



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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*Leise rieselt der Schnee,
still und starr ruht der See
Weihnachtlich glänzet der Wald—
Freue Dich, Christkind kommt bald!*

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Editorial: A personal thanks to American Mennonites



Susan and Mary Geigley

In 1948, Mary B. Geigley, a single woman in her mid-forties who lived with her mother and sister Susan in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, sent a baby layette through MCC. That package arrived in Austria, where my mom was overjoyed to receive 7 diapers! Mom responded with a thank-you letter and a package of crocheted doilies--that started a correspondence that lasted until Miss Geigley's death in 1966. "Auntie Mary" remembered us at Christmas and at each birthday with toys, clothes and home-baked cookies when we were young, books when we were older. Letters always began with "Greetings of Love in the Master's Name." We never met Auntie Mary; she was only 62 when she died, and the flowers Mom sent to cheer her arrived for her funeral.

Mary Geigley was one of countless people in North America who gave so generously to those of us who were refugees. In 2007, our Society will join MCC in hosting a traveling quilt exhibit which "features 18 quilts and comforters made by North American women and sent to the Netherlands by MCC following WWII. For decades the quilts were in the care of a Dutch Mennonite woman whose home had served as a refuge for Jews, hungry children and Mennonite refugees from Ukraine. Today the quilts and their stories testify both to the horrors of war and to the power of compassion." (<http://ontario-mennonite-relief-sale.org/poc.html>) May we be faithful and tell future generations of the love shown to us. LBP

"From America With Love"—MHSBC's annual fundraising banquet

report by Helen Rose Pauls and Louise Bergen Price

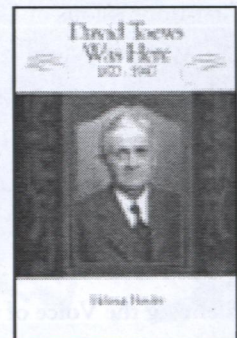
Russian Mennonites and their Swiss counterparts developed along separate but parallel lines, yet felt a kinship through common beliefs, stated Dr. John Landis Ruth at the MHSBC's fundraising banquet. This kinship was so strong, that when Swiss/American Mennonites heard of the difficulties facing their 'brothers and sisters' they immediately set about seeing what they could do, wanting to do their 'fair share' to help, first to aid early Russian Mennonites to emigrate in the 1870's, then to send food to the starving in Russia in 1921. This latter event was the beginning of MCC. Dr. Ruth was an engaging storyteller, often getting carried away as he described one event after another. (Some of the stories will be featured in the winter edition of *Roots and Branches*). Displays by Alice Umble Klassen and Sara Snyder Friesen, and a picture gallery by Jean Neufeld added further information on the subject. Dr. Evan Kreider described Swiss Mennonite singing and led in several songs. Dr. John B. Toews presented a framed copy of a *Denkschrift* written by BB Janz and others in 1922, thanking American Mennonites for their help. In closing, Evan Krieder led us in '606': *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*. Praise God for kinship, community, and the American Mennonite aid which kept many of us, our parents and grandparents alive.

Future Event: David Toews—Undaunted Hero, Mennonite Moses

Speaker: Helmut Harder, author of *David Toews was here: 1870-1947*.

Date: February 18. Time: 7 pm Place: Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Clearbrook Rd.

David Toews was a tireless and courageous fighter for justice. As one of the founders of Rosthern Junior College, he took on several staggering challenges during his years of active ministry. But none was bigger than accepting the responsibility to have CPR transport desperate Russian Mennonites in the early 1920s. Toews was willing to take large financial risks and brave withering criticism in the larger church community; however, his bedrock conviction that he was taking the right course of action sustained him. His heroic accomplishments deserve to be celebrated. Without the intervention of David Toews, large numbers of Mennonite immigrants would never have made it to this country.



Dr. Helmut Harder was a professor of theology at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College for many years, and is now Professor Emeritus from CMBC. In the 1990's he was secretary of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. He has written a number of books, including *David Toews was here: 1870-1947*. *from a report by David Giesbrecht*

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Mennonite Profiles: Sara, a Swiss Mennonite Among Us

by Helen Rose Pauls

Sara Friesen of Chilliwack is firmly entrenched in a Mennonite Brethren congregation, but she originated in a partially Amish Mennonite community in Iowa. Her mother's family had earlier switched to the more liberal 'Old Mennonites.'

Sara Jane was born to Paul and Kathryn Snyder in 1942 in Kalona, a town with beautiful farms, 18 miles south of Iowa City, where her father raised kosher chickens for Chicago markets, and tended the local mail route. Her mother, who taught eight grades in a one-room school, was from a family of 16 children of the Miller and Swartzendruber clans. Sara's great grandfather, a farmer, Benedict Miller, was also a tailor who once fashioned a suit for the Governor of Iowa.

The Snyder family can trace its roots to Berne, Switzerland [1534] but dispersed to villages in Holland and Germany in the 1600's. The first Snyders arrived in Philadelphia in 1736 with 388 others on the ship "Harle" and moved on to Lancaster County. Some Snyders became United Empire Loyalists and left for Ontario on the Conestoga Trail in 1806-7, settling in Berlin (later renamed Kitchener during WWI). But Sara's families of origin stayed in the USA and eventually settled in Iowa.

At first, they wanted to keep to the old ways. School went to eighth grade, as education was not a priority. Phones were not allowed as they were a link to the "world", and when Sara's grandfather, Sam B. Miller, had one installed to communicate with the doctors at the hospital where he had a very sick daughter, the family had to leave the Amish church. Sara's uncle, who combed his hair into a pompadour, was also asked to leave. They joined the Old Mennonites (which have since merged with the General Conference Mennonites to form the Mennonite Church.) Some

Amish joined the Congregationalists or the Methodists, or left the faith altogether.

During WW I, Sara's father, Paul Snyder, who had a strong conscience against war and killing, refused all military training and duties when he was drafted into the army. He was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, and suffered at army camp because he refused even the uniform. He spent forty days of mistreatment in the jailhouse. There was no conscientious objector status in the USA. Later he was stationed in the Cascades and fought forest fires.

Sara was the fourth child, eleven years younger than her nearest sibling, and was doted on as a baby sister. She loved to sing. When Sara was two-and-a-half, her mother was invited to a class on "Mennonites" with Professor Marcus Bach of the School of Religion in Iowa City. "Dr. Bach asked me to sing," says Sara, "and I belted out 'Climb, Climb Up Sunshine Mountain' and 'Beulah Land.' I have been singing ever since, in choirs, trios, quartets or just at home. In those days we sang a cappella, as instruments were frowned on. I still especially enjoy a cappella choral music."

Sara's middle years were enriched by a family who loved to travel and she remembers trips to the west coast to see where her father had been stationed, and a Billy Graham Crusade in Oregon in 1950. They also traveled to Puerto Rico, where her brother was fulfilling his alternative service. She attended a Mennonite high school where the girls wore little net prayer coverings during chapel, but only the most conservative and devout wore them in public. She remembers warm and stimulating teachers who were good role models.

Sara was baptized by pouring at the age of ten with 29 others when the



Sara Jane Snyder

bishop came to perform these rites. Communion was held twice a year and was taken very seriously. "We washed each others feet but could hardly keep from giggling," Sara remembers. "At church we were constantly admonished and monitored about non-essentials like the length of our hair. They used verses from Romans 12:2 or 1 Corinthians 11:5-16 about not being conformed to this world, and about hair coverings and submission. Movies, pool halls, make-up, jewelry, were forbidden, and we were not allowed to use musical instruments.

