



Roots and branches

Newsletter of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

**"What we have heard and seen
we will tell the next generation."**

Psalm 78

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Book Review: A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, 1789-1923. David G. Rempel with Cornelia Rempel Carlson. University of Toronto Press, 2002 reviewed by John B. Toews

There was a stage in my early career as a historian where I was intimidated by the theories of anthropologists, demographers, economists and even members of my profession who compressed the vastness of human experience into systems, classes and models. I began to ask myself—did our conceptual studies focusing on grand events and mass processes perhaps miss the mark? Why? Because warm-blooded humanly recognizable women and men rarely emerged. We tended to eliminate people from our work.

I spent some years researching the experiences of the Mennonite minority in the former Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s. It was a time of dying, during which, roughly speaking, about one-third of the Mennonite population and almost four out of every five family heads lost their lives. One can sit down and in detached fashion tabulate the suffering inflicted, yet leave no room for the human anguish involved. If I did that, was I any better than the tormentors and creators of those long lists of the dead and wounded? At what point does one reflect on the personal death agonies, of attempts to survive the Gulag, of the struggle of those left behind?

(Cont'd on page 5)

Next Event: "Umsiedler"

a lecture by Dr. Heinrich Loewen, archivist at the Centre of M.B. Studies in Winnipeg.

February 21, 2004. Garden Park Tower 7 p.m.

Refreshments and a time of visiting to follow.

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Editorial

Roots and branches. Roots to symbolize our past, branches to reach out to the future. We are excited by the new name for our newsletter! Another change that you will notice is that the newsletter is now 16 pages long rather than 12. It will come out 3 times a year. This will mean significantly less work for both editors and office staff.

As always, we appreciate your comments on these changes, or any other aspect of our newsletter.

Send letters or comments to the MHSBC office, or directly to Louise_price@mindlink.bc.ca

Tribute to Henry Rempel, 1930 – 2003

It is with sadness that we report the death on October 1 of Henry Rempel after a courageous battle with cancer. Henry had a strong interest in Mennonite history and served on our board for over ten years. He was chair of our Events Committee for many years which planned lectures, musical and other events which tell the story of our people. His faith was evident in the way he lived and in his interaction with board members and volunteers.

Henry was born in Alberta and graduated from Rosthern Junior College and the University of Alberta. He spent his life as an educator, serving as teacher, vice-principal and principal in a number of schools, mainly in the Chilliwack area.

It was evident at his memorial service in Eden Mennonite Church on October 4 that he was a dedicated husband, father, and grandfather. His career did not prevent him from maintaining a strong relationship with his family.

Henry contributed to his church as a Sunday school teacher, member of church council and deacon. He also served on the board of Camp Squeah.

We will miss Henry as a board member and friend.

“By the Skin of our Teeth,” lecture by Dr. John B. Toews,
at our annual fundraising banquet. Report by Helen Rose Pauls and Louise B. Price

If the parents of most of those in the audience attending the annual banquet of the MHSBC had not left Russia in the 1920's, their lives would been very different according to Dr. John B. Toews. Of those who remained, a third perished in Stalin's gulag. Four out of five families lost their fathers through exile or death. A large number were forcibly 'repatriated' after the war, and sent to labour camps in Siberia. It is to the credit of leaders like B.B. Janz, that so many were spared these events, and were able to escape 'by the skin of their teeth.'

Dr. Toews listed the chronology of disaster that followed the “Golden Age” of 1914 : revolution, civil war, chaos, Mahknov massacres, forcible grain and produce collection, famine, starvation and death. He told of a typical village where in 1914, they had 400 cows, 200 hogs, 600 horses and 4,000 acres seeded. By 1920, there remained 137 cows, 20 hogs, 60 horses, and 1,000 acres seeded. In response to this disaster, Mennonite Central Committee was formed in Elkhart, Indiana in 1920, with a Russian relief arm called the AMR (American Mennonite Relief). Finally, by 1922, food and tractors arrived in the colonies.

The New Economic Policy of the Soviet government brought short term relief, but for at least 20,000 Mennonites, there was little confidence that conditions would improve further. Leaders like Peter F. Froese, C.F Klassen and B.B. Janz began to work with the chaotic and emerging communist governments of both Ukraine and Russia, asking that the swelling tide of Mennonite refugees and those economically ruined be allowed to emigrate. The Ukrainian government agreed, and by 1922, a list of 20,000 hopeful emigrants was approved. It was now up to Mennonite leaders to find a country willing to take the refugees, to arrange for transportation, exit visas and monetary help. Through the persistence of leaders like B.B. Janz, Canada agreed to take the refugees, and the CPR was willing to transport them. The emigration took seven years to complete and involved incredible frustrations as visas expired, medical inspectors rejected large numbers of applicants, and the Soviet currency devalued. By 1928, over 18,000 Mennonites had managed to escape to Canada. Many more tried to emigrate, but by 1929, Canada had closed its doors. “By the skin of our teeth” is a story of faith, persistence, and prayer.

(cont'd next page)

The Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter is produced to inform and to promote the work of the society. It is mailed to those who contribute \$25 or more per year to the society. Editorial Committee: Louise Bergen Price, Henry Neufeld, Helen Rose Pauls, with help from Hugo Friesen and Mary Ann Quiring. Board of Directors: David Giesbrecht, Edward Hildebrand, John Konrad, Henry Martens, Henry Neufeld, Helen Rose Pauls, Louise B. Price, Ben Stobbe, Peter Neudorf, Richard Thiessen, and John B. Toews. Archivist: Hugo Friesen.

The MHSBC is a non-profit organization, funded by donations. All donations are tax deductible.

Mrs. Mary Neuman, a daughter of B.B. Janz, shared personal reflections of her parents. Her father was absent so often, that at one point, his youngest child did not recognize him. It fell to her mother to see the family through these difficult days of unrest and famine until they too, were able to relocate to Canada.

All 360 seats at the banquet were sold out two weeks in advance; 60 extra chairs were set for those who wished to attend the lecture only. Peter Froese's catering group produced a superb meal. Wilmer Neufeld led the audience in the singing of several hymns. Jean Neufeld had set up an informative and attractive photo gallery around the gym. In his closing comments, John Konrad, president of the Society, recalled the work of Henry Rempel, who had served the society for many years, and who died this past summer. Rempel will be sorely missed by all those who serve on the board, and by the many people who knew and loved him.

Letter from the past

(submitted by Helen Rose Pauls)

June 12, 1922

The grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Dear friends and acquaintances!

