



Roots and branches

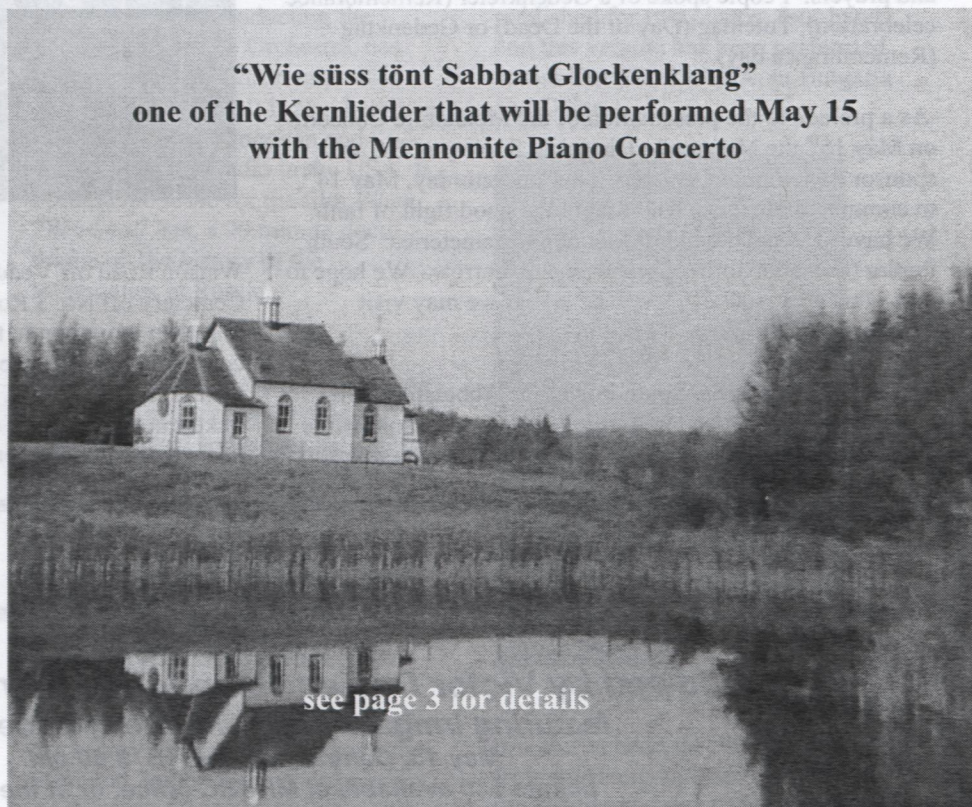
Newsletter of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

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

Psalm 78

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|------------------------------|----|
| Editorial..... | 2 |
| Memorial Cemetery Tour.... | 2 |
| The Mennonite Piano | |
| Concerto | 3 |
| Lecture : Wrenching our | |
| Youth From Frivolous | |
| Pursuits..... | 4 |
| Silencing the Voice of the | |
| People: Part One. | 5 |
| A New Song:..... | 7 |
| Hymns and Choruses: The | |
| Cows are in the Corn..... | 8 |
| Book Review:..... | 9 |
| Mennonite Immigrants and | |
| the Canadian Mennonite | |
| Board of Colonization..... | 10 |
| Family Histories – | |
| Preserving the Voice of the | |
| Past..... | 12 |
| Who is she? | 13 |
| Letters from the past: | 14 |

**"Wie süß tönt Sabbat Glockenklang"
one of the Kernlieder that will be performed May 15
with the Mennonite Piano Concerto**



see page 3 for details

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Editorial

A synonym for *harmony* is *agreement*. Yet in our churches, our choice in music is more often a cause of disagreement. A few years ago, I chuckled at a joke circulating via email about the difference between hymns and choruses. Thinking it might add another perspective to this newsletter's music emphasis, I 'googled' the words 'hymns, choruses, cows' and found 280 sites, including Catholic, Baptist among many others. Obviously, this is not just a Mennonite issue! There will be harmony of the best kind at our May events. Get your tickets early to avoid disappointment!

Memorial Cemetery Tour

"Don't forget about your leaders who taught you God's message. Remember what kind of lives they lived and try to have faith like theirs." Hebrews 13:7 This Scripture verse was always taken seriously in the Russian Mennonite tradition. Annually, whether at conferences or in individual churches, people paused to remember those who had passed on during the past year. There were readings from Scripture and prayers. People spoke of a Gedenkfeier (Remembrance celebration), Totentag (Day of the Dead) or Gedenktage (Remembrance day).

As a prelude to the presentation of the Mennonite Concerto on May 15th the Mennonite Historical Society of BC will sponsor a Memorial Cemetery Tour on Saturday, May 14th, to commemorate those who fought the good fight of faith. We have selected the oldest Mennonite cemeteries: South Poplar (S. Abbotsford), Greendale and Yarrow. We hope to make this an annual event and next year we may visit McClure Cemetery.

The Tour begins at the South Poplar (S. Abbotsford MB) Cemetery, Huntingdon and Gladwin (beyond the old white church) at 1:00 pm, then off to Greendale Cemetery west on



Watson Road off Vedder Road at 2:30 pm, and then Yarrow Cemetery off No. 3 Road on Hare Avenue at 4:00 pm. The tour then moves on to the Yarrow MB Church for a brief commemorative service with Dr. John B. Toews followed by a fellowship Faspas. Pick up your complimentary Faspas tickets at the MHSBC office (ph. 853-6177) along with maps to the various cemeteries.

Kernlieder Choir,
assembled by Rudy Baerg and Holda Fast Redecopp,
led by Bill Baerg
followed by Victor Davies "Mennonite Piano Concerto"
featuring Irmgard Baerg and Betty Suderman
May 15, Central Heights MB 3:00 pm
tickets \$10 available at MHSBC office, or at the door

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Silencing the Voice of the People: Part One

The Mennonite Piano Concerto

by Helen Rose Pauls



When Victor Davies was commissioned by the B. B Fast Foundation in Winnipeg to compose a Mennonite concerto, he knew little about Mennonites or their music. Ben Horch, Winnipeg musician and scholar, gave him fifty song titles to work with, twenty-five each from the Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference. Davies realized that he knew almost all of the pieces from his United Church background, and that the Mennonite hymns, or "Kernlieder", were actually Victorian hymns and American gospel songs in German translation. He assumed that the hymns were in current use in Mennonite churches, learning later that they were considered out-dated and old fashioned.