I remember my mother leading the congregational singing using a pitch pipe to start things off. The hymns in four-part harmony without accompaniment were amazing."

Sara attended Hesston College in Kansas for three years and finished at Goshen College in 1963. Here she met George Friesen from Greendale, B.C. After their marriage in 1965, they moved to Yarrow, where George taught at Sharon High from 1964-1969, when it closed its doors. They lived in a little white house on Yarrow Central Road and Sara worked in the office of Diamond Construction, and taught kindergarten class during VBS at Yarrow MB Church.

"People were very friendly and there was lots of visiting among the Sharon High teachers," remembers Sara. Church was in both English and German, and Sara could not understand much of the German. "Also, faspa was a new concept, but I enjoyed this tradition very much and learned to make platz instead of shoo fly pie."

Although Sara felt accepted by the other young couples at Yarrow MB Church, she was not eligible to take communion in Yarrow or join the church as she had not been baptised by

immersion. She was asked to give her testimony at communion in front of the whole church, then sat in a little room off to the side while the church members discussed her faith statement and voted on her membership. Someone was thoughtful enough to sit with her during this time, and cheered her on when she passed. "That was just the way things were done in those days and I didn't resent it," says Sara.

After ten months in Kennedy Heights, Sara and George returned to Chilliwack and raised their three

children there. Jennifer teaches at the local high school. Chris is assistant pastor at Lendrum MB Church in Edmonton. Matthew lives and works in Sweden. They were early members of the Sardis Community Church (MB) which began in 1975. Sara sings in the local "Evensong Chamber Singers", and sometimes performs in a mixed quartet in church. George and Sara have seven grandchildren, and enjoy books and gardening in their retirement. She still sometimes makes Shoo-Fly Pie.

Starting Over in Canada

Margie Ewert as interviewed by Henry Neufeld

My Mom, her sister Justina, and we three children - Haedy (10), John (6), and I (8) - arrived in Halifax from Germany in June 1948. We took the train from Halifax to Tofield, Alberta where our uncle, Peter Dyck, picked us up in his Model T and took us to their farm home. Aunt Justina left Tofield for Vancouver after a few weeks since there wasn't work for her on the farm.

We were the first refugee family to arrive in the Tofield community and we were well received by the members of the Tofield Mennonite church who were kind and generous to us, and had a shower for us on our arrival.

Uncle Peter and Aunt Sara Dyck lived on a small farm. Mom had located these relatives when we were still in Frammersburg, Germany through an advertisement a German lady helped her place in the *Hausfrau* magazine. A Mrs. Rempel in Tofield noticed the advertisement and took it to Uncle Peter. We spent two months there, the four of us sharing a bedroom. They were very kind to us.

Mom wanted to move to the town of Tofield to find work and we found a small unused granary where we lived. It was not insulated. Winter was drafty and very cold. The howling winds were terrible. We could see daylight through the shiplap-constructed wallboards. It was so cold the buckets of water standing beside the oven froze and Mom feared we would all freeze to death. Our wood stove was very close to the outside wall of the house and in very cold weather we'd hold wet clothes against the outer walls so the building wouldn't catch fire. Mom says it's by God's grace that we survived.

Each morning Mom would go to work at the hospital and as soon as she'd left, we'd go to school. It was far too early and the school wasn't even open, but we were scared to stay in the granary. The caretaker was kind and always let us in so we could stay warm. Mom knew we couldn't survive in the granary for another winter and somehow she saved enough money to buy a two-room house for \$1,000.00. This was much better than the granary.

Mom worked at the Tofield hospital, doing all the laundry with a wringer washer. On Saturdays we three kids would help her fold diapers at the hospital.

In 1951, we moved to Vancouver where we stayed with Mom's sister. Uncle Peter thought we would all be spiritually lost in the big city.

Mom did house cleaning work and also worked at Nelson's Laundry. Later she bought her own house where she still lives. I don't know how she got enough money to buy a place. We never had much and we didn't need much. To have a can of Prem was a real treat. Mom sewed all our clothes and we had our garden. Holidays were unheard of. My Mom also paid off the Reiseschuld (travel debt) to my uncle who had sponsored us.

In summer we picked strawberries at Joe Klassen's near Langley, then raspberries at the Goossens in Yarrow, hops in Chilliwack and then blueberries in Richmond. Since blueberry picking went into September we

always started school a few weeks late. From our first years' picking we bought a refrigerator, and a table and chairs. We still have that table at our cottage.

I quit school after grade 10 at the age of 16 and started working at the Bank of Montreal in Vancouver. It was rare for a person with only grade 10 to get such a job. I worked there full-time for 9 years, then part-time.

Not having a father was something I didn't really think about. I probably didn't know what I was missing till my kids had a father, then I realized how important a Dad is - the presence, the things Dads do with the kids. When I saw Vic with our kids I realized how much I had missed. My father was taken away by Russian

authorities in 1941. The officials came to our village in trucks and took every male over 15 years. They feared we German-speaking villagers would have sympathy for the advancing German troops.

All my friends at First United Mennonite in Vancouver were also fatherless and only two were not immigrants. We were fortunate that we had a good youth group.

In 1956 we learned that my father had remarried in Russia. This was very difficult for Mom. She said she'd rather have buried him than learn that he'd remarried. Dad said he had looked for us in Germany and blamed Mom for taking us out of Europe. She felt sad, then sorry for him. Mom wrote Dad and said she couldn't blame

him for remarrying.

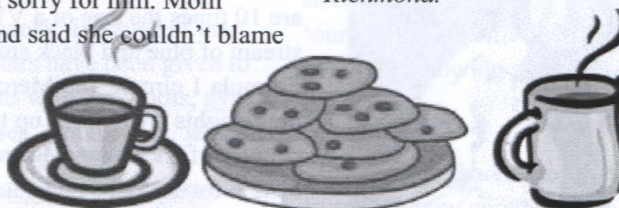
We tried to get Dad to come to Canada but it never worked out. We sent packages to him, things he could sell on the black market. Dad said if it wasn't for this help they would not have survived. He died in Russia in October 2003. He said we'd see each other again in our next life. We're in regular contact with my father's son from his second marriage, who lives in Kazakhstan.

We are grateful that God brought us to Canada. We feel at home here and enjoy many blessings. Through God's grace we now are able to help others.

Margie and Vic Ewert live in Richmond.

Bubbat and Peppernuts:

By Helen Rose Pauls



What would Christmas be without the smell of something wonderful baking in the oven: peppermint cookies, bubbat, and peppernuts? Mystery filled the house in December as mother baked mountains of cookies, only to store them away in crocks from eager little (and not so little) hands so that they could mellow for Christmas. The following recipes are taken from the "Mennonite Heritage Village Cookbook."

Peppermint cookies:

Cream together 1 cup lard, 2 cups sugar, 2 eggs. Add 1 cup milk, 5 tsp. baking powder, 1 tsp. baking soda, dash of salt, 2 ½-3 cups flour, 15 drops peppermint oil.

Roll ¼ inch thick and cut with a round cookie cutter. Bake 10 minutes at 375. When cool, use plain white butter icing.

Peppernuts:

Cream a cup of butter and 2 cups sugar. Add one egg and a cup of molasses. Mix in ½ tsp. oil of anise, 2 tsp. baking powder, ½ tsp. each of cinnamon, ginger, allspice, cloves, salt. Add 2 cups thick cream and 3 cups flour (more if needed to make a stiff dough.) Some bakers rolled these out paper thin and used a thimble to cut rounds. Others rolled them into little balls and pressed them flat. Bake at 350 for 7 minutes, and store in a sealed container for a few weeks to bring out the flavor.