First of all, we wish you the best of health and welfare. The condition of our health is very sad. ...I have not been able to leave my bed for 8 days. I think it is the so-called hunger dysentery. My dear wife just drags herself around by making every possible effort. The boys cannot make it either - swollen feet and tiredness in all of their limbs. Those are the results of eating too much water soup. Elise, Cornelius and Albert are also such pathetic figures. The need is great, not only here but everywhere one hears of such calamity and distress without hope of relief. The American relief arrived here in the week before Pentecost, but, unfortunately, there are so many poor like us that it accomplished very little. The opportunity of earning something is nil. As weak as we are, no one wants us.

Dear friends, I come to you with a great request, for God's sake please have mercy on us and save us from this land of hunger, and redeem us from death by hunger as quickly as it is possible. For speed is of the essence or we are lost...Since I had to quit writing because of weakness, this matter has been delayed. Today is already June 26, but thanks be to God, it is better again. God will continue to help...

Now I come to you, dear friends, with the big request to write to me as quickly as possible as to whether I can hope for your help. However, if it would be too difficult for you alone, perhaps there are good people who could also add something so that I could come directly to you....

We are as follows: I and my dear wife, then Heinrich born June 30, 1905, then Peter born October 26, 1906, Elise born August 19, 1913, Cornelius born January 29, 1915, Albert born September 10, 1920.

As soon as I have the correct address to which the money is to be sent, I will notify you. From here, work is also being done so that the government will give us free rail service to the nearest harbour. Perhaps the ship which will load the emigrants in Odessa, will also come to Novocherkassk, so that we do not need to travel so far by train. Refugees will be let out first.

Dear friend Esau, as much as I can understand from Cornelius Schmidts letter, which was read at Heinrich Schmidts, he lives in the country and you live in the city. We would prefer being in the country, since the boys want to farm, and I would like to occupy myself with gardening. Of course, at first we will take whatever is offered.....May our loving God give wings to this matter. Nothing has been heard about the parcel for which you paid. But God has always provided something.

I will mail this letter without stamps, as it is impossible for me to come up with the half million rubles which a registered letter costs. Another heartfelt greeting from us to you, and to Cornelius Schmidts. In heartfelt love, we remain, your thankful and loving friends, the Heinrich Janzens.

*from "Russia Letters" translated by Elma Esau, 1995

1932-33 UKRAINIAN FAMINE COMMEMORATION

"... When I awoke, before the dawn, amid their sleep I heard my sons...weep and ask for bread..."

(from Dante's description of Hell)

This year we begin to mark the 70th anniversary of the enforced famine of 1932-33, engineered by the Soviet regime in which some 7-10 million Ukrainians perished. The sheer numbers alone would qualify this entry as the world's most massive genocide. We honor the millions of victims of this most heinous mass crime ever committed by man against man. Historians conclude that no nation lost more than the Ukrainian during the XX century. Together the famines, purges, persecutions and wars resulted in some twenty million lives lost.

The quintessence of today's commemoration lies not only in reflection. Seventy years ago when Ukrainians were being brutally murdered, many governments in the so called free world were establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Worse, even the free press conspired to conceal, among them, The New York Times. In 1983 Time magazine wrote about the victims of the famine of 1932-33: "Their extermination was a matter of state policy, just as the ovens of Dachau were a matter of state policy. The Ukrainian kulaks died...for the convenience of the state, to help with the organization of the new order of things...they died and yet the grass has grown over the world's memory of their murder. Why?..."

To date this tragic event lacks due condemnation or recognition as a genocide from many international institutions, democratic governments and even the government of the Ukrainian people. In 1988 the U.S. Congress Commission on the Ukraine Famine concluded: "The Genocide Convention defines genocide as one or more specified actions committed with intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group wholly or partially as such...One or more of the actions specified in the Genocide Convention was taken against the Ukrainians in order to destroy a substantial part of the Ukrainian people...Overwhelming evidence indicates that Stalin was warned of impending famine in Ukraine and pressed for measures that could only ensure its occurrence and exacerbate its effects. Such policies not only came into conflict with his response to food supply difficulties elsewhere in the preceding year, but some of them were implemented with greater vigor in ethnically Ukrainian areas than elsewhere and were utilized in order to eliminate any manifestation of Ukrainian national self assertion."

We call upon the government of Ukraine and other governments worldwide to recognize the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine as a genocide against the Ukrainian people and to condemn the perpetrators. We urge the Ukrainian people throughout the world to observe this sorrowful anniversary with solemnity and scholarship.

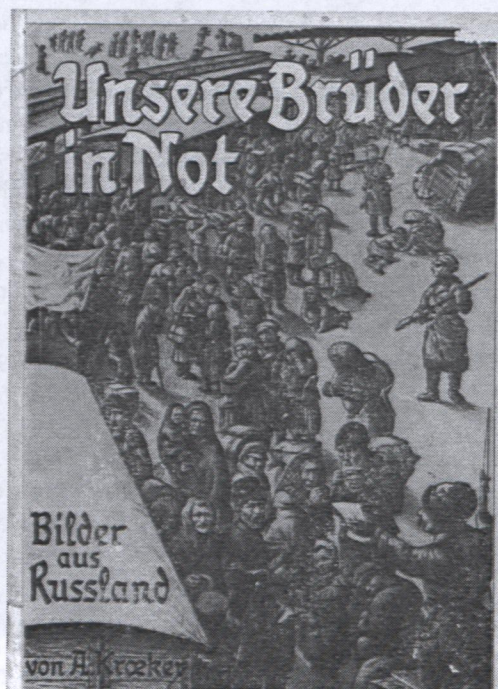
For the Presidium of the Ukrainian World Congress:

Askold S. Lozynskyj, President
Victor Pedenko, Secretary General

from the website; [Ukrainian World Congress](http://UkrainianWorldCongress.org), used by permission.

Already in 1930, A. Kroecker writes in *Unsere Brüder in Not*, "Since the beginning of the war, blow upon blow has fallen on us and our still beloved Fatherland, until we can hardly believe that it is possible to fall deeper into misery. Presently, the Russians and people from other nationalities, suffer hardly less than we Germans... All of Russia hungers and goes about dressed in rags, living in inhuman circumstances. Many thousands starve to death..." (p. 159, 160)

By 1932/33, thousands became millions. And the world did not seem to care.



The MIFM is a non-profit organization, funded by donations. All donations are tax deductible.

Book Review (cont'd from page 1)

I know you are beginning to wonder what all this has to do with David G. Rempel's book. When I first read the manuscript, I became excited because it affirmed what all historians should believe—people make events. Little people in little villages make individual decisions. As a result their actions fly in the face of tsarist or early communist ideologies, both of which sought to compress humanity into some pre-ordained pattern of behaviour. In Nieder Chortitza there are no peasants heroically striving for the establishment of a new order. Instead there are only warm blooded people, some wise, some muddle-headed, some striving for justice and fairness in economics, others unsure of what is going on. The important thing is they are breathing, eating, loving; at times angry and cursing; at times forgiving and getting on with life. In Rempel's narrative, people act out of personal, not collective motives. They are concerned with family commitments and community obligations. His books reminds us that life as we know it consists mainly of people, that there are all kinds of them, and that they are usually not predictable.

