



Mennonite Historical Society of BC Newsletter

Vol. 9 No. 2

Spring 2003

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

Editorial Committee

Henry Neufeld, Louise Bergen Price, Helen Rose Pauls with help from Hugo Friesen and Mary Ann Quiring. Contributions are welcome.

Directors:

Walter Bergen
David Giesbrecht
Edward Hildebrand
John Konrad
Henry Martens
Peter Neudorf
Henry Neufeld
Helen Rose Pauls
Louise Price
Henry Rempel
Richard Thiessen
John B. Toews

Archivist:

Hugo Friesen

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

Singing Along Life's Road: Mennonite Music for Special Occasions.

Sunday, May 18th, 3:00 P.M. Central Heights MB Church
1661 McCallum Road, Abbotsford, B.C.

an afternoon of singing the songs of the seasons, of funeral, weddings, baptisms, and other important milestones in our lives. Ticket information on page 2.

Mennonite wedding in
Tofield, Alberta, 1941.

After the wedding, the
young couple moved to the
Fraser Valley.



A wedding in the Brazilian jungle

by Susanne Hamm, translated by Louise Bergen Price

We celebrated according to the old customs, only much simpler. The school, which was also used as a fellowship hall, was decorated with a variety of beautiful flowers. The bride wore a veil and a wreath of flowers in her hair. If the bridal couple lived nearby, they came on foot, accompanied by other young couples. Several little girls walked in front of them, scattering flowers. A lovely picture.

The choir welcomed the couple with the song "Gott grüße Dich". (God welcomes you) Then the Ältester of the congregation married them. The wedding meal was simple, but lovely and relaxed—even the mothers of the bride and groom could enjoy it. There was no torture of baking, frying, cooking. Every settler brought a basket with baked goods, cups and plates. We all sat together, young and old, and enjoyed the meal and the companionship.

Later, the young people played "Schlüsselbund" or "Hasch, hasch, das letzte Paar hinaus." Or they sat on the big stumps, played guitars, and sang to their hearts' content. The children frolicked in the meadow, and we older people sat in groups, visited or dreamed the day when we ourselves were wed.

more by Susanne Hamm on pages 6, 7 and 9.

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

Editorial

Singing along life's road

by Helen Rose Pauls

Mennonites seem to have music for every special occasion. When we were growing up, as now, the Christian life celebrated in our churches had definite milestones. Songs in spring praised God for flowers and birth. "*Wer pflanzte die Blumen*" was a gift from the choir to the congregation. Easter emphasized salvation or rebirth.



A funeral at Arnold MB Church, 1966.

Summer was a time of growth, development, baptisms. In fall, we thanked for the harvest at Thanksgiving and winter brought a decline with more funerals and thoughts of home.

Evocative songs from the past define the seasons for many of us. "Der Friedensfürst" for Christmas, perhaps, or "O Power of Love" for all those summer weddings. Baptisms and funerals also had their set pieces. "Wir weilen bei dem Lebens Wasser", or "O Happy Day, That Fixed My Choice" as the candidates prepared for first communion. I remember suggesting "Wiedersehen" for my dad's funeral, having forgotten just how long and tongue-twisting all those verses were.

I felt personally responsible on Good Friday as we sang "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" and "Were You There". What still rings in memory, is that this guilt was assuaged by the enthusiasm in the male voices on Easter Sunday morning, as they leaped upwards with the words: "Up From the Grave He Arose".

At Thanksgiving, we could sing a rousing "Bringing in the Sheaves", although we would have identified more completely with bringing in berry flats, having only a slight notion what "sheaves" looked like.

We stood reverently to sing "Nun danket alle Gott", for so many in our congregations were survivors. The "Kernlieder" and "Heimat Lieder" still send goose bumps up the spines of even those of us who were anxious to hurry along the transition from German to English in the sixties. And it seems that "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and "How Great Thou Art" have endured through several hymn book revisions, and are still sung heartily, even "off the wall". Now that the tradition of soul searching on the last night of the year has fallen away, it is hard to explain to my children that we even had songs for *Sylvester Abend*. *Tent meetings* are another mystery, and "Just As I Am" does not seem to cover them in contrition. What remains constant, however, is that music binds us together, lifts us up and transcends the everyday. **Join us on May 18, as we celebrate the songs we sang for special occasions in the 40's, 50's and 60's.** ☼

Musical Event:

Tickets for "Singing along Life's Road: Mennonite Music for Special Occasions" are available from the MHS of BC office. Admission is \$10.00. Students and children free. Purchase of advance tickets is recommended to ensure a seat. The remaining tickets will be on sale at the door.