Bubbat:

Oma Pauls at 96, still brings bubbat to Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners to the delight of the grandchildren. Now she bakes it in pans, but she used to pour it into the turkey where the dough absorbed the drippings and the fat....a Mennonite version of Yorkshire pudding. Mix together 4 cups flour, 4 tsp. sugar, 1 tsp. salt, 4 tsp. baking powder, 4 tbsp. shortening, 2 cups raisins, 2 beaten eggs, 3 cups cream. Bake at 350 for 1 ½ hours.

First Impressions of Ukraine

from letters by Ben and Linda Stobbe, who have recently returned from a ten-week volunteer assignment in Ukraine.

It's interesting to see how your priorities change and you value the small things in life. After carrying up to 30 nice large brown eggs from the market to the apartment in a plastic bag, Linda is extremely grateful that the neighbour gave her a metric cardboard egg carton which holds 10 eggs. We walk the ½ km. trip to the market almost daily, to pick up bread, vegetables, fruits, etc. The bread here is fantastic when it is fresh.



Pensioner selling sunflower seeds

LPrice photo

This week we took a trip to Zaporozhye, a city of approximately 500,000 and the site of Chortitza, the first Mennonite settlement here. Kate, our translator and the director of the

Centre, does not like to drive in cities, so Ben took the wheel of the Lada and drove the nearly 2-hour trip. On arriving in Zaporozhye, we picked up more than a trunk-load of medical supplies. The container was located on the yard of the most beautiful Baptist church we have ever seen! The relatively new 600-seat church reflects its roots, with silver domes, three wonderful chandeliers, and a beautifully decorated and painted interior. We fear that some new churches here may be tempted to adopt our North American design features and not portray their own character and culture. This was a refreshing change

Like most of the larger Ukrainian cities, Zaporozhye reflects the new, youthful Ukraine, with fine restaurants and good shopping, but it is still dominated by one-dimensional Soviet apartments which have fewer architectural features than an Abbotsford chicken barn! In this city of contrasts, some women dress as though they are stepping into a Vogue photo shoot, while just outside the city the babushkas tend little garden plots in front of blue and white cottages. The highway between Molochansk and Zaporozhye is relatively good although dotted with the occasional tractor, vintage motorcycle with side car, buses (which are 10 times the size of a VW van, have half the power, and are trailed by a jet stream of blue and black smoke), Ladas whose drivers fantasize that they are on a Formula 1 circuit, and Mercedes who all have the same wiring problem - their brake lights are hooked up to the horn and the flashing head lights. This diverse country of Ukrainians, Russians, Tartars, Germans, etc. is bound by a common disdain for seatbelts and a love for both sides of the road.

On Thursday we went to Tokmak, where approximately 2,000 gathered for an evening of Ukrainian songs, dancing, and fireworks to celebrate Ukraine's 14th year of independence. Even in this predominately Russian-speaking area there appears to be an emerging sense of pride of their Ukrainian past. However, the little kids stole the show. They'd found an abandoned empty wading pool less than a metre deep, where they ran around and played tag, completely oblivious to the sharp edges of rocks, metal grating, and the other activities going on. There was also a refreshing attitude of parents letting kids be kids, giving them space and freedom to enjoy themselves. While there was obvious drinking going on, everyone seemed very well mannered and it was a good community party. The living conditions of the pensioners, the warehousing of the mentally ill, and the overcrowding of the orphanages all illustrate the formidable challenges this country faces. But the laughter of children playing tag in that concrete hole shows promise for the future.

Molochansk (Halbstadt) is poor by our standards but not impoverished. Children appear well cared for and happy. Young people avoid eye contact with us but you can tell they are curious. Older men seem indifferent, women a bit more friendly. The warmth of the staff in the Mennonite Centre, on the other hand, is limited only by language.

As mentioned, the pensioners in this society are hardest hit. Our receptionist, Olga, worked as an English language teacher for many years and served in the defense of the motherland as a loyal communist, yet she is expected to get by with 180 Grievnas a month. To do that she eats potatoes and macaroni—never meat—and supplements her diet with garden produce. Last week, we spent over 150 Grievnas on food for ourselves: chicken, sausage, eggs, bread, yogurt and fruit. But Olga with her excellent English and very classy demeanor never complains; she thanks God for her part-time job at the Centre where, interestingly, she taught English to Molochansk children for many years.

The fields here look prosperous. Although the weather has been very dry, the sunflower fields look beautiful, the cattle corn is sparse but OK and the grain appears to have been harvested. Everywhere people are being forced into the new economy with issues not all that different than what we hear from Victoria. Any salary increase for doctors means there will be fewer doctors. Small village hospitals are being turned into clinics. A factory in Tokmak which employed 10,000 now employs only 1,000. The massive silk machine factory built at the turn of the last century by Franz and Schroeder is now a small furniture wood shop owned by a larger plant in Dnipropetrovsk. Young people are leaving the villages and going to the big cities.

The Mennonite Centre stands out like a jewel in Molochansk. Because of the donations of people in North America, thousands of dollars have been given to provide orphanages, hospitals, schools, and kindergartens with new roofs, gym floors, paint for inside and out, books, bedding, mattresses, ambulances, lab and



diagnostic equipment. Students have received scholarships to study journalism, medicine, psychology, music, and education. Some attend Bible Colleges, others go to the State universities. Families in need have been given emergency support. Twice a week, seniors come to the Centre for free lunch and lots of laughs. Through years of conditioning, the people here have developed a very negative attitude to Germans, but the actions of this Centre have gone a long way to bridging the divide. There is a greater appreciation for the past contribution of our ancestors; in fact, local museums are highlighting this period and asking for pictures. Here and there you see evidences of Mennonite factories, flour mills, schools, houses and churches. The streets, especially Rosa Luxembourg, 'our' street, are still lined with trees, possibly following an earlier Mennonite example.

This week we had a group of *Aussiedler* from Germany come to visit. Many of them remember being forced out of these homes by Stalin just before WWII. The leader of the group, Jakob Stobbe, may well be a distant cousin of Ben's! Tomorrow we are off to the Mennonite Church at Kutuzovka (Petershagen) where we'll say a few words of greeting.

If you want more information on the Centre, you can find it at <http://www.mennonitecentre.com/P-1.html>

Donations are welcome!

"Remember us as we remember you: Letters from the Gulag," a selection from Ruth Derksen-Siemens' work-in-progress *Writing through the Flowers from Stalin's Gulag (1930-38)* is featured in the spring 2005 issue of *Geist Magazine*. The core of the book will be the 'Bargen collection,' letters sent from the Gulag to the home of Franz and Liese (Regehr) Bargen in Carlyle, Saskatchewan. MHSBC has been involved in the Bargen project. *Geist* is available at our Centre and at local bookstores. Website: www.geist.com

Stories from the past: Held Up By Robbers!

excerpt from Cornelius Friesen's *Escape to Freedom, Episodes from 1921-1927*. Abridged and edited by Lora Sawatsky, submitted by Hugo Friesen.

I must tell you of another episode that I experienced with my father. In fall, it was our custom to travel by horse and wagon in order to take sunflower seeds to an oil press about 25 km. away. Our seed resulted in five gallons of oil, which was our family's oil supply until the next harvest. The evening of the second day of our journey, we, as well as the horses, were tired so Father decided we would carry on slowly till we would arrive safely at home. About halfway home, Father noticed I was getting tired and sleepy and so he suggested that I lie down in the back of the wagon on the empty sacks. It was a clear, moonlit evening.