When you have read this book—whether you agree with the author or not—you have been there. You have participated in every facet of the Russian Mennonite experience, czarist and soviet.

Profile: Agnes (Neta) Loewen

by Louise B. Price; eulogy by Helen Grace Lescheid.

Neta was born in 1912 in the village of Osterwick, Chortitza; her family moved to Nieder Chortitza a couple of years later. The oldest of 6 children, she learned very early that life is difficult. After only 3 years of school, she had to quit in order to help at home. In the book, "Lead Kindly



Grandparents Maria and Heinrich Pauls, ca. 1888

Yet in the final analysis, it is the individual that matters. A Grandma Pauls or a mother Maria with her wide-ranging domestic and culinary skills or father with his pre-occupation with neatness, old farm wagons and ill matched teams of horses. Then there are the relatives of every kind and description from whom one could not escape amid the narrow confines of the village. Or what of the concept of 'neighboring'—that socializing that consists of coffee, small talk and just plain gossip. Never-the-less, the practice was essential if one was to maintain one's status and place in the community. What did it mean to be different in the context of a conformist community—ironically a

community composed of feisty, individualistic Nieder Chortitza types?

This book appeals to me emotionally. It engages real life with all its unevenness, passion and folly. Within an objective intellectual framework Rempel sketches an intimate broad-ranging human drama drawn from everyday life. Who can forget the grain merchant Makar being pelted with watermelons by teamsters in order to settle accounting discrepancies. There is that always masculine gathering at the local store, somewhat like the all-male twilight crowd sitting at the sidewalk cafes in the Greek villages of today. Or what of David's portraiture of rising class tensions in WWI Nieder Chortitza. He names specific individuals and specific issues. There are those who have, and those who don't, those who strive for justice, and those who are inherently selfish. There are those who thought of the needs of their Ukrainian neighbours, and those who did not.

In summary, here is a personal narrative, easily comprehended by the average reader, that becomes a history of a people. Thank you to the late David Rempel and to his daughter Cornelia who edited the manuscript for a story that is both personal and objective, that combines passion and detachment, pathos and humour.

the garden. In 1929, her father died; the following year the family's land, horses, cow and wagon were confiscated and became part of the kolkhoz where Neta joined a work brigade.

Light" that she co-authored with her daughter, Helen Grace Lescheid, she states: "I was heartbroken....but my father consoled me that I could still become a fine seamstress like Tante Lentje in Neuendorf." As a 10-year-old, she did the laundry, milked the cows, and worked in the field and in

A highlight of 1931 was her baptism on Pentecost Sunday by Aron Toews, who was later banished to Siberia where he died.

The family somehow manage to survive the famine of 1932/33. *"After working hard all day, kolkhoz labourers received one bowlful of watery soup for lunch...Soon all of us lost weight and we became weak and dizzy. Eventually, I got so weak, I could hardly lift my hoe, yet I forced myself to keep working. (p39)*

By 1934, food was again available, and life became somewhat easier. Neta met Isaak Loewen of Neuendorf. They married in 1935. By 1941, when Germany declared war on Russia, they had three children, Helen, Agnes and baby Fred. Stalin commanded that all the villages on the west side of the Dnieper be evacuated, so that nothing, no animals, grain, or machinery fall into German hands. Isaak was sent east over the Dnieper with the tractor brigade, but managed to escape and return to his family. When the call came for all the families to evacuate, Neta refused to leave. She and Isaak and their children joined the Klassen family, who had a wagon and together they headed west. After two days, they met German soldiers, and in another day, they were able to return home.

It wasn't long, however, before life became difficult again. Isaak was drafted into the German army. When baby Katie was born in early 1943, he was serving in the eastern front. He was anxious to come home to see his baby daughter, but it was not to be. Neta and her children traveled west with the German army retreating from Ukraine. In November, she received a letter that talked about a reunion at Christmas; a few days later, she was called to the office and given the news that her husband was reported missing in action.

Five difficult years of life as a refugee family followed until they finally



Anganetha Dyck (Neta, for short) married Isaac Loewen on June 2, 1935, the last day of official services in the church.

were able to emigrate to Canada. Neta was 37 years old. Her daughter Helen remembers, *"The day after we arrived in Surrey, B.C., she walked out onto a potato field, grabbed a pail, and began to gather potatoes. She worked hard all her life either as a farmhand--she worked many years at Kennedy farms--at Empress Foods, or she did housework for various families."*

Helen Lescheid's tribute to her mother tells of an indomitable spirit, who showed by her example how to live a full and happy life in spite of unimaginable hardship. Here are some excerpt from the eulogy read at her mother's funeral:

My mother had a way of creating beautiful moments for us children even in the midst of poverty and war. One of my earliest memories are of colored Easter eggs nestled in a dishpan of rye shoots several inches high. Eggs were a luxury during those starvation years in the Ukraine and coloring was impossible to buy, still my mother managed to create a lovely Easter surprise for us children.

When we were refugees in Poland, the front was once more dangerously close. The bombing sounded very near. Jeeps and tanks plugged the streets. It wasn't safe to be outside at night. Still my mother was determined

that we children would not miss out on a Christmas party two refugee women had made in a neighboring village. She carried Katie, almost two years old, piggy back and took Fred by his hand. We girls followed across frozen fields in the dark. When we arrived at the house, we joined the women and children sitting on the floor. I'll never forget that wonderful party.

Katie's first memory is not of bombs falling or of fleeing in a wagon, but of Mom planting flowers in front of the rooming house in Austria where we rented one room that had a heavy iron door and iron bars across the windows. It had been a storage room but to us it was home. Mom had scrubbed the room from top to bottom. We even had geraniums blooming in tin cans between the bars of our windows.

On Christmas Eve at dusk one of us girls would go with Mom into the forest to cut down a little Christmas tree. What did we do for decorations? We made paper chains and hung up four paper angels that an uncle had sent us-- one for each child. My mother had the grace to forgive and see the good in people. She spoke about her life without a trace of bitterness or self pity. "Lot's of people were worse off than I," she would say. When she spoke of her experiences in

Russia--the famine, the loss of freedom; the plundering and arrests when many of her relatives and friends were sent to Siberia-- she would remind us that the Russian people were not to blame. "There are good people and bad people in every nation."

Even when people took advantage of her kindness, she would say, "But I didn't expect to be paid for it." One grandson summed it up so beautifully: "It was Oma's ability to forgive that made her home such a welcome place."

She didn't judge people for their decisions; she just said she didn't understand.

