supposed to pay the authorities, he managed to deal with the farmer directly.

When all of the Japanese farmers disappeared during the war, it was a sad time for the whole region, as many of the Mennonites had become good friends with them. Marie's father rented some of their land for strawberries and raspberries during this time, thinking that he was taking care of it until they returned. Little did he know the full story of their fate.

Unfortunately, it was soon apparent that the Rannies Ranch settlement could not continue. The land was too low, and the settlers did not have the resources to maintain roads or drainage systems. The soil was found to be extremely poor and swampy. "They couldn't make a go of it," says Marie, "and so they dispersed to other settlements, many to Mission or Vancouver. The whole community was dissolved." These hard working pioneers lost not only their land, which reverted back to Mr. Rannie, but also their last dollars which had been used for down payments. They moved to other communities, and found work wherever they could, often in sawmills or peat bogs, so that they could earn some ready cash to survive.

In the sixties, farmers from Holland drained the area for dairy farms and renamed it Pitt Polder. Recently, a prestigious golf course has been developed on Rannie Road called Swanieset Bay Resort and Country Club.

When I asked a former resident whether she had photos about anything depicting Rannies Ranch, she replied, "Photos? No, I don't think anyone had photographs. We were all too poor for pictures."

It sounds as if many more stories could be told about Pitt Meadows and Rannies Ranch, and we would enjoy hearing and sharing them. If anyone was a part of this settlement, or has stories about any other aspect of our history as Mennonites in B.C., please contact the archives or send a message to ehpauls@shaw.ca. ☼

Einwanderungszentrale Documents (EWZ files)

(Scanned copy of a microfilm copy pictured below)

EWZ files, cont'd

Names that have already been or are currently being indexed include the following: Berg, Bergen, Braun, Dueck, Dyck, Enns, Epp, Fast, Friesen, Janzen, Klassen, Loewen, Martens, Neufeld, Penner, Peters, Rempel, Thiessen, Toews, Unger, Unruh, Wall, Warkentin, Wiebe, and Wiens. During this year those involved in purchasing the EWZ microfilms hope to complete the task of purchasing microfilms containing the vast majority of Mennonites.

Another goal is to make copies of the microfilms containing Mennonite families in order to make a complete set of these microfilms available to a number of archival centres, including the MHSBC archives.

Funds have already been received by the society for this purpose, and there is hope that others will also contribute towards this goal.

If you are interested in helping the society purchase additional EWZ microfilms, please contact the archives. If you have questions about this project, feel free to e-mail at:

richard.thiessen@mhsbc.com. ☼

Personalsblatt									
EWZ Nr.: 04552.		Geburts-Nr.: 1 230 685		Vorname:					
Name: THIENSEN		geborene: Delesky		Vorname: Marie					
Geburts-Tag: 19. 8. 86		Ort: Gnadenheim		Mutter: Tschernigowka (28)		Geburts-Bekanntnis: men.		Saporoshje (7) II.	
Fam. Stand: Verh.		Die geschlossene (am): 12.8.28		Ort: Prangenu		Beruf: Hausfrau			
Merkmalstanz: 04552.		Luther. Meliorat: Gnadenheim		Mutter: Tschernigowka (28)		Geburts-Bekanntnis: men.		Saporoshje (7) II.	
Geburts-Gemeinde: Friedensruh		Luther. Meliorat: Friedensdorf		Mutter: Saporoshje (7) II.		Geburts-Bekanntnis: men.			
Staatsangehörigkeit: UdSSR.		Geburtsort: UdSSR.		Geburtsdatum: 19. 8. 86		Geburtsort: Gnadenheim		Geburts-Bekanntnis: men.	
Abkürzung: polnisch + deutsch		Deutschdominanz: 25.		Geburtsdatum: 14.2.72		Geburtsort: Prangenu		Geburts-Bekanntnis: men.	
Vater: Johann Thiessen		geb. am: 14.2.72		Mutter: Ida geb. Klassen		geb. am: 2.1.78			
Abkürzung: polnisch + deutsch		Deutschdominanz: 100 %		Geburtsdatum: 1934		Geburtsort: Prangenu		Geburts-Bekanntnis: men.	
Großvater: ?		Großmutter: ?		Großvater: ?		Großmutter: ?			
Abkürzung: polnisch + deutsch		Deutschdominanz: 100 %		Geburtsdatum: 1941		Geburtsort: Prangenu		Geburts-Bekanntnis: men.	
Vater: Ditrich Thiessen		geb. am: ?		Mutter: Anna geb. Dyck		geb. am: ?			
Abkürzung: polnisch + deutsch		Deutschdominanz: 100 %		Geburtsdatum: 1941		Geburtsort: Prangenu		Geburts-Bekanntnis: men.	
Großvater: ?		Großmutter: ?		Großvater: ?		Großmutter: ?			

The family file of Marie Thiessen—notice the wealth of information about Marie's family in this particular file. Similar files exist for all ethnic Germans who came to Germany during the Second World War. As funds and volunteers become available, the EWZ files containing Mennonite names will be indexed. If you wish to help fund project please designate EWZ on your donation envelope and/or cheque.