Five kilometers from home, we had to pass through a village of well-to-do Russian farmers, a number of whom were well known to my father. When we approached the first house, a sentry stepped out of the darkness and ordered us to stop. I awoke and sat up to see what was going on. The sentry was only one and a half strides away, aiming his revolver at us and swearing loudly. He checked us out while we stood with our backs against the wagon, hands held high. He inspected the wagon, too, and with much swearing remarked that these awful Germans traveled unarmed at night. The robber then took my last coat and father's last pair of shoes. He hit Father with his fist when he refused to take off his shoes. Then he ordered us to follow him to the centre of the village where his captain sat on a horse with his revolver ready, shouting out his orders and punctuating them with shots into the air to underscore his authority and to let the local people know that he was serious. The bandits intended to rob a rich widow. They had taken her harvest wagon and harnessed her three horses to it and were now taking the large Russian chests which contained her best clothing, blankets, sheets, towels and other valuables. (My grandmother had such a chest too, which every young bride was expected to bring to her new home.) The robbers also took 5 or 6 sacks of flour that were intended for the family's use through the winter.

I knew the man who held us captive and addressed him by name. "Ted, be decent and let us go. After all we are from the nearby German village and I am employed as the secretary of the village council and we know each other."

Ted swore vehemently when I spoke to him and then I realized what an awful mistake I had made in acknowledging that I knew him. After all, I would now be able to report the whole gang to the higher Soviet authorities. The robbers had no alternative but to do away with us, and so their captain ordered us to fall in behind their wagon. Father and I both realized what this meant. I was not yet converted and not ready to die. The robbers were soon ready to leave the village with their booty and we were forced to follow with our horses and wagon to our destiny.

The villagers from the other end of the village began to shoot over the heads of the robbers. The captain ordered three horsemen to stage a counter-attack and he himself shot into the air every so often. As soon as the wagon ahead of us started moving off at a trot, the three horsemen turned and rode back to hold off the villagers and we were left alone for a few minutes without any guards. Our horses were very tired, but father had the presence of mind to whip them. As they sprang forward, he pulled them sharply to one side entering a nearby yard, and guided them behind the house. We both jumped off and fled for our lives. I was as quick as he to hide in a low dark chicken coop. There we lay next to each other trembling, trying to hear whether someone would come looking for us. We heard the robber wagon drive on and soon the three riders galloped past, not knowing that we had fled. When all was quiet, we slowly came out of our hiding place and were soon recognized by the men from the house who'd seen all that had happened. They helped unhitch the horses and put them into the barn. Since it was very early in the morning, they took us into their house.

To God be the honour, thanks, praise and glory for saving us from possible death at the hands of murderous robbers.



Cornelius Friesen



The Way we Were: Blumenort, the Village where I was born

by Hilda Born

The friendly village of Blumenort is located in Southern Saskatchewan. Lying just east of the number four highway, it is right in the centre of a fertile farm area.

Twenty-one brown frame houses occupied by twenty-one families stand there on either side of the road running east and west. Each home is built on a yard lot of almost equal size, and is joined to the next by a common fence. Around this group of homes is the community pasture and beyond stretch acres and acres of golden grain.

As you come along the highway and approach Blumenort at dawn you will hear the tinkle of a bell and the trampling of cattle hooves. The village herdsboy is just rounding up cattle and will take them to the community pasture. As soon as the bell is heard by each villager, he opens the gate and lets his cattle join in the general concourse of beasts. Unique architecture is employed in the construction of the Mennonite homes. The house, pump-shed, barn, garage, and granary are all harbored under one roof. At one end of the structure are the rooms used by the family. A hall usually used also as pump house separates this from the barn. On one side are several stalls for the cattle and beside this is a shed called the "ovenside" used for storing chop and bags of sunflower seeds. Along the other end of the building is the granary and above this is the feed loft.

The church, the centre of community life, is situated in the middle of the village, opposite the schoolhouse. All branches of Mennonite churches are welcome to worship here. When the harvesting is finished, ladies bake a cake, some buns, and roast a fat fowl for the Thanksgiving Festival. Very few people are absent at this occasion because it gives them an opportunity for meeting not only people from our village but also from other nearby villages that have been cordially invited. Hopefully every one forgets his need with the result that the collection plate will groan under its weight. The wealth of the harvest is really exhibited in the great feast that is provided. Families bring a variety of tasty pickles cooked from the choicest vegetables. And after having a delicious brown drumstick each visitor receives a slice of fluffy cake topped with frothy icing. An ample supply of provisions is always on hand. As soon as one lady notices that there are only a few golden-brown buns left, she calls Johnnie to her side. She whispers something to him and he dashes off toward home. In the wink of an eye he is back with two more pails full of buns that she had put away in the pantry to be ready just in case they should be needed. When all the appetites have been satisfied the villagers divide the remaining delicacies and happily return home.

As soon as the snowflakes appear on the ground we begin to wonder whether it isn't time for the pig butchering bees. One morning on our way to school we notice the men are gathered in little groups near Funk's, Friesen's, and Schmidt's gates discussing the weight of the hogs. Now we are sure that there will soon be fresh spare-ribs. Typical Mennonite co-operation is shown at this time. Cheerfully everyone extends his services for his fellowman and the work is then well done. The hams are soon hung in the shed and lard pails are stored in the attic. Did you ever taste anything more delicious than the original Blumenort sausages?

Because there are quite a few young people living so close together they can conveniently gather for sports all year round. A glassy rink is constructed on Mr. Koop's yard. Keeping this rink in perfect condition provides a pastime for husky young fellows who have completed school. The dense shelterbelt around the school yard attracts huge drifts of snow. These drifts are sculpted into an excellent slide that gives pleasure to youngsters from December to March. In springtime the young people gather on the school yard to have softball games and wiener roasts on warm June nights.

Whenever Death comes to visit the sunny vale, neighbours try to share the grief. The yard of the deceased is cleared of refuse and raked in preparation for the funeral. Two nights before the funeral almost every woman in the village sends her little Peter to the afflicted home with a pound of butter and a pail of milk for mixing bun batter. The following morning a man drives from home to home delivering a large lump of dough which will be baked into tiny buns for the meal at tomorrow's funeral. Chairs and tables are also collected from homes to provide seating for guests at the funeral luncheon. A minister clad in a long black jacket, black shirt, and high black boots speaks at this solemn occasion. He slowly reads a sermon. A few pauses are made in which the audience can reflect on its own past and sympathize with the mourners. When the body has been buried in the graveyard, which is located in the centre of the common pasture, the funeral guests return to share in a meal.

During the long cold winter months social life continues. The short paths leading from house to house are often traced and retraced by jovial neighbours. The men, usually dressed in overalls, are invited into the living room to discuss the prices of grain and the varieties of gopher poison. Women gather around the kitchen table to practice new embroidery stitches.

A friendly relationship exists between neighbours in our little village. When unexpected company arrives at Mrs. Enns' place she doesn't hesitate in going over to ask Annie Dyck to come and help her. Mrs. Gunther has a knack of baking peppernuts but she can't turn out edible Easter bread. Her neighbour is an expert along this line, so they exchange delicacies. This exchange of goods is also of economic value. Lena and Tena carry the "Rundschau" and "Courier" across the street and exchange them so that their parents benefit from two papers and only pay for one.