Mom focused on the good in people and everyone was made to feel welcome. Everyone who came to our home felt her warm acceptance and enjoyed her wonderful hospitality. She would have the table groaning with food--salads, breads and buns, and cold cuts and cheese, and baking of

all kinds-- then she'd take me aside and whisper, "Is it enough?"

Mom loved to look at old photo albums with her grandchildren and to tell them about life in The Old Country. Sometimes she had us on the verge of tears; other times we laughed uproariously at some funny thing that had happened to her. She could see humor even in serious times.

A grandson said, "Oma's simple home was a sanctuary, a shelter where one could go to rest, to be fed and to strengthen the bonds of family ties and friendship." For years we had our big Christmas exchange at Oma's house. Easter egg hunts took place in her back yard among the bushes on her corner lot. Halloween began with a trip to Oma's house.

She would admire the costumes and slip a bag of goodies to each child she'd prepared ahead of time. She remembered every birthday with a card in which she had written a personal message in English and tucked in some money. She went

berry picking with our children and often dumped her berries into their flats. She participated in their little dramas, playing whatever character was assigned to her, even if it meant staying in a stuffy closet for awhile waiting for her cue.

Mom had an amazing ability to enjoy herself wherever she was whether at home or on vacation with her sister Anne. She was keenly aware of her surroundings and was thrilled with little wild flowers and the shapes of trees, sea shells and rocks. She helped us see them with new eyes of wonder. Mom enjoyed reading many biographies and books on travel and poetry and singing in choirs. Hearing Mom sing in the kitchen among the clatter of pots and pans gave us children a feeling of "all's right with our world."

"Lead Kindly Light" is available for sale at the archives office.

Gifts for Christmas from the Archive Office

Books:

- Calm before the storm. Janice L. Dick. (Historical fiction) \$21
- Eye of the storm. Janice L. Dick. (Historical fiction) \$25
- Journey into freedom. Edith Elizabeth Friesen. \$30
- Menno Place. Mennonite Benevolent Society 15th Anniversary \$24.95
- My harp is turned to mourning. Al Reimer. (Historical fiction) \$18
- Neu Samara. Jacob H. Brucks and Henry P. Hooge. \$23.50
- Shepherds, servants and prophets: leadership among the Russian Mennonites. Ed by Harry Loewen. \$50

CDs

- Grandma 4.1. Database of Mennonite Ancestry. \$48
- Singing along Life's Road. Celebration Choir and Holda Fast Redekopp. \$20
- Highlights of Invitation to Celebration. \$10

Video

- Singing along Life's Road. Celebration Choir & Holda Fast Redekopp \$25, audiotape \$20



New Release: Journey into freedom: a survivor's story of the Great Trek. Translated and edited by Agatha Klassen. A great Christmas gift. Available for \$20 from the Archives.

Photo Gallery

by Jean Neufeld

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS". We have heard this saying many times, haven't we? At the MHS we have experienced this very thing when given a family photo album to scan its pictures, into our computers. What wouldn't we have given had we had this procedure when it was so important, while we were fleeing Russia or during the wars. There were a few fortunate ones that had the foresight to hide some precious photos of grandma and grandpa or mom and dad with their few belongings as they made their way to a peaceful country. I heard just yesterday of a woman who hid a few of her precious photos in her hair, while fleeing the horrors of Russia. What did those who had to flee the fires in Kelowna and

elsewhere, and now the floods in Northern British Columbia have in common? The one thing that was of most importance to them was their family photo album. So we all know that photos are among the most important things that we need to preserve.

We discussed preserving family photos at a meeting about 3 years ago. I was bold enough to say that it should be quite an easy thing for the MHS to gather as many as 8,000 photos from all the Mennonite families represented in British Columbia. To date we have received only about 1,200 pictures for preservation. The 8,000 could be easily attained, if all the families would consider their photos as precious as the ones that we have gathered and whose owners we

interviewed. We will store all photos that are donated to us in an environmentally controlled storage place. Should you still want to hold onto them, and the children are interested in having them, we would be happy if you shared your families with us by scanning them into our computer and then give us all the information that you can about them.

I have personally interviewed 14 families and received vital information about each picture that was brought in. Such pride in the voices of those I spoke to when they described their father and mother's wedding photo or their siblings or spouse whom they would never have seen alive after the picture was taken. There was such sadness in the voices when they spoke of their loved one who had passed on.

Maria Kroecker was the first to bring us her album with 170 photos to share. Here are a few pictures from her collection.





Top left: Agatha Klassen not only donated family photos but also her much sought after collection of 300 Yarrow photos. We thank her for her generosity. Top right: Back of photo reads: Johann Thiessen, brother of P.N. Thiessen. Do these people have relatives in this area? Bottom centre: This photo of a choir from Russia was found by someone and brought in to the archives. Can anyone identify the individuals and the Choir conductor in the front row?

Recipe Books

by Henry Neufeld

This is not an exhaustive list of Mennonite cookbooks, rather a sampling of some found in our home. Our bookshelves used to have novels and other books; these are gradually and regularly being replaced by an increasing number and variety of recipe books. Readers are invited to write us about their favourite books and dishes.

The Treasury of Mennonite Recipes, Derksen Printers, Steinbach, 1961

The initial section is on "Mennonite dishes, including three recipes for zwieback, two for portzelky, and three for New Years cookies. It also has recipes for perishky, molasses ammonia cookies, kielki, wareneki, rollkuchen, ruehrei, borscht, gooseberry moos, and various recipes related to hog butchering.

The Best of Mennonite

Fellowship Meals, Phyllis Pellman Good and Louise Stolfus. Good Books, Intercourse, Pennsylvania, 1991.

Over 900 favourite recipes, including recipes for monkey bread, easy zwieback, Lorraine Amstutz's broccoli salad, Hilda Born's scalloped potatoes, peasant's offering, impossible pumpkin pie, Hawaiian wedding cake, fruit pizza, pastor's soup, and Sunday noon congregational soup lunch. There's also a chapter "If You Do Not Cook."

Fix-It and Forget-It Cookbook: Feasting with Your Slow Cooker.

Compiled by Dawn J. Ranck and Phyllis Pellman Good. Good Books, Intercourse Pennsylvania.

This recent publication was the best selling trade paperback in the USA in 2002, selling over 2.5 million copies. We have not seen this book, and invite our readers who have it to provide us with comments on it.

Grandma's Cooking, *The Ladies of the Clearbrook Golden Age Society*, Cedar Park Printing, Inc, 1994.

A collection of traditional Mennonite recipes. Throughout it's pages there are translated Low German sayings, proverbs, and helpful hints, as well as a description of Mennonite weddings in olden days. Recipes include Grandma Wall's milk soup, Plumma Moos, watermelon syrup, ammonia peppermint cookies, prips, a variety of platz recipes, and near the back of the book, a section on low calorie dishes.