Notice of General Annual Meeting:

MHS of BC Annual General meeting will immediately follow the musical presentation. All members of the society are invited to come to this brief meeting. The Annual General Report will be available. Directions to the meeting room will be posted at the concert.

Book Review

Helmut Harder, *David Toews Was Here: 1870-1947*. CMBC Publications, 2002, 347 pp. Reviewed by Jake Letkeman of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Reprinted by permission from Mennonite Historian, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, Sept. 2002.

Although Frank H. Epp, Ted Regehr and others have written about David Toews, this is the first book that provides a full account of the influential life of this Mennonite leader.

The title at first seems prosaic, but Harder justifies it in his preface. Toews had been scheduled to preach in Berghal, a four mile distance from his Rosthern home. Because it had been a very cold winter night, the man in charge of stoking the stove early Sunday morning had assumed nobody would show up, did not stoke the stove and wrote on the chalkboard, "There will be no service because the minister cannot come." Toews, however, had walked the distance in the cold, saw the writing and added, "DAVID TOEWS WAS HERE" and walked home. Harder proceeds to show throughout the book what a difference Toews' presence has made.

I can only speculate what the difference means for me. Had Toews not been there, my parents might not have migrated to Canada and I might have been destined to a life under Stalin. The same will be true for many people reading this book.

I first became aware of Toews as a result of his indefatigable energy expended on behalf of Mennonites trying to leave the USSR. The CPR was willing to advance a \$400,000.00 loan on stringent conditions to transplant 3000 Mennonites from the Ukrainian steppe to the Canadian prairie. When the conference delegates meeting in Winkler in 1922 lacked the courage to sign what Harder calls the

infamous contract, Toews did. This was only the first of many risks he took on behalf of Mennonites in the USSR, risks which cost him countless time, endless travel, misunderstandings, false accusations and sleepless nights. The messy "Braun-Friesen fiasco" [p. 152 ff] is one example.

Toews also made very significant contributions in other areas, as for example, Rosthern Junior College. One is impressed with his vision, dedication and personal sacrifice on behalf of that institution and Mennonite education in general. About 45 years he served faithfully as an ordained minister and 31 years on the Conference executive, about 24 years as chairman. According to Harder, Toews was a staunch pacifist all his life and promoted the peace position as a community affair, "a way of life for a people" [p.99]. Other fascinating aspects of this book include Toews' experience with the Klaas Epp migration out of the Ukraine to the east, his sojourn in the United States and his early educational contributions in Gretna, Manitoba.

Regarding his style of leadership, Harder writes that "even his critics had to admire his tenacity and stubbornness" [p.209]. One example of his style was to make a personal decision to assign J.J. Thiessen to a task, and if chastised for the decision "to ask for forgiveness [rather] than be denied permission at the outset." [p. 195] Leadership also requires courage. During the WW II years when Mennonites were accused of being members of the Nazi Party,



Toews had written in the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix that the accusation was false. Then he added, "I consider National Socialism to be a political party that has at least as much right in any free country as, for instance, Communism has, toward which many of our Canadian papers are very tolerant." [p. 248].

The primary organization of the book is chronological. Chapter headings and subheadings make it easy to follow the geography of Toews' pilgrimage as well as his major experiences and contributions. The book is adequately documented. The book could have been improved if we had been spared many repetitive details and if quotations had been kept shorter or omitted. CMBC Publications and Helmut Harder have rendered a valuable service by providing us with this biography of a most deserving man.



Copies of this book are available at the MHSBC archives (\$24.00). It should be of special interest to many of us whose families were able to come to Canada in the 1920's, and will enlarge our understanding of the difficult decisions and amazing contributions of our Mennonite leaders during that time. hrp

Book Review

Journey to Freedom: The Story of Jakob & Maria Redekop, by Mary Bergen with Louise Price & Kathy Doerksen, 2002. Reviewed by Hugo Friesen.

From the perspective of our well-ordered an affluent life in Canada the story of the Redekops seems to be almost a fairy tale, imagined by some gifted writer. But in truth it is the story of a family which lived through a series of most difficult and even life threatening events from 1925 to their arrival in Canada in 1947.

Their life's journey began in Nieder-Chortitza where Jakob Redekop began a farming "career" interrupted by military service, collectivization, political pressure and intimidation, illness, imprisonment and many other uncertainties. Through it all Maria

took care of the children and did what farming she could.

The German occupation in 1941 brought some relief but by 1943 they were forced to flee with their wagon loaded with precious belongings and eventually by train and on foot. This journey took them to Lodz, Poland, Dresden, Germany, northern Yugoslavia, Salzburg, Austria, Ulm, Germany, and eventually to safe haven in Holland. All of this in the span of only 3 years with the final arrival in Canada in 1947. It boggles the mind to understand how old and young could survive such difficult experiences!