The village of my childhood was surrounded by open stretches of prairie that go as far as the eye can see. However, inside the small community the people are linked by a persistent spirit of caring for each other. In times of illness, fire or death, willing hands and sympathetic hearts reached out to help. Will people treat you as well anywhere else? Oh how I wish I could stay in Blumenort!

* This essay first appeared in the R.J.C. Link. I was in grade eleven at Rosthern, Sask. The essay and photos are from *Third Daughter; Living in a Global Village*. Available from the author at 604-853-5196 or hjborn@rapidnet.net



The home of John F & Maria Klassen, Blumenort, Sask.,
childhood home of the author

Tribute to Hugo and Jean Friesen



After some 12 years as volunteer archivist of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC, Hugo Friesen has asked to be released from his responsibilities. In many ways, Hugo has been the face of the Society. He consistently set the tone for public services to the approximately 200 people who visit our Center on a monthly basis. Under Hugo's leadership, a large collection of archival documents, books, periodicals, microfilm documents and family histories has been assembled and carefully organized. In addition, Hugo has given oversight to supervising some 20 volunteers who largely do the work of organizing and preserving the materials entrusted to us.

Over the years, Hugo and Jean Friesen have taken on challenging MCC assignments that included stints of service in war-torn Europe, Hong Kong and Akron, PA.. Hugo and Jean have both left their mark as teachers in BC schools. In 1969 Hugo was invited to teach at the Mennonite Education Institute in Abbotsford. After ten years as principal of the school, he became a classroom teacher, serving in this capacity for another decade.

The Board of the Mennonite Historical Society is deeply grateful to Hugo and Jean Friesen for their modeling of Christ-like service in our community, and particularly for Hugo's devoted service to the Mennonite Historical Society of BC.

With Hugo's pending resignation, the Board invites enquiries about this position. The responsibilities and time commitment are flexible and open to negotiation. Interested persons are asked to contact the Board chair, John Konrad at (604) 922-9324 or email jikonrad@telus.net. This is a volunteer position.

Rhubarb, a magazine of Canadian Mennonite art and writing, has published a special issue of works from BC writers and artists entitled: **Words From the West Coast**. Lower Mainland contributors include Elsie K. Neufeld, Walter Neufeld, Connie Braun, Barbara Nickel, Robert Martens, Patrick Friesen, Andreas Schroeder, Roxanne Willems-Snopek, Larry Nightingale, Lora Sawatzky, and Hilda Goertzen. Copies are \$7 and are available at the archive office, or at Chapters.

Plautdietsch

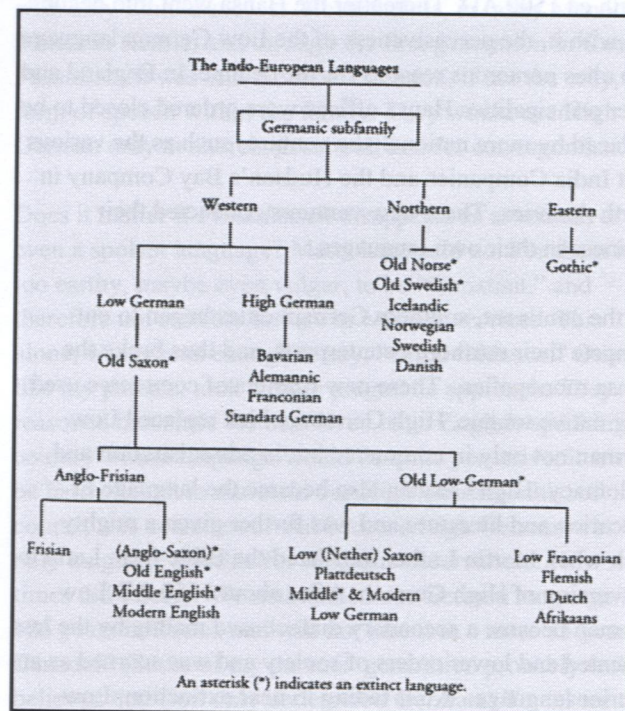
By Edward Hildebrand

This essay is in part a book review of "The Story of Low German & *Plautdietsch*" by Reuben Epp, and in part a personal commentary on our Mennonite Low German language. For the sake of clarity the terms "Low German" and "*Plattdeutsch*" will refer to that broad family of Germanic dialects historically resident in northern Europe around the North and Baltic Seas. "*Plautdietsch*" will refer to only our Mennonite Low German.

Reuben Epp begins his book by citing the scholar Christopher Moss who wrote, "English is a dialect of Low German." Our first reaction is that this must be a joke – but is it really? As Epp points out, if we think beyond our familiar *Plautdietsch* and delve into the history of Low German, there is a fair amount of truth in this statement. It is often assumed that Low German (*Plattdeutsch*) is a dialect of High German and is therefore a subsidiary language. That is possibly one reason *Platt* is translated as "Low" whereas its primary meaning is "Flat." This denigration of *Plattdeutsch* is not justified. It is an ancient language whose importance in history as a commercial and administrative tongue predates High German by several centuries. The term "*Plattdeutsch*" may have been derived from the fact that it was used by Germanic people in the generally flat and low lying lands surrounding the North and Baltic Seas, or it may also have come from an earlier meaning of the word "*Platt*" that read "clear, popular, understandable."

Epp traces the flow of the Germanic family of languages from their North European base eastward to the Baltic regions and even parts of Scandinavia, westward to the Netherlands, and northward to England. Much of this migration of language followed the movement of people, especially the Saxons as they moved westward across northern Europe, and later followed the Teutonic Knights in their eastward campaigns. The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes invaded England ca 500 AD. They came to stay and securely planted their Old Low German or Old Saxon language in their new realm. Over time this was modified by gleanings from the residual Celtic tongue to become Old English, and later by the language of the Normans after 1066AD, to become Middle English, the language of Chaucer. It was the mandatory study of Chaucer at school that kindled Reuben Epp's interest in Low German.

By thinking in his native *Plautdietsch*, Epp found he could translate Chaucer into modern English more easily than most of his Anglo classmates. He recognized the kinship of Middle English to his native tongue and wanted to learn more. Many of us have had a similar experience with Dutch. Even though we can hardly understand a word of the spoken Dutch language, we can read many written texts. This writer also found this to be the case with some of the Norse languages. On a business trip to Sweden, my hosts always politely spoke English to me, but Swedish to each other. Even though they spoke on a topic of common interest, I could not understand a word. However, when I saw a written Swedish text, and thought in *Plautdietsch*, I could grasp the meanings of many words and the gist of the message. These examples demonstrate the kinship of these languages as illustrated in more detail below.

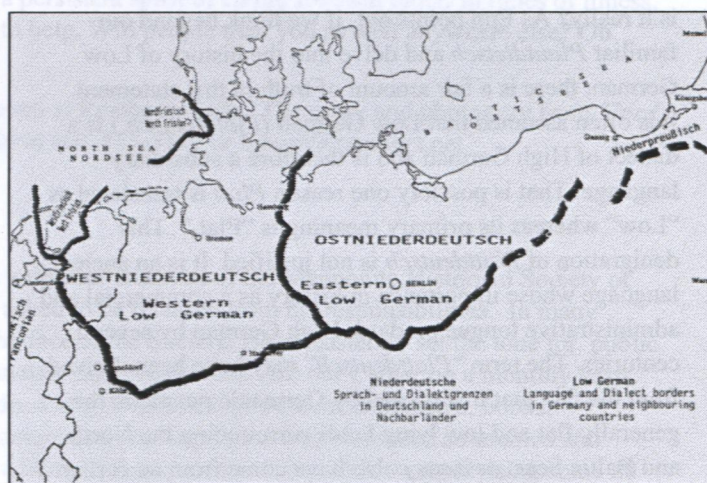


Old Saxon and Old English eventually became extinct and were replaced by Middle English, the language of Chaucer. Middle English followed its own development course into Modern English and is not a subject of this essay. Old Low German became Middle Low German at about the same time (ca 1000 AD) and entered into a period of substantial development. It would eventually become the parent language of our own *Plautdietsch*.