More With Less Cookbook, Doris Janzen Longacre, Herald Press, 1976.

Commissioned by MCC, this classic seeks to blend the good cooking skills of Mennonites with the need to care about the world's hungry and to find ways to live more simply and joyfully. We are encouraged to eat more whole grains, rice, wheat, legumes, vegetables, fruits, and nuts.

The recipes are designed to improve the nutritional value of meals without increasing the costs. The text is interspersed with inspirational inserts and personal remarks about certain recipes.

Food That Really Schmecks, More Food That Really Schmecks, and Schmecks Appeal, by Edna Staebler. McLelland and Stewart, Toronto.

Edna Staebler was raised in Waterloo county, Ontario and her books reflect her close association with Old Order Mennonites of that area. She also lived on a Hutterite colony, an Iroquois reservation, in the home of

an Italian immigrant and in a Cape Breton fisherman's home. Includes recipes for shoo-fly pie, schnitz, and cousin Hilda's coffee cake. Staebler describes the Old Order Mennonite ladies: "Nothing is ever wasted as these hard-working women joyously invent and prepare feasts for families and company that comes to enjoy fellowship and good food. Thirty-five people or more may drop in for noon dinner after divine service on Sunday and a good housewife must be prepared." In *Schmecks Appeal* Staebler describes the fascinating "cookie war", a legal battle involving conglomerate giants Proctor and Gamble, Nabisco, the author and tOld Order Mennonites.



Three Mennonite women pose in the photographer's studio in 1913. From *Mennonite Foods and Folkways*, Vol II

Book Review: Mennonite Food and Folkways from South Russia: Vol. 1 and Vol. 11, Norma Jost Voth, Good Books, 1990 and 1991. Reviewed by Helen Rose Pauls

The word that comes to mind to describe these books is "comprehensive"! Need a recipe for prips, Knacksot, pickled pig's feet? How about a descriptive listing of Mennonite herbs, spices and seasonings and their uses? Making "sauromp" [sorrel] borscht today? Or maybe sausage bubbat? Watermelon syrup? Wedding borscht for 100 guests [just double and triple as needed]? Tea with a samovar? It is all there in Volume one, often in list and story form, accompanied by ditties, songs and personal experiences.

There are 13 pages dedicated to zwieback, that quintessential of all Mennonite foods, sackfuls of which kept fleeing refugees alive, kept generations of toddlers quiet in church, and kept our boys sneaking over to Oma's house on Saturday afternoon for the first morsels off the pan.

There are historical maps, essays about the Dutch, Prussian and Russian influences on Mennonite foods, and an overview of Mennonite history. One is overwhelmed by the incredible work that feeding huge families day

after day entailed, before the days of refrigeration and shopping malls, or such simple things as pectin for jams or sealing jars. The less esoteric recipes are all there too; such basics as Plumemoss, peppernuts, platz, paska, pickles and porzelki.

Whereas Volume 1 has colored pictures of mouth watering food dishes, Volume 11 features black and white photographs of early life in South Russia. This volume is less about food and more about folkways. Voth describes Mennonite houses, specialized ovens fed by straw and manure, the use of the cauldron [meagrope]. A history of Low German takes up four pages, and schooling in Russia is described at length.

Festive Sundays meant that women worked feverishly Saturday to prepare Sunday dinner for the family and any unexpected guests, as well as special cakes and delicacies for faspas. Church life and practices and the celebrations of the church year, were under-girded by hearty eating by a people with an abundant food tradition.

Excerpts from old cookbooks ask for 3 kopecks worth of ammonia; a big spoonful of sugar, a lot of vinegar. Most recipes were not written down. Food followed the seasons and the availability of various foods. For example, the menu list for a harvest meal for threshers is a page long, including at least four meat dishes. The menus for spring were mostly "out of the flour sack" as gardens and orchards were not yet bearing, and preserved meats were used up.

Courtship rituals and weddings required special feasts, often prepared communally. Voth also describes the constant spring to fall labor in orchard and garden, and the life-sustaining work of food preservation. There are recipes for meals in times of plenty and "famine soup" and "beggar's gravy" for times of want.

Mennonite life has always centered around food. It is fitting that Voth entwined food and folkways in her books, as one cannot be understood without the other. These are books to be enjoyed for the history as much as for the recipes.

The way we were: First United Mennonite Church Founding of First United Mennonite Church (FUMC) in Vancouver "*Erste Vereinigte Mennonitengemeinde*" by Ed Hildebrand.

The roots of this congregation lead back to 1935 when Rev. Jacob H. Janzen was sent to Vancouver by Elder David Toews to provide a Christian environment for young Mennonite ladies migrating to Vancouver in search of work, usually as domestics. His presence prompted other local Mennonites to ask for religious services. When my family arrived in 1936, these were held every Sunday at the home of Frank Bergmann, 440 East 53rd Avenue. Across the front of their house was a large room in which all furniture had

been pushed aside. (Maybe they had very little) In place were rows of old wooden chairs and a table up front for a lectern. The group was pitifully small. Some names that come to mind are Braun, Duerksen, Friesen, Bergmann, Hildebrand, and of course, Janzen. As in all Mennonite groups there was concern for the children. Therefore, after an appeal from Mrs. Janzen, Helene Bergmann taught the first Sunday School class of three children on October 25, 1936. Some months later she had to withdraw and on June 13, 1937 was replaced by

Peter Epp who now taught a class of seven, including my sister, my brother, and myself. Peter Epp would serve as Sunday School teacher, and later, leader for thirty two years. It was agreed that all children should make a donation of one cent each Sunday for Missions. This may sound ludicrous today. But in those days it was a significant sacrifice for the parents. Times were hard.

Church services remained here until the Fall of 1937 when a Church building and adjacent Manse at the

corner of 49th Avenue and St. George Street were purchased for the group by the Home Mission Board of the North American Conference at a cost of \$5,000. At about the same time Rev. Janzen was recalled to become Elder of the Waterloo Ontario Congregation. Rev. J.B. Wiens. (Janzen's son-in-law) was sent as his replacement.

A new building required a formal organization. Therefore "*die Gründungsversammlung der Mennonitengemeinde zu Vancouver*" (Meeting to organize a Mennonite Congregation in Vancouver) was called on December 27, 1937. Present were Pastors J.B. Wiens and D. Duerksen, Mrs. and Miss E. Klassen, (mother and daughter) brethren J. Braun, P. Dyck, J. Peters, P. Epp, D. Friesen, D. Hildebrand, (my father) and P. Schultz. (I knew them all) I am sure many, if not most, of the wives were also present, but were not mentioned in the minutes. Nor is it likely that they took much part in the proceedings at that time. J.B. Wiens was asked to chair the meeting and P. Schultz to be secretary.