A fitting summary is given by Mary Bergen, the daughter & author of the book, when she states: "We learned many lessons from our experiences: how lucky we had been to stay together as a family, and how we needed to help others less fortunate than ourselves. Father would say, "On my knees I prayed all of you into Canada, and I expect you as my children to conduct yourselves accordingly." ☼

This book is available from the archives.

Recent acquisitions by the archives

1. Video

- * The Pacifist Who Went to War - The Story of Ted & John Friesen (National Film Board.)

2. Library Books

- * The Russländer - Sandra Birdsell (2001)
- * Journey of Many Steps - Susan M. Kehler (2002)
- * Eyewitness in Tobolsk - Olga Belisle (1982)
- * Sweeter Than All the World - Rudy Wiebe (2001)

3. Family Histories

- * The Mirus Family - Earl C. Mirus (1980)
- * David F. and Helena Penner Family Picture Book - Michael B.G. Penner
- * A Look at the Past - The Memoirs of Heinrich Wiens - H.E. Wiens
- * Dick Family Register & Story - Peter H. Dick
- * Memoirs of Abram J. Esau - Abram Esau
- * The Peter Dyck Family - Ernest Dyck

- * David H. Friesen & Family - 1720-2001 - Lynne Ward

- * Penner Family Genealogy from Dr. Tim Janzen
- * Andres Family History from Dr. Tim Janzen
- * Klassen Family History - Robert Klassen
- * Genealogy of Barga, Schmidt, Wittenberg, Friesen - Gerhard Barga

4. Collections

- * "Lieder" - A Collection of German Folk Songs - Katie Bauman
- * "Pearls of Wisdom" - A Collection of quotations & poems - Katie Bauman

5. Microfilms

- * 16 Rolls - David Rempel Collection from the St. Petersburg Archives - about Mennonites from 1789 - 1917
- * 29 Rolls - Hermann Thiessen Collection from Germany - family history books
- * 1 Roll - Ulrich Dueck Collection from Germany - genealogical charts ☼

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC is looking for a volunteer to up date our website. Please contact the office at archives@mhsbc.com or Richard Thiessen richard.thiessen@mhsbc.com

The Way We Were: Oliver

by Helen Rose Pauls

There are still many Mennonite families from around British Columbia who have their annual summer family gathering at Lakeside Resort, Lake Tuelnuet, just north of Oliver. For many, it is the second and third generation that cherishes this destination, and continues the family tradition. For some, the roots for this custom are forgotten.

Oliver used to represent hard work, not play. In 1933, five families from Manitoba arrived in the little hamlet, with dreams of establishing verdant orchards, in contrast to their dried out croplands on the prairies during the depression. A fledgling orchard industry already existed in Oliver,

Some of them brought horticultural knowledge from their experience with soft fruit orchards which had flourished in Russia. Others had to be taught how to prune, when to cut the suckers, how to apply sprays and the art of harvesting.

Leaderless, they gathered as a congregation on Sunday morning in various homes and read sermons from "Briefe an mein Volk" ["Letters to my People"] written specifically by Ältester Jacob H. Janzen of Ontario, for immigrant groups scattered across Canada. Nicolai Bahnman, itinerant minister, came occasionally to preach. He also served communion and performed baptisms. In 1938, Jacob Thiessen moved to Oliver and became the minister.

As in many of the struggling settlements, the Women's Mission Group was formed early on. The importance of these groups in funding the early church buildings

was amazing. The congregational report of 1940 says that, "The women are making things. The sale brought in \$34.00. This money goes to help build our church." [Cornelia Lehn, "Frontier Challenge"]

When the Conference of Mennonites in B.C. was officially formed in 1940, Oliver was one of the founding congregations together with Black Creek, Sardis, Abbotsford, Mission, Coghlan, Yarrow, and Vancouver. Altogether, there were 405 members in these churches and all the church buildings and land were registered in the name of the provincial conference.

When one travels through the Oliver area now, the landscape is green with rows of irrigated vineyards, peach and cherry orchards. Dwarf apples grow like palisades in high-density orchards, where up to 5,000 trees per acre are placed a foot apart. The latest technology in grafting and dwarfing, produces fruit bearing trees in three years. The area boasts several world class wineries open to the public, many tourist facilities and an eighteen hole golf course.

For the Jacob Goertzen family, who arrived in Oliver in 1945 from the Peace River district with all of their possessions in a boxcar, it was very different. Farmers were able to get a start in the form of a loan from the local packing-house, so Jacob and Olga bought an established ten-acre orchard with a small house for \$12,000.00 and started to work! A series of cement ditches carrying water to the various orchards from the creek flowing through Oliver was already established and Jacob was able to irrigate his trees. Although it

was dry and hot in summer, this water gave the little valley life, and the trees flourished.