Irmgard Baerg

The Mennonite Concerto premiered on Oct. 27, 1975 in the Winnipeg Centennial Concert Hall, performed by Irmgard Baerg on the piano with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Bill Baerg. The occasion was a Mennonite Saengerfest to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the founding of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church.

A recording of the concerto, made in 1983 with Irmgard Baerg at the piano and Boris Brott conducting the London Symphony Orchestra, has become one of the most requested works on the CBC. It is also heard on the BBC and on American and National Public Radio in the USA. It became the score for the film *When They Shall Ask*, a 90 minute documentary on the history of the Mennonites in Russia.

Davies said that it was difficult to undertake the challenges of changing vocal into instrumental sound and congregational songs into the single voice of the piano. The melodies of the "Kernlieder" are lyrical, tuneful and folk-like with beautiful harmonies, and reflect a history of blooming and disaster; conflict and change; hurt and hope. They express inner resolve, deep piety, devotion and resilience in the face of extreme hardship. The composer "remind(s) the listener of the beauty of faith. Faith is not only profound, but contains enormous joy."

In the first movement, a sonata, the melodies portray a crisis of faith; an exuberant beginning gives way to doubt and struggle which dissolves once again into joyous celebration.

Variations on the melody of *In the Rifted Rock I'm Resting* (*Wehrlos und Verlassen*) form the second movement, which increases in

complexity and then moves toward beauty and simplicity.

The third part is a rondo, a series of repeated themes centering around the song *How Sweetly Chime the Sabbath Bells* (*Wie süß tönt Sabbat Glockenklang*). The audience responded with a standing ovation. According to Ben Horch, "Victor Davies has caught the essence of our spiritual history and interpreted it in a new form, essentially re-creating Mennonite history in the *Mennonite Piano Concerto*."

In 1986, a score for the concerto was published for two pianos, four hands, and this version has been performed across Canada, the USA, in Bulgaria and China.



Betty Suderman

It is this version that will be played by Irmgard Baerg and Betty Suderman at the Central Heights Church on May 15 at 3 p.m. (see page 2) Tickets are on sale at the archives for \$10.00. This afternoon should be a very special one for old and young alike as we celebrate our musical heritage.

*Information for this article comes from a lecture Victor Davies presented at "The Sound in the Land" conference at Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo, May 2004.

Lecture : Wrenching our Youth From Frivolous Pursuits,

by Helen Rose Pauls.

When we asked Dr. Bruce Guenther to find a catchy title for his lecture on the history of the Bible school movement in Western Canada, he found this one in a quote from the Bethany Bible Institute Catalogue from 1937, that stated the school's objectives: 'To give our youth foundational Bible instruction in both the German and English languages, to wrench our youth from frivolous pursuits and the contemporary *Zeitgeist*, to nurture the German language as a special possession handed down from our fathers, to raise believing youth for the battle of the faith, and to take into account the needs of the congregations in the methodical training of Sunday School teachers and sundry church workers.' This was probably the intent of most of the Bible schools that sprang up in the first half of the twentieth century. Although the Methodists established the first Canadian Bible school in Ontario in 1885, and Tyndale began in 1894 and continues to the present day, Mennonites established Herbert Bible School in 1913 and soon had 60 such schools strung across the nation. The Mennonite Brethren started 30 of these Bible schools, and the Conference of Mennonites (now Mennonite Church Canada) started 20. Seven other Mennonite groups started 10 more. Altogether, 330 Bible Schools of various Protestant denominations served their communities, Prairie

Bible Institute being the largest. Dr. Guenther said that, "Taken as a whole, the Bible school movement stands as one of the most important influences in the development of evangelical Protestantism in Canada during the twentieth century." Low tuition, an agrarian lifestyle that left young people with spare time in winter, a chance to meet and mingle with other youth, and motivation to learn about the Bible to serve churches still run by laity, were all factors in the popularity of these schools. The Bible was the center of the curriculum, and the scriptures were studied "systematically and thoroughly [even if not critically] ...a necessary inoculant against humanism, modernism and atheism". Christian education methods were also taught, and there was a special emphasis on missions. Young people who returned from Bible school "became a veritable army of trained lay workers for involvement in Sunday Schools, youth work, music, and church leadership. Over time, the Bible schools created a common religious experience, a high level of biblical literacy, and an enthusiasm...for participation in the life of the church that was an ongoing source of vitality and energy for local congregations...that shaped the ethos of the entire denomination.". Dr. Guenther feels that Mennonite institutions are no where close to

having this kind of an impact on church life today.

With the rise of 9 Mennonite high schools in the late forties and greater opportunities for higher education at MBBC and CMBC in Winnipeg and even at the university level, interest in Bible school began to wane and there was a push towards accreditation in those that remained open. Only seven Mennonite Bible schools are operating in Canada today.

Most young people who attended Bible schools have warm memories of the experience. They remember pranks, special teachers, romances that often led to marriage (hence the name *bridal schools*), life changing decisions, spiritual commitments, life long friendships and, of course, increased Bible knowledge and ministry skills.

Music from another era set the stage for Dr. Guenther's lecture, as Betty O'Malley and Neil Matthies sang two duets, and Vic Ewert led in singing "Wonderful Grace of Jesus." Past president of CBC, Dr. Wally Unger, led in the prayer of invocation. He displayed the evocative motto of the old Bible school, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God." Dr. David Ewert responded to the lecture with his usual wise words. Jean Neufeld's picture displays of many of the Bible schools of western Canada were a focus for much reflection and conversation during coffee time.

Future events:

October 15, 2005. Annual fundraising banquet with speaker Dr. John Ruth. Dr. Ruth will be speaking on the Swiss Mennonite aid to Russian Mennonites and the birth of MCC. 6 pm. Columbia Place (CBC gymnasium).

February 18, 2006. Helmut Harder -The David Toews story and the Canadian side of the 1920's immigration.

"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-fashion, 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)

Silencing the Voice of the People: Part One.

How Changes in Sanctuary Designs Are Affecting Acoustics, Congregational Singing, and Concepts of Community in Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren Churches in British Columbia, by J. Evan Kreider, School of Music, UBC

During its very first years, the Anabaptist revolution recognised the importance of the 'voice' of its laity. Already in the early 1500's, Anabaptist laity were encouraged to own and study the Bible for themselves, and then talk about it in their own terms. They soon learned to improvise prayers rather than rely upon written prayers, and groups of laity sang new songs telling of their evangelical faith. Very quickly, however, voices of strong leaders increasingly predominated during the worship services, but that initial ideal of the laity having an important 'voice' kept re-emerging over the centuries.