The meeting formed a Church Council, consisting of the two (later three) pastors as ex-officio members and three lay brethren elected for three year terms. Elected were P. Epp, Chairman, J. Sawatsky, Secretary, (absent from the meeting because he had found work that day, and one could not afford to miss a day's pay when it was available, but nevertheless a charter member) and D. Friesen, Treasurer. (Replaced by D. Hildebrand within the first year.) There were also decisions to register the Church under its official name, "Vancouver United Mennonite Church" ('First' was added later) with the appropriate authorities for tax purposes, and to apply for membership in the B.C. Conference. The Conference would be asked to reduce its fees from 50 to 25 cents per member for at least the first year. Until February 1, 1938 other Mennonites would be allowed to join the

congregation by simple request. Thereafter membership would require formal confirmation by the congregation.

Since the congregation had no hymnals, Duerksen, Friesen, Sawatsky, and Epp were elected *Vorsaenger* (song leaders). They would alternately, recite the words and then lead the singing, until the song was complete. In Fall of 1939 twelve hymnals, one per family, were purchased by the congregation. Members were further asked to make private purchases if possible. (I still have my mother's *Gesangbuch*) Thereafter, *Vorsaenger* were not usually required.

The most urgent problem for the congregation at this time was building repairs. Both Church and Manse required roof, eave, and interior repairs. Members would do most of the work. But still, cash costs were estimated at \$400 for the Church and \$150 for the Manse, with zero in the treasury. The Home Missions Board again provided the funding, as a loan, repayable at \$100 per year. Members now went to work and soon a presentable building was in place. Even I helped a little. I was too young for useful work but did serve as a "gofer." Actual cash costs recorded in the Minutes were - Church \$400. - Manse \$151.80.

Growth was only modest the first year but names such as Goertz, Peters, and Lohrenz were added to the membership rolls. The usual adjuncts to a Mennonite Church were also soon organized - *Chor* (Choir), *Naeheverein* (Sewing Circle), *Jugendverein* (Christian Endeavor) - The names seem to lose 'something' in translation. Peter Epp reported that Sunday School enrollment had grown to seventeen with much wider age disparity. Elizabeth Klassen was named to teach the younger children in March 1938 and would remain on staff for more than ten years. Also, four

candidates were baptized in July 1938. (Names not recorded in minutes.)

Herman Lohrenz's addition to the congregation brought a man who was prepared to teach a German School on Saturday mornings and therefore it was quickly organized. "*We maintained our separateness and our German language for 125 years in Russia and we are not about to lose it after 15 years in Canada.*" This was considered so important that the Church Council agreed to pay the school fees for those unable or unwilling to pay. (amount not given) How could children participate in Church life if not literate in German? "*Mennonite Church life had always been and would remain German.*" It would be some years into the future before Bob Braun and his sister created a mini-scandal by singing an English song at *Jugendverein*.

Being purists, of course we had to learn not only reading, spelling, and grammar, but also the German Gothic script. Therefore every Saturday morning we children had to struggle with angular, almost indiscernible, series of *m's*, *n's*, *u's*, *e's*, and *r's*, the sinuous but equally inscrutable *p's*, *q's*, and *y's*, and the mysteries of '*ess*', '*esszet*', and '*schlussess*' - not to mention the correct, although often illogical, use of '*der*', '*die*', and '*das*'. (Lohrenz must have been a good teacher because I can still read that stuff, more or less.)

By mid 1939 Church membership had grown to about 35 with 20 children in Sunday School. Mrs. M. Hildebrand joined the staff as a third teacher and served for two years. Council felt that the church required better maintenance than volunteers could provide at times when other priorities might intrude. Therefore a stipend of \$5.00 per month was offered for weekly cleaning and winter heating, with an additional 75 cents for cutting the lawn.

Council also decided that the congregation should attend the Sunday School and Congregational outing in Abbotsford scheduled for July 2, 1939. The cheapest mode of transport they could find was a covered flat back truck, whose owner charged 50 cents per adult, children free. Planks were laid across the truck deck to provide backless seating. (Yes, this was legal at the time, or at least not illegal.) We set out with high hopes but the transportation may have been a little too "cheap." After two flat tires and another minor breakdown we finally arrived at the site about three hours late when all the formal proceedings were long finished. Our parents were probably mightily chagrined, but we children had a ball.

With the year 1939 coming to a close, Council approved an expenditure of \$5.00 for Christmas goodies for the children on Christmas Eve after the Sunday School concert. At the year-end congregational meeting the Treasurer reported that total offerings for the year had been \$ 460.76 and expenses had been \$422.32, including a \$100.00 loan repayment to the Conference.

Even though the congregation was pathetically small, and struggling for its own survival, there had been since the beginning, a concern for even smaller groups in the greater Vancouver area. A few Mennonites resident in New Westminster could not readily travel to Vancouver, given available transport at the time. Therefore Council and Pastors accepted the responsibility to serve these people in their own locality. After Rev. John Goerz joined the congregation, Council minutes record that he preached in New Westminster so often that colloquially it became known as Goerz's church. To further assist the pastors, Peter Dyck was ordained the first Deacon on May 26, 1940.

Another question that concerned the congregation at this time was the

Church's stance on military service as WW2 raged in Europe. The congregation was not directly involved since no members, nor their children, were of military age. Nevertheless, through Rev. J.B. Wiens they participated in developing the overall standards as to how Mennonites should or would take part. Relief for the suffering, as well as service was included in these deliberations.

The congregation continued to grow, but only slowly. The names Ewert, Thiessen, Redekop, Falk, Braun, and Poettker come to mind. The Minutes record that in 1941 the average Sunday attendance was: mornings 30-40 and evening 60-70 - less in summer. (The most likely reason for the greater evening attendance was the number of young women working as domestics who were free Sunday afternoon) Sunday school attendance was also 30-40.