They had no idea how to farm fruit, and learned the nuances of the trade from their neighbors. In spring, two more experienced Mennonite neighbors came every day to show them what to prune. Blossom time was particularly lovely, as ten acres of trees bloomed in white and pink. There was the continual worry about insects, disease, early and late frosts. Despite hard work and difficulties, Jacob remembers having up to forty boxes of apples from one of the big trees, some of which were fifty years old. Apples, cherries, peaches and apricots were transported to the packing-house on a flat bed deck, which had been built onto the neighbor's old car to haul fruit. Before winter, the dormant trees were sprayed with a mixture of oil and sulfur to prevent disease. Few checks and balances existed when trouble came.

In the orchards as well as in church, the Mennonite settlers helped newcomers and each other. Each did their part in maintaining the spiritual life of the little church. Rev. John Harms served in the forties and Rev. Gerhard Neufeld was the leading minister for many years. The switch to the English language was accomplished in 1966. However, after that, few ministers stayed long and young people moved away for better opportunities off the farm. A charismatic movement created conflict. In 1965, 35 members were on the register. In 1987, only 10 remained and the Oliver Mennonite Church closed its doors.



Letters and accounts from the past: Germany after WW II.

Once again, MCC is asking for care packages; this time to help those in Iraq. Fifty seven years ago, Germany was in a similar situation. The war was over, and the country was desperately poor; thousands of Germans were starving. Germany had assisted those Mennonites who fled Russia in the 1920's, now some of these same Mennonites were lending a hand to the starving people in Germany.

Statistics often seem meaningless. In these letters and excerpts from Susanne Hamm's memoir "Wie Gott führt", the reader receives an intimate account of how these events in history affected Susanne and her extended family. Susanne and Hans Hamm escaped Russia in 1929, and settled in Brazil. (see stories p. 1 and 9) Her sister Käthe with her husband Kurt Hecker remained in Germany, as did their friend Agnes Kemnitzer. Here is the story through their eyes:

Susanne Hamm:
During the course of the second world war, we received absolutely no news from Germany. We were very worried about Käthe and Kurt and their children Roswitha and Werner. Then came the terrible news that Dresden had been bombed, and that the whole city lay in ruins. We feared for the lives of our loved ones. ..It was ten years later that we finally heard the story of how they had fled the burning city.

With Little Friedl tucked into the baby carriage, they raced out of their home in great fear. They hoped to reach the city park, away from the danger of apartment buildings collapsing around them. Everywhere they looked they saw fire and dense smoke. Screams for help rang through the air, interspersed by the crashing sound of walls collapsing. Finally they reached the park. Here they hoped to rest, but to their horror, they found that death had raged here as well. Grey objects were heaped on the lawn. As they came closer, they saw that these heaps were charred bodies. A couple was sitting on a bench; beside them was a huge bear. All three were dead, apparently suffocated by gas. Filled with horror, they hurried on their way. Though a miracle, they were able to escape from the burning ruined city. In Kirchberg they could finally recover from the fear and terror. (66)

In the years following the collapse of Germany, we received news that it was now possible to send 5 kilogram parcels to the starving people there.

The only condition was that for each parcel that was sent to a friend or relative, one parcel would be sent to a hungry, starving child.... Immediately we got to work, packing parcels, thankful that we could send our own produce. People brought lard, flour, sugar, honey, beans, dried fruit, clothing to our warehouse. Many had packaged their parcels themselves; others brought them to us. Our place of business became a large packing room...

Käthe Hecker, (Susanne Hamm's sister) 1946:

Your letter means so much to us; we've read it over and over again. Many thanks for your concern and for the many heartfelt prayers for us. With horror we think back to that terrible night when our lovely city Dresden went up in smoke, and we felt the world was coming to an end. All we could rescue was our baby carriage and a pillow. Then we wondered how God could allow such a thing to happen. But now I have often said that God has not abandoned his own.

How wonderful, that we have loved ones in Brazil and Canada. Though your loving care, you have eased our hardships.Dear Suse, you ask if we have blankets. Yes, we have blankets, one for each of us; some were given to us by friends, others lent to us.

Oh, we are so looking forward to your parcels. You can't imagine how great our joy was when we received a package from Mariechen in

Canada. There were so many good things in it; how we enjoy the bacon! I don't know how I can divide it. I always have to look for new hiding places, or it disappears too quickly....