The engine of growth that propelled Middle Low German (henceforth called Low German) from a simple peasant tongue to a sophisticated language of commerce and administration was the Hansa, or Hanseatic League. The Hansa consisted of a series of trade agreements between cities located on the shores of the Baltic and North Seas. The first recorded agreement was between Hamburg and Luebeck in 1241 AD. From this humble beginning, the Hansa grew to a trade association of more than seventy cities, dominating commerce in the area for several centuries. Coincident with this growth were the eastern campaigns of the Teutonic Knights that spread Germanic populations and the Low German language to the east. The Hansa administrative center was the German city of Luebeck. The language of Luebeck was *Plattdeutsch*, or Low German, which became the language of commerce at Hansa, counters, or offices, from Brugge to St Petersburg and from London to Bergen. From its base as a widely used language of commerce, Low German soon became the language of diplomacy and literature, probably reaching its zenith ca 1500 AD. Thereafter the Hansa went into decline and with it, the pervasiveness of the Low German language. Epp cites numerous reasons for the decline. In England and other principalities Hansa offices were ordered closed to be replaced by more nationalistic ventures such as the various East India Companies and the Hudson's Bay Company in North America. These new ventures conducted their business in their own languages.

On the continent, southern German cities began to out-compete their northern counterparts, and thus broke the Hansa monopolies. These new masters of commerce used their native tongue, High German, which replaced Low German not only in commerce but in administration and diplomacy. High German also became the language of education and literature and was further given a mighty push when Martin Luther translated the Bible from Latin to his version of High German. After about 1650 AD Low German became a secondary dialect used mainly by the less educated and lower orders of society and was scorned as an inferior language. After fading to near extinction, Low German resurfaced as a literary language in parts of Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century to serve the still substantial Low German speaking population.

This renaissance has continued and today there is a modest, but still thriving, body of Low German literature extant in Germany, and to a lesser extent elsewhere. Reuben Epp estimates the number of Low German speakers at about 8 million in Germany, 10 million worldwide. (Epp's original text estimated a *total* of 8 million but he now states that subsequent research supports the larger number.) Scholars have specialized in the language and developed grammars and dictionaries to govern its use. My mother's youngest half-brother, David Hooze, specialized in *Plautdietsch* in, of all places, the Soviet Union during the 1970's and 80's. After its decline as a commercial and literary language, Low German in its various dialects was still spoken by masses of ordinary people as their usual means of communication in homes and villages, including the fledgling Mennonite communities in the Netherlands.



A majority of the people now known as "Russian Mennonites" originated in the "Friesia Triplex" of West Friesland and Groningen in Holland and East Friesland in Germany. They spoke a dialect of *Westniederdeutsch* (Western Low German). Mercilessly pilloried for their Anabaptist faith by the local authorities in the Netherlands in the mid sixteenth century, the Mennonites found refuge in the lowlands of the Vistula River delta where the inhabitants spoke a dialect of *Ostniederdeutsch* (Eastern Low German). They were welcomed in part because local authorities were more tolerant, and in part because their skills at reclaiming and farming low-lying lands were in demand.

One day the refugee watchman, whom Elfrieda had placed at the gate of Ringstrasse 107, reported a puzzling scene. People were slowly walking by on the opposite side of the street, always looking at him and the house. In half an hour or so they would return on his side of the street, still carefully scrutinizing everything. He thought they might be refugees from Russia, like himself. What should he do?

"Greet them in Plautdietsch," Elfrieda instructed. "If they don't understand it, they're not our people. If they do, bring em in."

Peter and Elfrieda Dyck. *Up From the Rubble*, Herald Press, 1991, p. 144

These two groups now inhabiting the Vistula delta understood each other quite well even though their dialects were distinctly different. The Mennonites from the Netherlands brought with them their Western Low German with an admixture of Flemish, Dutch and High German words and over time melded this mixture with the local Eastern Low German. This blended language, whose speakers tended towards isolation in their villages, over time developed into a separate and distinct dialect that became Mennonite *Plautdietsch*.

This was the language of the Mennonite colonists at the time of their migration to southern Russia. Even within this small group their language was not quite consistent. Epp cites two possible reasons. First, dialects were in a constant state of flux and development and therefore changes may have occurred in Prussia during the years between the first emigrants of 1789 to the Old Colony and the next group in 1804 to the Molotschna. Second, the first group included only landless people with no assets, i.e. the poorest of the poor. People with assets were not allowed to leave at that time. It is safe to assume that this relative poverty also restricted their education, and thus their linguistic sophistication. For the second group these restrictions were relaxed and therefore the 1804 emigrants included richer, and therefore possibly better educated colonists. The minor dialect differences between the Old Colony and the Molotschna were probably further widened by the relative isolation of the two groups during the early years.

According to Epp, *Plautdietsch* was the language of our forefathers, not only in the home, but also in Church and in schools, such as they were, for the first twenty years of their sojourn in Russia. Some sermons were preached in Dutch since many were read, and writings of Menno Simons and other early leaders were in that language. However, original sermons were often in *Plautdietsch*. As the Mennonite colonies in Russia matured and prospered, cultural development caused both languages to disappear from use in religious observances and education, to be replaced by High German which was deemed to be a more refined and cultured tongue.

Reforms led by Johan Cornies and the Agricultural Society covered not only farming methods but also construction, administration and education. This leadership recognized that Mennonites must have better schools to ensure progress. To achieve this, trained educators were imported from Germany who of course spoke and taught in High

German. Later, traveling German evangelists visited Russia and added their weight to the switch to High German in church. (They were also influential in the formation of the Mennonite Brethren.) By the end of the nineteenth century *Plautdietsch* was regarded, if not exactly with scorn, then at least condescension. Among the more educated, or those that considered themselves to be the "elite", *Plautdietsch* was considered somewhat crude when compared to the "fineness" of High German and thus not suitable for use by their kind. B. H Unruh wrote, "*Das Plattdeutsch gilt durchwegs als eine minderwertige Sprache.*" (Low German is generally regarded as an inferior language.)

As in Germany, *Plautdietsch* as a written language disappeared among Russian Mennonites to such an extent that virtually no literature was created in that language, nor were there dictionaries to control correct spelling. Later, J.H. Janzen in Russia and Harry Loewen, Al Reimer, Jack Thiessen, Reuben Epp and others in Canada would make an attempt to preserve *Plautdietsch* as a written language, but with only limited success. Nevertheless, in many Mennonite homes in Russia, and through the first generation in Canada, *Plautdietsch* was still the most common, if not the only, form of speech within the family. They would use High German only at church, at school, and for correspondence.