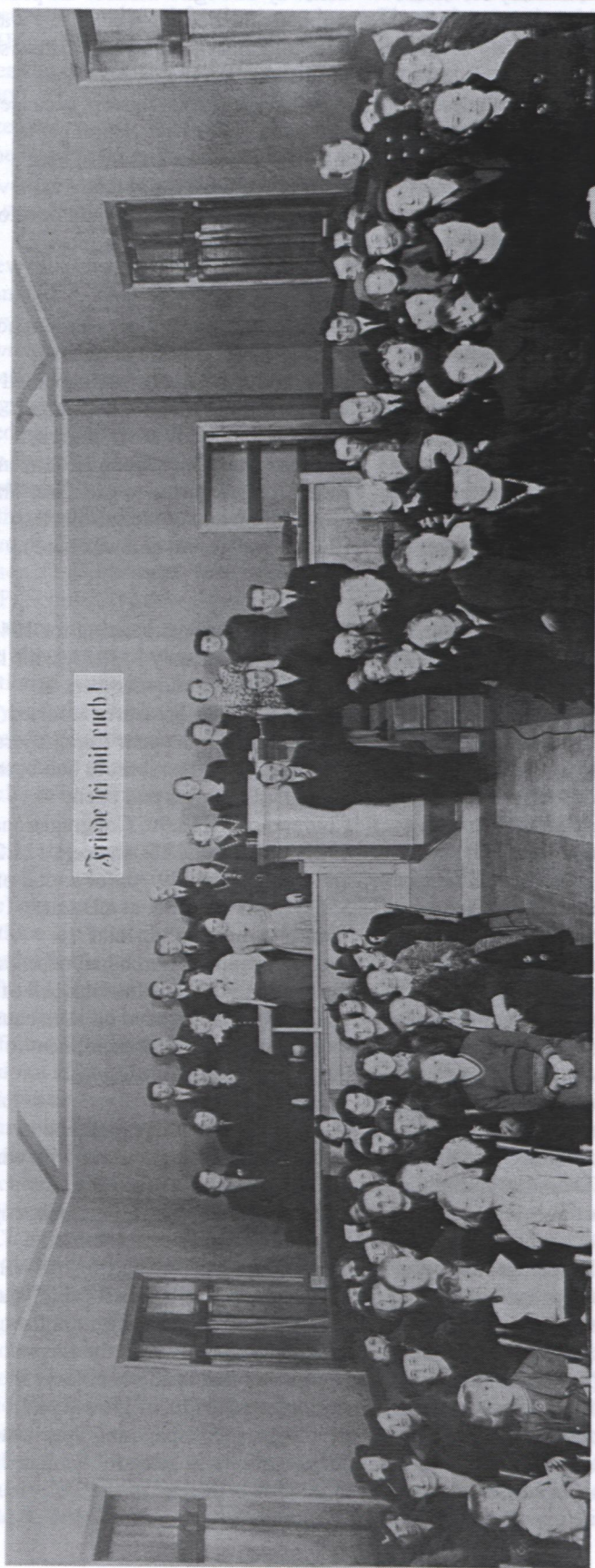
The *Maedchenheim* (literally 'Girl's Home', but again something is lost in translation) was not only a key part of this congregation, but originally, its *raison d'être*. The Manse served as both a residence for Pastor Wiens and his family and the *Maedchenheim*. (Later it would become only the *Maedchenheim*.) Most of these young women came from simple, pious Mennonite households in rural, homogeneous communities. Suddenly they were thrust into Anglo-Canadian families and a bustling city that were strange, almost alien, and sometimes terrifying environments. Here they labored 5-6 days per week. But there was a respite. On Thursday and Sunday afternoons they could retreat to the *Maedchenheim* where they would find a familiar refuge, a kindly word, and if necessary, material help from Pastor Wiens and his wife Erna. Another early institution was a Church Choir. The talent pool was small, and therefore it was not a great choir. Five years later it was not much better since they still had to encourage non-singers like myself to join. On at least one occasion I was quite mystified when

half way through a number the piano stopped and we sang a capella. I was later told that the choir had drifted so far off key that the director had signaled the pianist to stop, because choir and piano were beginning to audibly clash. Nevertheless, next Sunday we were again ready to serve. Eventually the church would develop the fine choir common to most Mennonite churches.

In November 1942 there was a major celebration in the church when Reverend J. B. Wiens was ordained as an Elder in the Mennonite Church. Pastors from many other churches attended, and Elder Jacob H. Janzen came from Waterloo to officiate. This provided further evidence that this Church had grown and was here to stay.

The congregational meeting for 1942 was held on January 3, 1943, with 12 male and 10 female members in attendance. The Treasurer reported that income for the year from general offerings and other sources had been \$620.05. Expenses had been: Conference \$ 118.96, Congregational \$327.71, Poverty Assistance \$ 125.29, and Publications \$9.76, for a total of \$581.72. In addition, at a Bazaar, Thanksgiving, and Special Collections, the Church had raised a further \$363.70 for Missions. All of this had been expended on such causes including a final loan installment to the Board of Home Missions.

The Church was still small, and its resources modest. However with wise and diligent pastoral and lay leadership and a faithful membership, it was now firmly established and prepared to welcome the post WW2 influx to Vancouver. First came young families seeking their future in the city and then refugees from the Soviet Union. But that is another story. A story of expansion, of growth and development, of spawning three sister congregations. A story for another time. This is the end of the "Beginnings."



First United Mennonite Church

49 Avenue & St. George Street, Vancouver, B.C. photo Circa 1938-1938

John Peters, Peter Schulz, Fred Peters, Peter Epp, Dietrich J. Friesen, Alvira Guenther, Louise Dyck, Tina Hildebrand, Frieda Friesen (or Elizabeth Thiessen?) Edith Regier, Paula Regier, Lise Klassen, Lydia Gunther, Anna von Niessen,, Elly Wiens, Rev John H. Goertz, Rev Jacob B Wiens, Rev David Duerksen, Mary Epp/Lepp, Margie Peters, Erna Wiens, Meta Bahmann, Hilda Peters, Liese Braun, Helena Goertz, Margaret Klassen, Helen Peters, Erna Goertz, Mary Schulz, Maria Guenther, Mary Goertz/Poetlker, Margaret Sawatzky (Ewart) Margaret Brown (Werner) Agatha Penner/Enns, Katharina Bergmann, Hedy Hildebrand (Epp) Katie Goertz/Siemens, Anna Friesen/Braun, Mary Hildebrand, Amalie Neufeld/Friesen, Helen Friesen/Dyck, Agatha Hildebrand, Walter Duerksen, Edward Hildebrand, Heinrich Bergmann, Victor Hildebrand, Mr. Guenther, Jake Duerksen, Judith von Niessen (Dyck) Hilda Bahmann (A. Dick) John Sawatzky, Maria von Niessen/Thiessen, Dietrich Heidebrecht, Hannah Friesen, Jacob Brown, Erna Epp, Lenora Epp, Nancy Heidebrecht, Dietrich Hildebrand, Peter I. Dyck, Katie Heidebrecht, Olga Bahmann (Jones) Margaret Sawatzky, John Duerksen, Marlene Duerksen, Sina Friesen (d. Bergen) Mary Hildebrandt, Mary Duerksen.

There are several names missing from this photo; if you know the names of people who should be listed , please let us know. A large scale copy of this photograph is on display at the archives.