2 months later: *Finally the first package from you has arrived.. It has been such a great help to us. Little Friedl has been able to drink cocoa for the first time in his life! ... How my heart aches when I see my poor boy (Werner). He's always getting thinner, his eyes deeply sunken in his face. For the last 14 days he has had only spinach cooked in water for dinner; no potatoes. He was so thankful to receive food from your package. When I think that we are now as poor as beggars, my courage fails. But when I read your dear letter, Suse, where you describe your hopes for a wonderful reunion on your verandah, then I take heart again, and I have only one wish: Dear God, keep us healthy that we can experience a reunion!*

KURT HECKER, June 7, 1947 :
Käthe sits at the sewing machine. She has 'coal or cold' holidays from work. We've never experienced this before. Without heating, it is not possible to run the schools, or the textile factories in the area. Until now, we always had enough coal in this part of Germany, but since Poland now occupies Oberschlesien, and the coal from the Ruhr area is all exported, we are dependant on the coal reserve of Ölsnitzer, which also supplies the entire Russian zone with coal...The surrounding forests are being cut down to replace the coal

supply. This will have consequences for our future supply of ground water and for the climate. Yes, these are different times...

Agnes Kemnitzer, Sept 7, 1947
Thomashof, Germany: The great drought has burned everything, and we're facing a great catastrophe. There are few potatoes, no cabbage, few carrots. one-eighth pound of meat per week, and 35 grams of fat. It is unthinkable little, when there is no flour or other nutritional food available. If help does not arrive for our poor German people, many will starve to death this winter. Still, miracles do happen, and God's arm is not too short to help.

Susanne continues the story: As others in outlying communities heard about this, they asked us to

package parcels for them as well. The letters were like this one:

"Susa, listen, Mr. Laun would like to have 10 parcels sent: 5 for Maria Göcken and 5 for Franzisca Laun in Westfallen, British Zone. Don't forget to package the 10 care packages for the hungry children..."

Years later, when Mrs. Weidmann worked in our factory, she remembered all the parcels we sent to the hungry children in Germany. She told this story: "I'll never forget this event. I had filled a 5 kilogram box with sausage cooked in fat, and sent it off. A while later, I received a letter from Jasch's relatives from Germany... They said that their little boy had been so malnourished that the doctor stated he would die if he did not get good food immediately. Sadly, the

parents returned to their home. When they arrived, they found a package on their doorstep, with the words: "For an unknown, hungry child."

When they opened it, they saw that it came from Jacob Weidmann from Neu-Hoffnung, Brazil. That was a miracle! How could this have happened? God surely must have performed a miracle.

The little boy wrote them a letter:
*Dear Onkel Jasch,
Through you parcel, you have saved me from starvation. If your package had not arrived, I would have died. Thank you for your love!*

God's ways are so wonderful.

(translated by Louise Bergen Price)



Germany refugees in Danzig, Germany, 1945.

Future events and items of interest:

*Summer newsletter will focus on 'Food and hospitality'. We welcome stories from our readers! If German is your mother tongue, please write in German—we'll translate. Did your family cook watermelon syrup? Celebrate 'Schwiens Tjast' (pig butchering)? New foods in Canada—what were the strangest foods you tasted then? Sunday afternoon Fasha—how has that changed? Are we as hospitable as we once were? Send in your stories and thoughts.

Deadline for submissions is June 1.

*Fall fundraising banquet this year will feature Dr. John B. Toews, and will be held at the Bakerview MB church on October 18, 2003.

Our Buildings Reflect Us: MHSBC lecture

by Henry Neufeld.

We learn about our past through material that historians research and assemble, and report in language we can understand. Agricultural historians study farming methods, changes implemented, and the success of new methods, machinery and crops; and educators comment on the importance of education in the growth and development of a community. Theologians trace the development and growth of a faith community and determine the various influences on a denomination. Each perceives the past through their particular perspective.

Rudy Friesen is a Winnipeg based architect and sees the history of Mennonites through the buildings our ancestors constructed. In a BC MHS illustrated lecture in February, Friesen described the changes and stages in Russian Mennonite architecture from 1789 to the present, focussing on structures of the church, home, educational, business and health facilities.

Our buildings, he contends, reflect who we are as a people, and mirror the values, times and resources of the people who built them. Examining the buildings, he said, allows us to touch the lives of our ancestors. Friesen noted that Mennonite architecture, like Mennonite views on issues of faith, education, farming, and healthcare, evolve due to tensions between the old and the new, between the conservative and the progressive. The first stage (1789 -1835) saw Mennonites bring construction styles from Prussia and adapt them to the Steppe environment. The house-barn

combination and simple churches, with square windows, were typical of this era. The villages, for safety reasons, were compact and usually had a single street, with houses similar to each other.