Does it matter if *Plautdietsch* disappears as a written, or even a spoken language? Many have said no. For them it is too earthy, maybe even vulgar, to be "Christian," and therefore not suitable for use in worship services. This alone, was reason enough to say, "Good riddance." Others, like my parents, took a more pragmatic approach. They reasoned that since we now lived in an English-speaking country whose language would be quite pervasive, it would be hard enough to maintain our High German--this, of course, was considered vital because High German was the only language suitable for religious observances. How many times did I hear, "We maintained our German language for 125 years in Russia and will not lose it in a mere 15 years in Canada!" (Some of my parents' generation probably truly believed that God only understood German.) To ensure that we children would be able to participate in church activities my parents decided that we would only speak High German at home. At the same time they continued to speak Low German to each other. As a result, I can understand Low German perfectly, but speak it only haltingly. A third group of Mennonites continued to treat *Plautdietsch* as an almost sacred mother tongue and ignored all opinions to the contrary.

All of the above opinions have been rendered moot over time as the English juggernaut swept all aside in Canada.

It may be difficult to make an intellectual argument for the continuing survival of *Plautdietsch*, but its complete disappearance would be a loss. For almost two hundred years it has been an intrinsic and defining element of our Mennonite ethnic heritage. Its wonderfully colorful and expressive tongue allows a skilled practitioner to make a statement more vividly descriptive than any other I have ever heard. Some of these expressions defy translation into English. How does one translate *Dommsage*? A comparable English idiom would be "to tell someone off." But that does not have nearly the same cachet. When some country cousins first came to town during the 1940's they translated *Dommsage*, as "tell him crazy", much to the amusement of my pseudo-sophisticated friends and me. Another expression used when referring to someone driving too fast was, "He always has to chase." *He mot ema joage*. (Low German is not the only language that lends itself to humorous translation. Many an elder child has been expected to be a *Front Picture (Vorbild)* for his or her younger siblings. Also most have visited that small town named *Glockenschinken*, just south of the American border.)

The complete loss of *Plautdietsch* might also be another nail in the coffin of the Mennonite Ethnic community. In a lecture, Dr. John Redekop convincingly argued that there are two Mennonite communities - the Mennonite Church or religious community (not a subject of this essay), and the Mennonite Ethnic community. In the main, the two overlap, but there are fringes that do not. Mennonites began forming as a separate ethnic community in Prussia, but were fully developed in Russia where they remained distinctly separate from their Russian hosts for generations. They lived in exclusive colonies and would not mix with their Russian neighbors, in part because they wished only to live on their own lands, in close communion with their own kind and separate from the "world," and in part because they probably felt superior to the average Russian. In their separate enclaves they developed certain styles of dress, manners and mores, cookery, and of course their beloved *Plautdietsch*. (All of these were somewhat influenced by their hosts, as they had been in the past. But this was seldom acknowledged.) These attributes form the style of a separate ethnicity. At times, when it became politically convenient, Mennonites may have referred to themselves as Dutch or

German, *never Russian*, but in the main they were simply *Mennonites*. The first generation of Mennonite immigrants brought their ethnic community to Canada intact. Reuben Epp estimates that the 10 million speakers of Low German in the world today include about 300,000 speakers of *Plautdietsch*. Some 80,000 of the latter live in Canada. I suspect the figures would look less optimistic if demographics were taken into account. *Plautdietsch* speakers I know are all in their 60's, 70's and 80's—those under 50 are few and far between. In fact, most of these younger Mennonites, second and third generation Canadians, do not even speak High German. The first wave of Russian Mennonites immigrating to Canada in the 1870's maintained their German language for several generations. The next wave in the 1920's began losing the language after the first generation. The third wave, arriving in the 1940's, seem to be losing their German language even faster. Younger recent immigrants from Paraguay and elsewhere still speak both High German and *Plautdietsch*. But it is fair to predict their descendants will lose these languages at an ever accelerating pace.

The Mennonite ethnic community may still be alive and well in some remote parts of rural Canada, or in Paraguay, or some other country. But in most of Canada Mennonite dress is indistinguishable from others, Mennonite manners and mores have blended with their Canadian equivalents, and Mennonite cookery has either disappeared from our kitchens or become an occasional specialty. If *Plautdietsch* also disappears, the Mennonite Ethnic community may soon become just another quaint footnote of history.

The Story of Low German & Plautdietsch by Reuben Epp is published by Readers Press, Hillsboro, Kansas.

"I learned it {Low German} quickly. It is a lovely language, simple and to the point, and much like English, differing from that convoluted High German in which I was later to major... I have always felt that the simple, uncluttered language of the Mennonite, so little changed from the early days of their founder, Menno Simons, was singularly appropriate to carry their own uncluttered faith which had also changed so little through one migration after another into the twentieth century. It would almost seem as if the religious outlook was embedded in the language."

Paul Hiebert. *Doubting Castle: a Spiritual Biography*.
Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1976. p. 36

A Collective Memory

by Andre Pekovich

Of the millions who lost their lives in Hitler's maelstrom of hate were dozens of Mennonites of the family Wiehler from the Ellerwald region, a lowland area on the Vistula near Gdansk (Danzig) in the former German state of West Prussia. Many of those who survived committed themselves to passing on the memories of the fallen, the history of the family dating back to the 1700s, and the lessons history taught, painful as they often were.



Erwin and Klaus Cornelsen at the Torichthof Cemetery

Most of those who survived escaped to western Germany during WWII to places as widely dispersed as Munster, Munich and the Weierhof. Many later emigrated to Vancouver, Abbotsford, Calgary, New York and Fiji where they reside today.

Since 1921, five reunions have been held to celebrate the family's growth and achievements. This latest, in July 22-24, was held in Oberwesel, a picturesque village on the Rhine near Bingen. It was attended by 250 family members including some twenty from BC, and several from Calgary, and featured seminars on mission and family history by members such as Marc Wiehler (Calgary) and Marianne Ullrich (Munster). A chronicle of the family's past (the Wiehlerkronik) samples personal stories from the past, and includes a genealogy of more than a thousand names, some 500 of which are still alive today.

Especially touching this time was the release of a translation of the personal diary of Hans-Joachim Wiehler, a 14-year-old boy in 1945 at the time of the flight from West Prussia, who kept his diary on scraps of paper, saving it when refugees lost everything but the clothes on their backs. The participants at the reunion were drawn into the story by a selection of readings from the diary by Ulrike Wiehler.

In a story common to nearly all who fled the Russian advance, he tells of leaving their farm in Klettendorf on wagons loaded with household goods in the bitter winter of January 1945, turning the livestock out on its own, and joining the column of refugees all bent on the same months-long mission--safety away from the front. Frequent aerial sorties and artillery duels interrupted the daily search for food and shelter in a countryside whose people were only too ready to turn them away due to overcrowding. Death due to cold and illness claimed refugees almost daily, and the hazards of the road included gang rape for women and girls, and violence, theft and murder for boys. Few men made the trek, many having already been seized for the war effort or killed as spies, sometimes in front of their families.

The frozen, rutted roads were lined with dead horses and wagons full of household goods damaged and left by their owners, sometimes aflame. Families struggled on with nothing more than what they could carry, becoming separated, while stragglers joined other families. Finally, reaching port cities such as Gotenhafen and Neustadt, they risked flight on ships that were routinely bombed and sunk, most notably, the liner *Wilhelm Gustloff* torpedoed by a Russian sub with the loss of more than 9,000 of its 10,250 mostly civilian refugees, including some Wiehlers among other Mennonites on board, the largest civilian loss of life in a single shipping incident ever.