The worship experiences which have most profoundly affected my spiritual journey have been those in which I listened to the 'voice of the people' from the pews. These lay people asked for God's mercy, collectively affirmed their living faith, and shared prayers or words of encouragement—all from the pews. These voices of the laity have made a much greater impression on my spiritual thinking than have words from the pulpit by the same voice, Sunday after Sunday. The unparalleled joy I experienced during the resounding *a cappella* congregational singing ultimately encouraged me to memorise far more verses of songs than scripture. One of the primary reasons I continue to associate with the Anabaptist tradition is because of the ways my present congregation (Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship) continue to give the laity a 'voice', whether during congregational singing, 'sharing time' or times of 'free prayer' (offered aloud by laity from the pews). In order for this 'voice of the people' to continue its important role within our spiritual tradition, we, the gathered community of faith, must ensure that we can hear that which is said and sung from the pews. The 'voice of the people' has the power to move me.

Each of the components of our worship services requires that our congregations listen: instrumental music, scripture readings, sermons, prayers, dramas, or even the sharing of The Peace. Mennonites tend to forget, however, that congregational listening also occurs during our hearty participation in congregational singing and responsive reading. Although we may not realise that we are in fact listening while we join in congregational singing, we immediately sense when we are in danger of going ahead or lagging behind the congregation, singing too loudly or on the wrong verse, and our ears are constantly informing us about the overall effect of the congregation's singing together or reading aloud in unison. I have observed that even our little children hear the 'voice of the people', for our congregational singing seems to make a far greater impression upon their young minds than do all the scripture readings and children's stories combined. The participation of our young children in this singing assures them that they are accepted by their parents' community of faith, and that they have the right to participate in its most public expression, that of singing. Even our children listen as they add their singing to the 'voice of the people.'

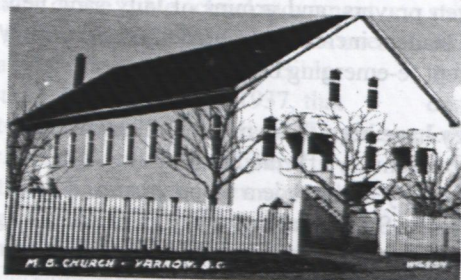
Given the importance of the 'voice of the people' to our spiritual tradition, this paper argues that our modern tendency to construct sanctuaries which are designed primarily so that congregations can hear the sounds produced from the stage (rather than to sounds produced by the congregated laity) is now profoundly altering at least two things: our congregational singing (and repertoire) and our concept of our relationship as individuals to our gathered community of faith. This paper calls attention to the role which the acoustical properties of our sanctuaries plays in our worship services, and urges that our people work to discover how the designs and construction of our sanctuaries can assist rather than discourage congregational participation in communal acts of worship in the generations to come. The assumption underlying these arguments is that the Anabaptist tradition must now find ways to ensure that the 'voice of our people' continues to be heard from the floor of our sanctuaries, both when singing and when speaking. This principle offers an alternative view to more popular theories of church growth and hierarchical church structures which assume that important statements come only from the stage and never from the pews.

The Important Role of Music in our Worship Services

Visitors to some of our Mennonite congregations often used to comment upon the emphasis music is given in our weekly worship services, and on how wonderful the singing sounded. I recently asked email contributors to MennoLink to report on the amount of time their churches devoted to congregational singing and to several other activities during the Sunday morning service. The thirty-six respondents revealed that their worship services devoted far more time to congregational singing than to reading from the Bible, and some tended to spend nearly as much time in congregational singing as in listening to the sermon. For years, many of our churches have added an extended period of time for congregational singing before the 'worship service proper' (whether hymns or songs from overheads); in length, this period of pre-service singing

may be longer than that devoted to scripture, prayer and announcements combined. Even as the musical repertoires of our congregations change, the importance of congregational singing itself remains a vital part of the average Mennonite worship service. Throughout this singing, regardless of which repertoire is being employed, everybody is listening to what the others are doing (whether consciously or not, and whether singing or not).

The Slow Changing of Architectural Designs of Mennonite Sanctuary



Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church

Although Mennonites have generally borrowed their musical repertoires from other denominations, for many years the architectural designs of our sanctuaries remained resolutely utilitarian and distinctly 'Mennonite', for we refused to copy modern sanctuary designs from other denominations. It was this very insistence upon constructing austere church buildings that unknowingly aided our congregational singing enormously, for the resonant acoustics of those plain rectangular wooden structures enhanced congregational singing in ways that are unimaginable to young Mennonites today. In those older buildings, the 'voice of the people' resounded ever so gloriously. But with the economic prosperity of the 1950's and 60's, some of our people started to move out from their isolated communities both

physically and intellectually. As theories of 'church growth' swept through our denominations in the 1970's and 80's, some Mennonites developed formerly unthinkable interests in imitating the sanctuary designs used by other fast-growing evangelical congregations. Slowly Mennonites abandoned their stance of architectural isolation. By the 1970's many of our new sanctuaries could no longer be identified as buildings in which Mennonites worshipped unless one first looked at the signboard perfectly positioned in the manicured lawn, beautifully edged by the smooth hard-surfaced parking lot which was now worthy of holding our latest-model upscale automobiles. Our former ideal of living a more simple lifestyle was dying both at home and at church.

It was in England's Winchester Cathedral that our two-year-old son first discovered the pleasure which resonant acoustics give anyone interested in vocalising. The science of building these cathedrals is now basically dead, but in our day, acoustical engineering is making remarkable progress, as a very few architectural firms build upon complex mathematical formulae and develop increasingly sophisticated computer models. Congregational building budgets, however, do not permit our committees to consult with any of these firms (such as ARTEC) in order to create the best acoustics possible, for their architectural fees honestly reflect the enormous amount of work and expertise required for ensuring the best possible reflection of sound for the room's varied intended uses. But as we move from older architectural designs to newer ones, the changes in acoustics are certainly noticeable. [Beware, many men who have business cards which say that they are 'sound engineers' are merely P.A. salesmen without physics degrees, and without any university work in acoustics.]