In the second period (1835 - 1880) the agricultural society was well established and standards were established to enforce stability and conformity; house and barn dimensions were predetermined. Religious differences started to emerge with the influence of German Pietists and the beginnings of Russification. The church and the school were placed in the centre of the village. Churches began to show some subtle ornamentation and gateposts appeared in this period. The symmetry of the villages was maintained and uniformity of buildings was important. The third phase (1880 -1914), said Friesen, reflected the newfound prosperity of Russian Mennonites. Architecture began to display creativity, sophistication and diversity. Some colony youth studied in Europe and some estate and factory owners had architecturally designed homes. Gothic style and tinted windows began to appear in churches and some had frescoes painted on church ceilings. The Melitopol church had a bell tower and a cross atop the tower.

Building design of this period moved beyond mere usefulness to reveal an appreciation for the aesthetic. "These buildings spoke loudly and with the language of pride. The message was "These Mennonites have arrived and plan to stay," said Friesen.

Friesen described the next phase (1914 - 1999) as one of decomposition and disintegration. The Russian revolution, the collectivization, and two world wars, resulted in lack of maintenance of buildings and consequent deterioration. "The Soviets nationalized many of the buildings and then lacked the resources to maintain them," said Friesen. Rebirth and revival describe the current era (1999 - ?). Ukraine recognizes the historic contribution of the Mennonites and North American Mennonites and Ukrainians are combining to work on new building projects. Friesen noted that some Canadian families are funding the restoration of Mennonite buildings in Ukraine, citing the Mennonite Centre in Halbstadt and the Mennonite Family Centre in Zaporozhe as examples. Friesen quoted a Ukrainian priest: "You are doing work in Ukraine which cannot be done by official government agencies. The most important thing I did was to get Mennonites to come back to this beleaguered country."

Buildings are for people; to worship, to live in, to eat, to laugh. I wonder what the architectural historians of the future will say about our Canadian Mennonite buildings: does our short history here reflect the stages our ancestors went through in Ukraine? What is the impact of moving from simple functional buildings to high cost, and technologically sophisticated homes and churches?

Our buildings reflect our times, our values and our resources, and maybe even our faith. ☼

Music in the lives of Mennonites in other times: Three accounts

Now Thank We All Our God. In her memoir, "Wie Gott führt" Susanne Hamm describes how her family left Russia for Brazil. Here is her telling of how they crossed the border. Translated by Louise Bergen Price.

On the forth of December 1929, we left Moscow. Once the train was underway, we started to sing, very quietly, *Jesu geh voran (Jesus, lead us)*. Joy flooded our hearts. Finally the hour had arrived. Of the estimated 17,000 Mennonites who had gathered in Moscow, only about a third of them (5,600) were able to cross the border. And we among the lucky ones..

Our train arrived at Sebesch on the border on December 5 at 7:30. The border guards looked through our belongings, and confiscated our remaining money. We had hidden \$25 in a small box for emergencies. Father was very disturbed about this, because talk was that they would search everything thoroughly. Anyone who was found with money would be sent back

immediately. But that money was not found, and our little box rattled over the border with us.

As the Russian locomotive rolled over the border, someone started singing the beautiful choral "Nun danket alle Gott" (Now thank we all our God). Quietly, the train doors slid open and the singing spread from wagon to wagon, from the many thankful hearts; then the music rose up to the throne of the almighty God...whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts. "Herzlich lieb habe ich dich, meine Stärke, mein Fels, meine Zuversicht und meine Burg, mein Gott auf den ich hoffe." (I love you with my heart: my strength, my rock, my confidence, my fortress, my God in whom I hope.)

On the other side of the border, we were transferred to another train by white uniformed nurses. We were saved! We were like those who dream. The nurses brought white bread, vareniky, coffee and milk. ...

.....
As we neared the ship, the band played "Nun ade du mein lieb Heimatland (Now farewell, my dear homeland) Our eyes filled with tears and we were deeply moved. ..A new chapter was opening in our lives. ..

Our ship moved slowly out of the harbour, the band played the song, "So leb denn wohl" (Fare thee well). We bowed our heads, suddenly aware that we had no place we could call home here on earth. O dear home, dear home in the faraway steppeland, you are rooted into our hearts. What have they done to you? Will we ever see you again?

"In all their Misery, they still sing" *Singing comes into many of the stories that Peter Dyck tells in Up From the Rubble (Herald Press, 1991) In the following story Peter Dyck first meets a group of Russian Mennonites refugees who had fled to the Netherlands after the war. Peter and Pastor Hylkema listen as the refugees tell their story of life in the Soviet Union, the famine and repression, the war, and their trek to the west. They also share the faith in God that sustained them.*

Presently one of the women began to sing, softly at first, but as the others joined her, the volume increased. People nearby stopped to listen.