Restored to Joy: a Christmas story

(When I first told this story at Langley Mennonite Fellowship, the scripture passage for that Sunday was Isaiah 35. When I turned to that passage, I found, to my surprise, that it follows the same journey to joy.)

It is early evening in the village of Nieder Chortitza, and families are gathering around their kitchen tables for supper. But in one of the homes, four children sit alone, waiting for their mother to return. She'd left early that morning, to take food and clean clothing to Johann, their father, in prison in Zaparozhye.

It's cold outside, and snowing. Every now and then, Irene, the oldest, goes to the window and breathes on the ice until it melts away, and she stares into the gathering darkness. If only Ma would come home soon. Someone knocks at the door. A neighbour, bringing a plate of buns, and a pitcher of milk. She puts the food on the table—they'll eat when mother gets home.

After a while, it is too dark to see. She lights the oil in the saucer.

"Should I tell you a story?" she asks.

"Yes!"

So she tells Katie, Hans and Jascha about Christmas long ago, when Mother was a little girl, when everyone in the village celebrated Christmas. Before Oma and Opa had been sent to Siberia to die, along with their sons, and many, many others.

She tells about the Christmas tree at Oma and Opa's house, with candles that flickered and glowed, and an angel with a trumpet on the very top of the tree, swaying in the candlelight. Plates on a table filled with candies, dried fruit, mittens, toys. Papa would take his guitar and they'd sit in a circle around him in the warmth of the pine-scented room, and they'd sing Christmas carols; "Nun ist sie erschienen, die himmlische Sonne" "Stille Nacht" "Freue dich Welt." And then Opa would take the Bible, and he'd read about Mary, the young mother, giving birth to her first born baby in a barn, about shepherds, gazing in terror and joy at a choir of angels, so enthralled that they leave their sheep to the dangers of the night and hurry to the stable.

"Do not be afraid," the angels sing. The children sit in the circle of story and imagine a world without fear.

The desert will rejoice and flowers will bloom in the wasteland.

The desert will sing and shout for joy;

it will be as beautiful as the Lebanese Mountains

and as fertile as the fields of Carmel and Sharon

Everyone will see the Lord's splendour

see his greatness and power. (Is 35, 1-2)

It is dark on the Dnieper River, and cold. Justine, the children's mother, is on her way home. All day long, she'd been standing in a queue outside the prison, holding a package that contains clean clothing and bread for her husband. It was late when she was finally able to give the package to the guard—then she had to wait to get a receipt. Now she's finally on her way. An icy wind whistles over the Dnieper River, and when she stumbles out of the boat, her hands are numb. Frozen.

She knocks at the door of a cottage and a Russian woman answers. Justine holds up her hands. She doesn't need to say anything—the woman understands. She pulls her inside, and rubs her hands with snow until the feeling returns.

The woman's face is kind. She pours a cup of tea, hot and sweet from the samovar. Justine's hands throb, and the woman holds the cup for her, so she can drink.

Justine does not stay long. She thanks the woman, and walks down the street of the village, toward her home. Along the way, she can see into the windows of the houses, cheerful families sit warm around their kitchen tables, eating, laughing.

Her eyes fill with tears; her heart aches with anger and despair. It is not fair. Life is just not fair. Her children alone and hungry. No one seems to care.

When she approaches her home, she does not go to the door. Instead, for a reason she can't quite understand, she goes to the window. Inside, a light is glowing, and in the circle of light she sees her children, safe and warm. There is food on the table, and the oldest, Irene, is telling the others a story.

*Give strength to hands that are tired
and to knees that tremble with weakness.*

Tell everyone who is discouraged,

"Be strong, and don't be afraid!"

*God is coming to your rescue,
coming to punish your enemies." (Is 35, 3-4)*

(cont'd next page)

December 26, and late at night, Johann, in his cell with a few other men, is stretched out on the floor, trying to sleep. He has rolled himself up in his coat—still, the cement floor chills him right to the bones. His thoughts are with his family. In his pocket is a letter that his daughter Irene has written to him. Just a few lines, telling him that they are well, and that they love him, and miss him.

It's hard not to feel bitter—he's done nothing wrong. He pushes aside that thought, reaches again for the letter.

Footsteps clatter down the corridor. He pushes the letter back down into his pocket, closes his eyes, breathes deep, tries to be invisible.

The guard calls his name. He's been called out before, long nights under a bare electric bulb, questioned, over and over, until he slumped with pain and fatigue. Not now, dear God, please not now, in this Christmas season.

He struggles to his feet, buttons up his coat. He says goodbye to his fellow cellmates, and follows the guard. Down the long echoing corridor, down to the very end. Here he is greeted politely.

"Your time is up. Sign for your belongings. You may leave."

He does not believe them—many have been tricked like this before. He sighs, walks with uncertain steps to the door. No one follows. The door closes behind him. He hears his heart thud in his chest, louder than the noise his feet make, muffled in the snow. He does not dare to look behind him, just walks, on and on. Through the suburbs of the city then into the woods that follow the Dnieper River. The woods are a haven for criminals, thieves. And yet, somehow, tonight he is not afraid. He has just been released from prison—he is one of them.

In the silence of the woods he stops. He leans against a tree, and waits until all is still, until his heart, too, becomes calm; begins to believe that he is free.

Then he tilts his head, and he begins to sing. The song echoes through the woods. *"Oh that I had a thousand voices, and with a 1000 tongues could tell/of him in whom the earth rejoices/who all things wisely does, and well/my grateful heart would then be free/to tell what God has done for me,"* he sings. And then, *"Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, all zugleich."* He walks and sings until he reaches the banks of the Dnieper.

The blind will be able to see, and the deaf to hear.

*The lame will leap and dance
and those who cannot speak will shout for joy.
Streams of water will flow through the desert;
the burning sand will become a lake,
and dry land will be filled with springs.
Where jackals used to live,
marsh grass and reeds will grow.*

*There will be a highway there,
called the "Road to Holiness."
No sinner will ever travel that road;
no fools will mislead those who follow it.
No lions will be there;
no fierce animals will pass that way.
Those whom the Lord has rescued
will travel home by that road
they will reach Jerusalem with gladness,
singing and shouting for joy.
They will be happy forever,
forever free from sorrow and grief. (Is 35, 5-10)*



In the house in Nieder Chortitza, Irene lies in bed, listening to the noises in the kitchen, where Justine lights the stove and begins to cook breakfast. Soon it will be time to get up, but for a few more minutes, while the stove warms up the room, she lies in bed and dreams.

Suddenly, a noise. Boots stomping snow off on the step, a tap on the kitchen window. And a joyful shout: *Children, come quick. Children. Look who's here.*

Johann, their father, stands in the kitchen, icicles sparkle in his beard and moustache. He's cold, tired and hungry, but right now he doesn't care. He's home.

Louise Bergen Price