I recall having heard one enthusiastic Mennonite Brethren college choir of perhaps 30 voices sing in a recently constructed sanctuary in Clearbrook, B.C. Although I sensed that the musicians knew their music well, I noticed that they were working hard, hoping that their singing could even be heard in the acoustically deadened sanctuary; I also noticed that they could hardly hear themselves from one side of the choir to the other. After the service, several concerned church members from their building committee asked why the sound of congregational and choral singing in their new sanctuary was so poor (and like the rich young ruler, when Bill Berg and I suggested what they must do to solve their problem, they turned sorrowfully away.) Not long afterwards, I sang with a choir of perhaps twenty amateur voices in that congregation's old sanctuary next door. I admired how effortlessly our untrained voices carried, how the room's acoustics enhanced the singing of the small audience, and how even a single voice could be heard reading scripture or praying without any electronic amplification. One American minister recently wrote to me to confirm that this experience is not unique to British Columbia's churches:

"Our new building [built in the 1980's] has all the characteristics you mention: fan-shape, carpeting everywhere, padded benches. I've only been pastor here three years but have had numerous people tell me that the singing was so much better in the old building, which was wooden, rectangular, no carpeting, etc. Many young people no longer sing at all, and they certainly have never experienced the thrill of a vigorous gospel song ringing throughout the sanctuary. I am not a professional musician but I have frequently noticed that I feel like I'm singing by myself...And the grand piano sits partially behind a brick wall!"

(cont'd next issue)

A New Song:

by Helen Rose Pauls

Five years ago, our daughter, who was still in high school then, came into the house breathlessly excited. "DOXA is starting up again!" she said. And without formal advertising and any organised fanfare, the good news was spread by e-mail, phone, word of mouth and the Central Heights church was full of young people on a Sunday night to hear a loud, high tech worship band.

Almost a hundred years ago, my grandmother apparently got into serious trouble because she used to go to the next village to sing four part harmony at youth rallies. "Songfests" they were called, and they radically broke with the tradition of having a Vorsänger (Singing Leader) who sang solo lines loudly and all participants repeated the verses after him in unison. Grandmother must have been exonerated and her music was accepted as the norm eventually, for she married a former Vorsänger from the next village.

My mother-in-law who is ninety and can recall the horrors of anarchy, famine, the onset of communism, Stalin's death camps, and eventual emigration to Canada, wonders why we don't sing the wonderful songs of deliverance any more.

An older friend recounts with misty eyes, "I'll never forget the time when twelve hundred people were standing in the Yarrow MB Church in 1948 and singing, *Holy God, We Praise Thy Name* (Grosser Gott, wir loben Dich) in four part harmony. "We'll never see those days again," he says wistfully, bitterly disappointed in the modern stuff the youth are performing in our church today.

It seems that one generation's grace often becomes the next generation's legalism.

For my younger aunts and uncles, the gospel quartets reigned. This summer one can go to any number of "old time" nostalgic gospel quartet rallies and relive those years, but we don't hear them in church anymore.

For my generation, it was choruses that kept our youth nights fresh and new. Loudly, we sang "Do Lord!" or "Wonderful Grace of Jesus" with the men going off on a marvellous tangent all by themselves. Some churches now sponsor the occasional Sunday night hymn sing for my age group.

Later we sang "Kumbaya" and "He's got the Whole World in his Hands" at hootenannies with guitars, campfires and lots of feeling. We still try to capture this at our annual corn roast, but some of the idealism is gone.

A friend from Manitoba said to me, "You B.C. people aren't even Mennonites. You don't sing harmony anymore!" In almost the same breath, she expressed sorrow that they were losing a lot of young people in their church. I couldn't bring myself to point out the correlation. Our youth are doing just what the Psalmist instructed in at least ten different verses: "Sing unto the Lord a new song".

Our daughter used to enjoy the Sunday evening Songfest in the next village called DOXA. It was loud, noisy, full of strange instrumentation and the words were not my heart's expression. But they were hers and her generation's words, written fresh and new by those who experienced God in a new way in a very different world. The words brought hope and faith and community to the next generation of youth, and these songs and music style have become the mainstay in many of our Mennonite churches.

But the "new song" has caused very real debate and ongoing division in our churches. It is probably as divisive and controversial as the change from the German language to English in the fifties. I remember an elderly neighbour hearing us children say our night prayers in English, and asking my mother whether she really thought that God would accept them.

Many churches are coping with "new songs" by having two services, one youth friendly and one more staid, but some mourn that the important intergenerational aspect of church is gone. Others have lost their youth to churches that sing only the new songs, and this occurs quite easily where so many different Mennonite churches exist in one geographical area. Our two youngest, as soon as one of them had his license, began attending a church that sang only new songs. Their older brother was in another "with it" church which attracted a huge college and career group, and this is where he met his life's partner. Our eldest daughter moved to the city to teach and found a lively church there, where she also met her husband. Our

parents, when they were still alive, found peace and solace in the familiar songs and worship, in a church close by that was full of grey heads.

We stayed in our home church which was founded thirty years ago by people in our age group who speak our language and sing our songs, but who have also adapted to modern worship teams. We thought our church was still "cutting edge" and very comfortable for all of us. "Sure, mom," said our son, "It's great if you're in your fifties."

I'm glad that they have all found a place to worship with others who are like-minded, but there are times when I wish we would all be together. Is compromise possible when we older ones still enjoy what were once our "new songs" and our youth want to sing theirs?

Hymns and Choruses: The Cows are in the Corn

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the farmer, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns."

"Praise choruses," said his wife, "What are those?"

"Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like hymns, only different," said the farmer.

"Well, what's the difference?" asked his wife.

The farmer said, "It's like this--If I were to say to you: 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well, that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you: Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh, Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, the CORN, CORN, CORN, then, if I were to repeat the whole thing two or three times, well that would be a praise chorus."

As luck would have it, the exact same Sunday a young, new Christian from the city church attended the small town church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the young man, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs."

"Hymns," said his wife, "What are those?"

"Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like regular songs, only different," said the young man.

"Well, what's the difference?" asked his wife.

The young man said, "Well, it's like this--If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' that would be a regular song. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you:

Oh Martha, dear Martha, hear thou my cry
Incline thine ear to the words of my mouth.
Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear by and by
To the righteous, inimitable, glorious truth.

For the way of the animals who can explain
There in their heads is no shadow of sense,
Hearkenest they in God's sun or His rain
Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are fenced.