*Ist's auch eine Freude
Mensch geboren sein?
Darf ich mich auch heute
meines Leben freu'n?*

Is there joy and gladness
In this vale of strife?
Naught but tears and sadness
In this earthly life?

Now it was my turn to pull out my handkerchief:

Where there's so much sorrow
Many doubts and fears;

Cares that leave the morrow
Dim with death and tears

And then the reassuring third verse:
O what consolation,
There's a God who cares!
Jesus brought salvation
From the world's despair.

They sang from memory most of the fourteen verses of this familiar hymn I had grown up with and that was one of my mother's favourites. They sang not only in four-part harmony, but also with feeling and personal conviction, as if they were answering our question about their belief and spirituality.

Wüstens doch die Leute
Wie's beim Heiland ist.

Sicher würde heute
Mancher noch ein Christ.
Many have not tasted
Of the Saviour's grace,
Surely they would follow
If they knew his peace.

When we left, the thirty three were all standing at the gate, waving goodbye and singing. Hylkema turned to me and said, "Can you imagine, in all their misery, they still sing!" They were singing, "God be with you till we meet again." Even the children joined happily in the refrain, 'Till we meet, till we meet, till we meet at Jesus' feet.'

(Up From the Rubble, p. 84-85. Used by permission.)

"Liese, Sing" Rabid dogs were more common in the early 1900's. Although Louis Pasteur had developed a vaccine in 1885, doctors in Mennonite villages were still prescribing 'Dolltrunk', a medicinal drink developed by a chiropractic doctor in Burwalde. The following story was told by Henry Bergen; translated and edited by Louise Bergen Price.

"Junge," my father said to me one day. "Go next door and borrow the scale." It was springtime, 1929. Papa and Onkel Martin were deep in some business discussion. I was eight years old, and Papa often sent me on errands in Schönhorst. "Yes, Papa," I said.

"And don't take too long."

"I won't."

The neighbours were busy repairing the straw on their roof, but one of the boys came down and got the scale for me. I thanked him, and watched as he climbed back up the ladder. Just as I was about to head for home, I heard screaming, "Hein, hurry! Up the ladder! Quick!"

I didn't stop to think. And I'd only got up a few rungs, the scale clutched tight in one hand, when a dog ran by, through the garden, and further on down the road.

"That dog looks sick," the neighbour said. "Stay up here for a bit longer, till it's safe to go home."

So I did, and when the dog had not come back in half an hour, I took the scale and ran home. Of course, I had to explain why I'd been gone so long.

"I haven't heard of a mad dog in the village," Papa said. "Well, anyway, he'll be long gone by now."

Later that day, when it was time for Uncle Martin to go home, Papa sent me along. "Your uncle's got some sacks he says we can have," he said. "Don't dawdle on the way back, this time."

We walked along the narrow path, down the hill, Uncle Martin leading the way. And then, suddenly, the dog was

back, right in the path, his hackles raised, his teeth bared. He lunged at Uncle Martin. Uncle Martin drove his fist into the dog's mouth and heaved.

I was paralyzed with fright; couldn't scream. But I did take one step backwards, off the path, and the dog ran past me, so close I could have touched him.

It did not take long for the news to spread from house to house. Men and boys grabbed pitch forks and ran out of their homes. Before long, the dog had been cornered and killed.

All those who'd had any contact with the dog, and those of their immediate family, had to drink "Dolltrunk" and all of us got really sick from the medicine, all except Uncle Martin. And that was that. The dog was dead, and life went on, and most of us forgot the incident.

I'm not sure how much later it was that Uncle Martin got sick. "Rabies," said the doctor. Not much anyone could do. When Uncle Martin had a seizure, it took four strong men to hold him down.

Between these attacks, he was still rational, and he preached several sermons, urging people to repent, telling them that they could never know when their own time had come. My mother had a wonderful voice; when the attacks hit Uncle Martin, he would beg, "Liese, sing!" and she would sit at the window and sing the old gospel songs he loved. Her singing was the only thing that could calm and comfort him.

When he died he was 29 years old. He left a young wife and three children: Tina, Martin and Peter.

Note: There is a brief account of this on p. 293 of *The Salomon Bergen Family*. "In the spring of 1929 (Martin) was bitten in the hand by a rabid dog..