Yea those cows in glad bovine, rebellious delight,
Have broke free their shackles, their warm pens eschewed.
Then goaded by minions of darkness and night
They all my mild Chilliwack sweet corn have chewed.

So look to that bright shining day by and by,
Where all foul corruptions of earth are reborn.
Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry
And I no longer see those foul cows in the corn.

Then, if I were to do only verses one, three and four and do a key change on the last verse, well that would be a hymn."

(from the web—numerous sources)

Book Review:

Adolf Ens, *Becoming a National Church: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada*, CMU Press, 2004, 218pp., reviewed by Henry Neufeld.

It started in 1902 when two church groups, one in Manitoba, the other in Saskatchewan, recognized the need to build connections beyond their own congregations and communities, and joined to form a fledgling conference that eventually became the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC).

Within a few decades the CMC spanned the four western provinces and Ontario.

It ended with a delegate vote in St. Louis in 1999 when CMC changed its name to Mennonite Church Canada. After 97 years, this action was more than a change of name; it severed most ties with their more numerous American cousins and also reflected a quest for control of programs and funds. North American Mennonite Brethren have also divided on the basis of our border.

Adolf Ens, former professor at CMBC, provides a valuable account of the struggling beginnings of CMC in the Canadian prairies, its change from a largely rural to an urban based group, its amalgamation with the Swiss descended Mennonites in Ontario and, in the latter part of last century, its emergence as a multicultural church. In many ways this is the story of any Mennonite group in Canada since they all faced the same social and economic pressures.

The reasons for churches getting together hasn't changed much over the years; the initial question raised by Rev. Peter Regier to nine men invited to Tiefengrund, Saskatchewan, was how to minister more effectively to the scattered Mennonite communities. The Bergthaler of Manitoba and the Rosenorter of Saskatchewan agreed to closer relations, pulpit exchanges, and annual gatherings of representatives. The first conference was held near Altona, Manitoba in 1903. Annual sessions were to further God's desire for unity and to encourage each other in kingdom work. The unity, they said, should not depend on outward forms but on faith, hope and love. The

conference was an assembly of congregations, not of ministers. This reflected one of the strengths (and weaknesses) of CMC – congregational autonomy. The conference should not interfere with a congregation unless requested to do so.

The early assemblies heard position papers on church members holding public office, church discipline, home visits, ministry to youth and seniors, furthering spiritual growth, alcohol consumption, dealing with disgruntled members, non-resistance, the need for Christian education and a conference-wide publication. "Reiseprediger" (traveling ministers) were commissioned to relate to scattered groups.

BC joined CMC in 1932 and the first conference held in BC was in Greendale (then Sardis) in 1949. The first Mennonite settlement in BC was at Renata, a community flooded out in 1969 as a result of the Columbia River treaty.

The 1930's and 40's saw the establishment of Bible schools in all four western provinces. CMC wanted to join with the Mennonite Brethren in clergy training, but MBBC President J.B. Toews said that his Board indicated "a desire to be sharply separate from other Mennonite groups." (Now we have CMU in Winnipeg and CBC in Abbotsford, both inter-Mennonite ventures.)

The city was feared by many. Ted Regehr cites a report to the 1942 BC MB conference by Vancouver missionary J.B. Thiessen: "But I regret the influx of young men, and many young families attracted by available jobs in shipyards and sawmills, etc. It is not beneficial for our people... may the hour soon come when none of our people can be found in Vancouver, or any other large city..." (Mennonites in Canada, p.167)

Ens echoes the challenges of urbanization and transition to the English language in the 1950 – 1971 era. Moving to the city meant the loss of a sense of community. Ministry to new city residents was not easy.

In the same era, the authority of the bishop (Aeltester) was phased out (1972) and more power given to local congregations. The Aeltester's role was somewhat replaced by conference ministers, though often without the authority of the former days. The constant struggle between congregational autonomy and accountability continues.

The salaried pastor became the norm with the congregation deciding when a pastor should come and go. Calling pastors from outside of the congregation is more like considering job applicants than a person responding to a call from God to a lifetime vocation, observes Ens.

The 1970's and 80's brought house church models, new ethnic churches, and the emergence of women in ministry. Kaethe Hooze and another woman 'crashed' the 1954 all male conference in Saskatchewan and were recognized by the body. By 1988, 20 women were serving CMC congregations as pastors.

In 1995, Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada (MCEC) joined, adding a Swiss Mennonite focus to CMC.

Ens has provided well-researched and rich background of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. He helps us look at the past and hopefully learn for the future. Perhaps the greatest tribute to CMC comes from Robert Kreider in 1999: "After the war (WWII), from Canada flowed into the [General] Conference the greatest stream of pastoral, missionary and institutional leadership in its history."

by Ron Isaak

"When, after World War I, the Mennonites of Russia were famine-stricken and suffered many other hardships, the Mennonites of Western Canada were among those who wished to extend every possible help. Thus, on 18 October 1920, fourteen representatives of the various Mennonite churches in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta met in Regina, Sask., to organize a Canadian Central Committee similar to the Mennonite Central Committee just organized in the United States. The committee was to be in charge of a united Canadian relief program for the Mennonites who suffered in Russia. ...

The project to extract the data from the CMBC records is being undertaken by the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). The following has been adapted with permission from their internet³ site.

Form 2-100

Canadian Grenville Board of Colonization.

Familienregister. Auf dem Kontext geprüft von uns. 122

| Zieler- nummer | Nach- name und Familienname | Wann geboren | Wo geboren |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| | Isaac B. Bruching | 1873-1876 | Albionville |
| | Lydia B. Bruching | 1878-1876 | Schwarzenstein |
| 1926 | Jacob B. Bruching | 1879-1876 | Albionville |
| 1927 | Abraham B. Bruching | 1882-1876 | " |
| | Bruching | 1881-1876 | " |
| 1928 | Johann B. Bruching | 1882-1876 | " |
| | Gertrud B. Bruching | 1881-1876 | " |
| 1929 | Martha B. Bruching | 1882-1876 | " |
| | Lydia B. Bruching | 1884-1876 | " |

Familiennummer 122 122 122

The registrations forms initially consisted of two-sided 5.5 x 8 ½ inch newsprint sheets that were pre-printed and completed by hand. ... The pages are of fragile newsprint and with many years of handling their condition has deteriorated. The Mennonite Heritage Committee in Winnipeg (MHC) had them microfilmed as a conservation procedure for the long term protection of the originals.

³ <http://www.mhsc.ca/index.asp?content=http://www.mhsc.ca/encyclopedia/contents/C364ME.html>

Letzte Wohnort in Russland: Alexanderpol bei Bachmut
 Abreise von Russland am 27. Juli in Richtung England in Begleitung der Familie
 Datum, angekommen in England am 1. August den Reisetage abgerechnet bis 1. August
 In Libau angekommen am 1. August den Abreis tag gerechnet am 1. August
 Von Libau angekommen am 5. August den Abreis tag gerechnet am 5. August
 Abreise am 1. August den Abreis tag gerechnet am 1. August
 In England angekommen am 1. August den Abreis tag gerechnet am 1. August
 Abreise am 1. August den Abreis tag gerechnet am 1. August
 In Canada angekommen am 14. August 1924
 Erste Wohnstätte in Canada: Winkler, Man.
 Verwandte in Canada oder der Staaten: Rudolf, Isaac, Kornel, Kornel, Rudolf - Cal.
 Verzeichnis der unterzeichnenden Angehörigen dieser Familie:

| Nr. | Nach- und Familienname | Wohnort | Wohnort | Wohnort |
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What can these records tell us?
 Why is such care bestowed on these records? It's because they contain rich information about the Mennonite households who were able to leave the USSR and come to Canada. Each one represents a milestone in the fleeing and freeing experience. Years later, they represent one sure proof of age for those who apply for Old Age Pension. Collectively, they represent a goldmine of data for family and academic historians. (For a further description go to <http://www.rootsweb.com/~abmhsa/cmboc/index.html>)

When I first found out about this project I sent away (see ordering information below) for copies of the CMBC records for my grandparents and was not disappointed.

The front of each CMBC record card (p. 10) lists the immigrating family with dates and places of birth. On the left are notes added as to what happened to each person, whom they married, etc. as this was the basis for a financial repayment record for 'credit passengers.' On this card beside Jacob Cornelius it says '1926 ertrunken' (drowned); beside Abram Cornelius Isaak it notes he married Katharine Wiebe; for Johann it lists his wife as Katharine Voth (Fote); and for Maria (Mary), Isaac Friesen is shown as the husband. The numbers at the bottom were the family number (533) and a folio number for financial tracking (F 90). This debt for travel expenses was called the *Reiseschuld* and is a word often said with disdain by our elders. The reverse side of the CMBC card indicated the dates of travel, the route taken, then destination in Canada and the naming of a relative in North America. (presumably a sponsor)

The back of the Cornelius Isaak Family card states that the last place of residence in Russia was Alexanderpol in Bachmut. They left from Alexandrowsk (now Saporoschje) Russia (a staging area for immigrants) on the 27th of July 1924 by rail arriving in Riga, Latvia on the 31st of July, 1924. Departed Riga (actually port at Libau, Latvia, on the 1st of August, 1924 on the ship Baltara for Southampton, England. Arrived in Liverpool, England on the 5th August and departed Liverpool on August 7th on the ship Minnedosa and arrived in Quebec City, Quebec on August 14th, 1924. They are bound for Winkler, Manitoba. They have an uncle, Kornelius Isaak in Reedley, California.

For those who read German and have access to back issues of the newspaper "Der Bote", the May 2, 1984 issue carried a lead story commemorating the trip 60 years ago. It is front page and entitled "Zur Erinnerung an unsere Auswanderung aus Russland vor 60 Jahren und das erste Jahr in Kanada." Copies of Der Bote are in the archives at MHSBC.

Thus, these cards supply important information about our immigrant forefathers including the name of the ship and date of arrival in Canada. From this information ship and immigration records can be ordered from the Canadian National Archives as noted in the last issue. To see if your family is listed on the CMBC records see the online index (right side of page) at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~abmhsa/cmboc/index.html>

The travel debt for credit passengers, called the "Reiseschuld", also contains valuable information for the family historian. The Reiseschuld records will be the subject of the next article in this series.

To order copies of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records contact the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSBC). They state "we'll be glad to supply a single scanned image (photocopy for those who do not have access to the internet) as an e-mail attachment at no cost. For copies of more than one record, we request a donation of \$1.00 per record. The MHSBC will be very pleased to receive independent donations from those individuals who would like to "sponsor" a series of individuals' (related or unrelated) records to be scanned and placed online.

All requests may be sent to the MHSBC. Please be sure to put "CMBOC" and any family details (surname, given name, birth date or year of immigration) into your query. Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta #223, 2946 - 32 Street NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7 (403) 250-1121 e-mail: rempel@shaw.ca

Ron Isaak is a member of the MHSBC. Email: teched@direct.ca

Family Histories – Preserving the Voice of the Past

By Deborah G. Block

"Christmas was THE THING! I don't think anyone raised in that era will forget Christmas Eve. The excitement of getting ready – I can close my eyes – 'course we always had snow, and the crunching while we walked to church and the sparkle in the snow – just that excitement! I don't think a child could forget that...and each one would get a little 'toot' [goodie bag] with peanuts, an orange and a few hard candy..."⁴

Have you ever been to a family gathering and overheard a great aunt, uncle, or grandparent start talking about when they were young? Did you ever think, "Someone should be recording this"?



If you are interested in family history and preserving some record of the past to pass on, interviews are a fun way to start. Photo albums, genealogy books, and family records are great, but there is nothing like hearing the stories from people who have actually experienced the things we see and read about in those historical records. Interviews do not take a lot of time or preparation and even if you do nothing but record and copy a few cassette tapes you will have preserved something wonderful for future generations to enjoy. The sooner you start the more history you will be able to capture.

In this article, I hope to present you with a few helpful tips on how to prepare for an interview, how to conduct the actual interview, and what to do with the information you gather.

To prepare for an interview you need to gather some basic equipment. You should get yourself a small tape recorder, plenty of long-playing (90 minutes minimum) blank tapes, and spare batteries. Do not get a recorder that is voice-activated as the tapes will come out choppy and the pauses in conversations often reflect a person's emotional response to a memory. For my first interviews, I had one of those big boom box stereos that was very awkward and distracting. It took up half a good-sized kitchen table and made more noise than a running air conditioner. I quickly learned what a distraction that was!

Another great option is the digital recorder. These are very small and the sound quality is superb, but they are expensive. You could use a video camera, but be aware that some people are very uncomfortable with being video taped. You should also have paper and pen, people willing to be interviewed, and a list of questions to prompt their stories.