Martin and Sara Bergen

.On the 16 January, he returned from Chortitza saying that he did not feel well. He passed away on January 23 with his mother, wife and doctor by his side. Those were difficult days." ☼

I came to the unwelcome conclusion that we fail to know our own past, not because it has left no evidence, but because we prefer not to know it. If we became one-fourth as skilled at preserving access to our past as we take the trouble skiing, playing the stock market, keeping houses in repair, or staying abreast of current clothes-fashions, our story would surround us richly. The God of our fathers is not a God of the dead but of the living. It is not that the past is dead, but that we, who have explained away our lethargy, are dead to the past. We have found other things to be more important than our own story, and thus closed our eyes and ears to it." (John Ruth, *Mennonite Life*, March 1977)

Board Member Profiles: Henry Rempel

By Henry Neufeld

Henry Rempel can't recall the exact year he joined the Mennonite Historical Society of BC board, but it was during G. I. Peters last year as president. Henry has been extensively involved as a member of the events committee; the group responsible for planning the well attended Historical Society lecture series.

Henry's parents, Heinrich and Katherina, migrated from Ukraine to Canada in September, 1925 on the liner Mountnairn. The Rempels were part of the Gnadenfelder group of 600 people. Ten couples from this group spent the winter in Calgary and then bought land from Patrick Burns in the Didsbury area, where Henry was born.

Henry attended local schools and graduated from Rosthern Junior College in 1948. The postwar teacher shortage and bursaries enabled him

to attend the University of Alberta, majoring in history and fine arts. He graduated in 1957.

Evelyn Bergen and Henry married in 1957; they have four adult children. Both were active in leadership of the Alberta Mennonite Youth Organization; Henry was President of AMYO when Camp Valaqua was established. They were members of the Bergthal Mennonite church in Didsbury.

Henry taught school for nine years in central Alberta, then the family moved to Chilliwack where Henry worked at several schools, mostly as principal and vice principal. The Rempels are members of Eden Mennonite church where both have been involved in leadership. Henry was involved in establishing Camp Squeah.

"The years of retirement since 1986 have been wonderful but not without some challenges," said Henry. The Rempels spend their time travelling (North America and Europe), remodeling their home, building a chalet in Sunshine Valley, and assisting in grain harvesting in northern Alberta.

"The challenge referred to earlier is prostate cancer," said Henry. "Hormone therapy preceded surgery in 1995 and continued intermittently until 2001." Henry recently completed test trial treatments with some success. "We thank the Lord for support and prayers of family and friends," said Henry.

Henry enjoys the camaraderie with people at MHS of BC, appreciates the creative leadership of John Konrad and values the interest in Mennonite history. He recently read Sandra Birdsell's *Die Russländer*, and is writing his memoirs.

A CONFERENCE: First Nations and First Settlers in the Fraser Valley (1890-1960) sponsored by the Yarrow Research Committee (YRC) and UCFV, is scheduled to be held on the UCFV campus from

June 5 – 7th, 2003. The conference will include a variety of presentations, a tour and dinner. Presentations will include discussions of pre-settlement and early settlers, early religious life, immigrant life in Yarrow, art and literature, educational Institutions, and economic initiatives in Yarrow and the Fraser Valley. A highlight will be a tour of Yarrow, followed by a banquet with ethnic food. This event will allow conference participants to become part of the celebration of Yarrow's 75th Anniversary.

Joining YRC members on the Conference Committee, chaired by Dr. Ted Regehr, Professor Emeritus, University of Saskatchewan, are UCFV faculty and staff members, Ron Dart and Mary-Anne MacDougall.

The YRC recently published *Yarrow: Mennonite Promise*, edited by Leonard Neufeldt.

Keynote speaker will be Dr. Marlene Epp. For a list of conference speakers see the Website.

Registration for the conference is FREE

The Banquet will be held at the **Yarrow M.B. Church Gymn - Friday, June 6th at 6:00 P.M.** Tickets are \$10.00 and are available at the following locations:

Chilliwack - Museum (604) 795-5210

-Lora Sawatsky (604) 795-5197

Yarrow – The Jolly Roger Barbershop (604) 823-4313

Abbotsford - Mennonite Historical Society of BC (604) 853-6177

- David Giesbrecht (604) 853-0382

For Online Registration please log on to the WEBSITE

www.ucfv.bc.ca/library/yarrow/yarrow.htm

Namedropping

We left behind our names

As fast as we fled our farms

Shucking the harness of Omar and Elmer

The canning kitchens of Elsie and Sadie

Who now struggle to remember

The names of their grandchildren

Those strange and marvelous creatures

Chads and Ashleys, Renees and Ryans

Who move so effortlessly

From university to city streets

Unnoticed in the crowds

As they stop by the market

With suits and cell phones

To buy organic lettuce

And range-free eggs

Still chained

To their surname

by Michael Martin

Michael Martin is a member of Hebron Mennonite Church, Hagerstown Maryland. Used by permission.