Decide who you want to interview and draft your questions based on what you already know about them. Start with a few warm-up questions to help you get comfortable with each other. Ask their name, their parents names, where they were born, etc. Then move into open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no response. I like to ask questions such as: What do you remember about your grandparents? There may be no one else on the planet that remembers them. What was Christmas like when you were a child?

Ask about the gifts, traditional foods, programs, and decorations. What kind of values did your parents teach you? What was your wedding like? What was it like on the ship when you came to Canada? These sorts of questions usually get some wonderful stories.

You might also ask about the first car their dad bought, their childhood home, and how their family made a living. This is always interesting. People will say that their dad was a farmer, blacksmith, teacher, or such, but when asked what their mother did they are likely to respond "Oh, she didn't work." Ask what their mothers did for the family and you will hear something like "Well, she baked bread every day, cooked, cleaned, did laundry, grew a garden, canned enough fruit and vegetables for a family of 12 to last the year, raised turkeys for Eaton's, sold butter to the local grocer, traded eggs for apples with neighbours, sewed all our clothes, and supervised the children taking care of the farm animals." Sounds like work to me!

Many people in past generations became experts in their fields without university or even high school education. If you want to know about their education, find out who taught them to farm or ask if they had special training to do their line of work. For example, my father-in-law, in his early twenties, learned to build carpenter's saw horses from the wife of a contractor. She did not like the big, heavy ones he had built so she showed him the "right way" to do it.

After you have gathered your recorder or video camera, and a list of guiding questions, contact the elder members of your family or their friends and arrange to meet.

⁴ Elma Jans, personal interview with Deborah Block, 16 November 2000.

You really want to focus on the interview so it might work best if you do not go for a meal or take extra people with you. When you get to their home, find a comfortable place at the table or on the sofa and set up your interview space.

Explain why you are recording the interview and that you appreciate their taking the time with you. Turn on your equipment and let it run – try not to fuss with it.

Practice good listening skills during the interview – make eye contact, nod, smile, and otherwise quietly encourage them to keep talking. Let the conversation flow naturally, and try not to interrupt. When I listen to my old tapes, I cringe at how often I stopped a good story by saying something when they were mid-sentence. If you think of something to ask them, just write a word or two on your paper and carry on listening. If you start writing furiously while they are talking, they will think that they have answered your question and will stop talking. Eventually you will learn to put down the pen and just listen! You may want to do more than one interview per person. They will likely ponder your questions and have more memories to share the next time.

A bit more advice – do not go seeking the “ultimate truth” as this does not exist. Each person remembers the past in a very unique way, and memories are filtered through years of experiences and reflection. If you ask four people about the same event, you will get four different perspectives. This is a good thing - by hearing them all you get a richer story. And if Uncle Jacob says an event happened in 1925 and Aunt Susanne says it happened in 1923 it probably does not matter. What is important is what they remember about the event.

Also, men and women structure the past differently. Generally, women will remember events by relating it to family life. “I was baking Johnnie’s 1st birthday cake when we heard about

the war on the radio.” or “Mom had washed curtains the day before she died and they were still draped over chairs waiting to be hung the next day.”



Men, on the other hand, will relate memories to numbers, whether money, miles, or hours and will often connect memories to their work. “That was the year we built old man Friesen’s house. He paid us 10 cents an hour.” or “I remember walking 5 miles to work every day.”

Once you have the tapes, have them copied and share them with siblings, cousins, or whoever is interested. This is where digital recording is great – you can quickly send it via email. Then you can be creative and find ways to put the interviews to good use. Perhaps enlist a web page whiz to set up a family history web. Imagine hearing grandma’s voice describing her wedding while looking at photos of that special day.

I heard some great stories during interviews I did for a history course – a child’s memories of enjoying her first cup of tea with her father; an 11-year-old’s stay in a TB sanatorium in far off Ninette; a brother dying of malaria as a baby and another while serving in WWII; a 5-year-old traveling with his family by ship to Canada leaving behind friends and home; wrapping up in a “peltzdakker”

(fur blanket) for the horse and sleigh trip to Grandma’s house; Eaton’s beauty dolls; and Christmas goodie bags.

The people who remember these things will eventually be gone. Your children and grandchildren do not know a world without cell phones, voicemail, and computers. Your grandparents and great grandparents grew up in a world without electricity, telephones, or “indoor plumbing.” The contrast is incredible!

The wonderful thing about doing interviews is that you do not need to be a great writer, orator, photographer, or scrapbooker. You just need to listen and let them tell you what it was like.

If you have some ideas to share about doing genealogy searches, organizing family records, or preserving family photos, contact the editor who may use your ideas in a future issue.

Who is she?



This photograph was found at MCC. It was in a large oval frame. There is no identification on the picture. Does anyone know who this woman is? Call the MHSBC office if you know.

Letters from the past:

From the files of Lydia Isaak

Peter Isaak returned home from work in the Forstei in 1907. The next year they bought their own home in Alexanderwohl, five kilometers from Rückenau, where Peter ran a lumber mill and farm. Three children, Susie, John and David were born into the family during the next eight years. In 1915, Peter was called up into the Red Cross service (Sanitätterdienst). Lena ran the mill and the farm with the help of a maid and a servant in addition to caring for the household and their five children. Her early education in agriculture must have been helpful during these years! Peter was a Red Cross worker until 1918. In 1925, the family was able to immigrate to Canada.

Only three of Lena's letters have survived, but they give us a glimpse into her life during those years. Excerpts from Peter's letters show his concerns about his family at home, and his life as a Red Cross worker during the war. The love and respect Peter and Lena have for each other is evident.

My dearly loved Peter,

Alexanderwohl, 1915

A hearty greeting of love! We are all healthy, as I wish you as well. Today I pulled the bean plants with Susa. We are harvesting the oats now; tomorrow we begin to clean and Monday we'll start the wheat, as long as it's not raining. I helped as much as I could—it looked like rain—but now we'll get it all in. Hamm stopped on our street yesterday. He was wondering if anyone else was ready to begin threshing, but so far no one else is ready. Gerhard Fast will be threshing later with Pankratz. Epp will thresh our wheat at the end of the week. He's already hired four workers. If they start drafting people again, it will get more difficult. Lisa's husband will probably have to go. Our Abram, too.



If possible, we plan to drive to our parents on Sunday. We'll get some watermelons—I got two from Bergen's yesterday—they were ripe already. I baked apple fritters to eat with them.

Are you very busy now? You will have stomach problems again, if you can't eat regularly! I received your letter on Wednesday—I'd already delivered the chicken and zwieback. Were you not able to eat the chicken again? What about the zwieback? Could you eat those? And was the butter still fresh? You can always brown it and use it for baking. . .

Soon it will be winter again. I hope you won't freeze too much in your barracks. Next time you'll have to take the featherbed with you. If only you could stay at home, but that's

not possible!

Our hired man says to tell you the horse you bought is a good one. . .

Shall we sow some rye? We have enough to last until Christmas, but then we'll have to buy. I was thinking, if I knew where I could get rye, I'd buy some now; it will be more expensive later. If we seed some here, in the patch of garden behind the house, plow it once now and later again, we'd get some rye and we'd have it close by. I guess it should be sown in straight rows—I'd sow it any old way. You'll laugh when you see—I'll make you cheerful again!

I've often thought of this verse: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Many kisses and hugs from your always dearly loving Lena.

(added across the top) What do you eat for lunch each day? Write me everything. I think I'll get another letter today! I'm starting to miss you so much, and then I start to worry. Something's missing in my life. Do you feel the same? When will our lives be different?

Exerpts from Peter's reply (summary)

Has Lena received the letter and parcel he sent with Koop? The parcel contains toy animals for the children: 2 dogs, an elephant, a chicken and a pheasant. Have the toys arrived in one piece? How much wheat have they bought, and have they been careful and not stored it too close to the chimney. He advises her where to buy rye. Is their rye all gone? He has spoken with Jacob Hamm who left yesterday for Moscow by train. A day earlier, 348 people from Nowabranz were sent to Moscow—all volunteers. He hadn't visited with them for a while—hasn't had the time.

Peter concludes, *"Yes, I'd love to have you visit for a few days too, but now it won't be worth it—I hope to come home soon. The past few days I've missed you so much! Greet our children Victor, Johan, Peter, Lena and Susi. Zum Schluß, sei du mein Lieb herzlich gegrüsst und geküsst von Deinen P. Martens. (Finally, my love, I cordially greet and kiss you.)"*



Lena writes:

My dear Peter,

June 13, 1916

A hearty greeting of love! I don't know what you'll say, but I sold the threshing machine to a Russian man for 140 R. He gave me a 40R deposit. Monday he'll get the machine, and then he'll pay the rest. I waited as long as I could, but the servant said because we hadn't got a deposit yet, I was free to sell it. I worry whether I've done right in God's eyes, but Nickel would not give a down payment, and we need ready money so badly. And if he hadn't come, we'd be stuck with the machine. I'll write to him, and then he won't come here unnecessarily. He'll be a bit annoyed, but ...

Our servant finished the plowing yesterday. Today we brought the hay in. Thursday a Dück in Kleefeld was hit by lightning in the field. He was 27 years old, and a believer. He was killed instantly. In Friedensruh, a farm burned to the ground, also hit by lightening. Berg, from the Crimea, just came home on furlough. Klass Unger and Konrad's Peter are home too. They'll be sent up north, as far as I understand. To Perm.

Tomorrow I'll go to Rückenau to see if Papa knows where I can get a mower. I don't like doing this without you—my head hurts! The servant says if we buy the mower now, even if we sell it for 10R less next year, we'll have been able to use it till then—it's difficult to borrow one now. ...

Peter's letter of Aug 27, 1917 (summary)

The influenza epidemic has hit. Peter is feeling feverish, but hopes he won't be sick long.

He goes on to say: *"Albrecht and I worked until 11:30 making a list of the provision we'll need in the coming half year. We have to send the order to Petersburg. They're forecasting that the war will last another 6 months. Riga has fallen and the front is coming closer—it's looks as if nothing can be done... Today four regiments were sent to the front. No Mennonites among them this time. .."*

Children, you'll be sleeping as I write this—it's already 11:30...Make sure you dress warmly and children, wear your shoes and stockings when it's so cold.

Now hearty greetings from your father and husband, P. Martens"

Thank you to Lydia Isaak for making these letters and pictures available!

Even with the best of intentions, errors have a way of creeping into newsletters. Please note the following correction to the winter issue, page 15, photo of CO workers. Names should read (left to right, back row) Kornelius Thiessen, Peter P. Martens, Abram Wiens, Heinrich Epp. Front row (l-r) Johan Barkman, Johan Regehr, Peter Sukkau, Abram Wiebe.

Scottish "Wanna-Be"

Recently, my husband and I visited our daughter Heather who is an exchange student at the University of Edinburgh. Immediately, the impact of Scotland hit us: the kilts, the tartans, the clans. Our tour guide wore a green kilt from the clan of the Macleod's, and every other shop on the Royal Mile between the castle and Holyrood Palace displayed tartans in the window: scarves, car blankets, tea towels, ties, and kilts of every size.

I enjoyed purchasing kilts for my grandchildren (three of them have some Scottish ancestry) and I remembered old "uncles" who had served in the German army, diving under the table at wedding receptions at the sight of the kilts, as the skirl of the bagpipes resounded.

I bought tartan scarves for my daughters, checked tea towels for my friends, but I was envious. I did not have a tartan to call my own.

Imagine if all the Mennonite clans had their own tartans, and we would wear our kilts to weddings, funerals, our many banquets, graduations and the MCC festival. We would no longer need to ask our favorite aunts if we were related to so-and-so, for we could identify our kindred by their clothes. Imagine seeing all of the Reimers in golden and red plaid; the Friesens in blue and burgundy; the Rempels in green and black. Family gatherings would take on new meaning as tablecloths and T-shirts displayed the various chequered patterns.

When I shared this with my pastor's wife, she suggested we Menno's could adopt family quilt patterns for our motifs. Perhaps "Log Cabin" for the Hooges; the "Four Star" for the Pauls clan; "Dresden Plate" for the Bartels. Surely, there are enough to go around, although given our triumphal view of our history, perhaps no one would choose "Drunkard's Path" or "Crazy Ann".

We could have these quilt patterns not only on our blankets, but have them made into ties, sewn onto our pockets; embellishing our homes in the form of curtains or pillow tops, and hand these items down through the generations. The concept of quilt patterns even fits quite nicely into our theology of peace making. I suggest we sort this out soon and assign each clan their quilt; before our youth forget their past and while it all still has meaning. Quilters of the Menno world, unite!

by Helen Rose Pauls