The diary is honest and frank, reflecting the dismay of a young boy in an expatriate population accustomed to peace and security under benevolent Germany tyranny as it is uprooted, and forced to consider itself an unwitting enemy, an accidental criminal in the world around them. Until the last minutes of the coldest days in January 1945, hoping that Goebbels' "secret weapon" could win the peace back for them, they planned their retreat, only to see it destroyed piece by piece beginning only a few kilometres from their home:

In the bright moonlight reflected off the snow we can see our beautiful old house once more. Oh! When will we ever drive along this way again?

We have to wait a long time until we can get onto the main street, the old Reichstrasse #1. In carts, on horses, on foot, everyone is moving westward. Our army is disintegrating. The soldiers are fleeing for their safety - each man for himself. The [icy] road is smooth as glass and our progress is very slow. The thundering of the artillery comes closer and closer. The horses slip flat onto their stomachs frequently although they were freshly shod earlier today... Our

bicycles are damaged by passing tanks because we secured them to the outside of the wagons. They are the first thing that we throw into the ditch. Because of this Reinhard cries for the first time.¹

The diary's economy with words often belies the importance of the events Hans witnessed. This simple passage produced echoes down the history of the family:

We meet up with the Penners from Fürstenau. They weren't able to find anywhere to sleep and had spent the whole night sitting in their cart. They are completely apathetic and say that if they have to live through another night like that one, they would shoot themselves. This they did the following night.

Though there were many times when help was given or arrived unexpectedly, the boy-author still expresses surprise at how quickly the world changed. The hubris evident in the boy at this time passed entirely out of him after this period, and those who met him (as I did just a few years before his death) could not fail to remark upon his humbleness and gentle spirit. Contrast his later humbleness with this passage from earlier:

Apparently our troops have once again occupied the small town of Neustadt. That's the town we drove through a few days ago just before the Russians captured it. The two of us must quickly find tickets for the ship and get out of this town of suffering with its two million refugees. Polish people stand around on the street corners and some of the shop assistants can't even understand German anymore.

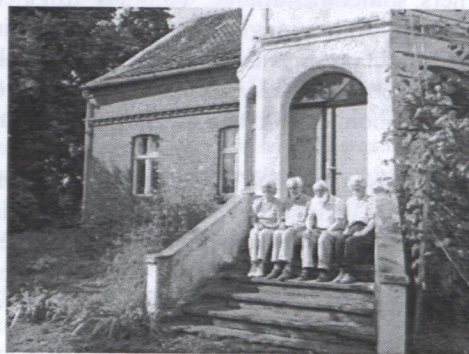
Hans and his mother, separated from his aunt, grandmother and brothers, are taken aboard a refugee boat that is torpedoed by a Russian sub only hours out into the ocean. They are rescued by a patrol boat, but he sees others are not so lucky:

A few men in lifeboats are tackling the wreck, armed with metal saws, crowbars and other tools. They want to rescue the people who are trapped in the storerooms behind the buckled iron walls. The terrified screams of those who are trapped, wounded, and burnt, suffocating in smoke, reach our ears. Suddenly we see in the light of exploding munitions, a woman, high up in the iron wreck of the radar tower. She falls, burning like a torch, her arms thrown upward. It is hard to find words to describe such an experience. How did this poor woman manage to work her way up onto that tangle of iron beams? She must have been crazy with pain. And no one could save her.

Everyone knows someone who will not or cannot talk about the war. In reading a story such as this, who could fail to understand? What words are there to evoke such a tragedy, and how many are fortunate enough to possess the means to use them? To go back into the halls of memory and remember the screams of the victims is more tragically painful than many can bear.

This diary is but one of several in this family chronicling life in the West Prussian lowlands. This family is but one of many who remember the past so that we are not 'doomed to repeat it' (Santayana). There were many other family groups in the area - Lutherans, Catholics, other Anabaptists, and all suffered in different ways. Even those that expelled them had suffered in unique ways.

One of the families (Franz and Marie Cornelsen nee Wiehler) owned a small farm in Tragheimerweide, some 40 km south of Klettendorf. Forced to flee in 1945 as well, most did not make it, and ended up as prisoner-servants in their own house to their new Polish overlords. Their harsh treatment until their deportation to Germany in 1946 was tempered by the knowledge that the bitter family who displaced them were themselves displaced from eastern Poland by the Russians, their property destroyed and their relatives murdered.



Cornelsen family in front of their former home

¹ Diary of Hans-Joachim Wiehler copyright Frank Wiehler, Sonnhalde 33D, 79104 Freiberg, Germany
More of the diary of Hans-Joachim Wiehler can be read on-line at
www.selby.org/index.php?src=gendocs&link=GIC_Wiehler_early_diary&category=Research

Despite this, the surviving Cornelsens have exercised forgiveness and have continued to meet with the family through the years of Communism and into freedom. As time passed on, slowly the relationship was restored, and during recent visits, the son and daughter-in-law accepted the gift of a new roof paid for by the Cornelsens, when it became obvious that there was no means for the Polish family to pay for the roof themselves.

These stories bring to life six generations of history. Younger members of the family continue to contribute to the collective memory in many ways, commemorating the sacrifices of the elders. At the 2000 gathering, the family members brought quilt squares commemorating their family's part in the collective history. Over the past four years, these squares were sewn into an 8' x 6' quilt by Hannelore Schowalter (Vancouver). This family quilt was then auctioned at this 2005 reunion for 575 euros (\$850) with the proceeds going to benefit an Umsiedler education centre in Germany at which Marc Wiehler (Calgary) serves.



Commemorative quilt

The search continues for family history further afield - for instance, connections are being sought with the Peter & Katharina Wieler family who emigrated from Ellerwald to Siberia in 1803 and are known to have over 7000 descendants. We are certain they are part of us, but where, exactly? With these gatherings, the Wiehlers give thanks to those who went before us to make a better life. May God's grace fall on them all.

Silencing the Voice of the People:

Part 3: Changing Dynamics Within Our Worshipping Communities of Faith, by J. Evan Kreider.

Unfortunately, too many of our modern Mennonite church designs seem to have been constructed without the understanding that our sanctuaries' shapes, fully carpeted floors and fully covered pews absorb congregational singing. What is also unfortunate, is that in these deadened spaces, each participant hears considerably less of the total sound being produced by the 'voice of the people'. In sanctuaries suffering from truly dry acoustics, individuals sense that they are alone, that they are not being supported by others in their singing, they feel as though their individual voices are 'sticking out' and they consequently respond by singing more quietly. This has a cumulative effect. For example, when my voice is not carrying all that well in the acoustically-dampened sanctuary, other people sense that I am not supporting them as they sing; we all then tend to sing more timidly, regardless of the nature of the song's music, style or text. In sanctuaries such as these, I have felt as though I was singing virtually by myself (or in an ensemble of those immediately surrounding me) even though over 400 other people were surely singing at the same time. Experiences such as these help me understand why, when I am in a resonant sanctuary, surrounded by other enthusiastic singers, I am far less self-conscious, and why I then tend to sing more joyfully, my spirit being filled with the assurance that I can unabashedly praise God through my joining in congregational singing. I sense that I am being supported by everyone in my community of faith,

even during my singing and responsive readings. This musical support assures me that my friends will also pull together when times get difficult for me.

As musical styles and repertoires have undergone significant transformation during the past twenty years, so too has the audibility of those leading our congregational singing. In the 'Old Mennonite' churches which formerly sang without the help of any musical instruments, our song leaders led by the sheer carrying power of their voices. Although the leader's voice could be heard for the initial two measures, by the time the first musical phrase was being completed, the leader's voice was submerged into the totality of sound produced by the voices from the rest of the community of faith. What this said about us as a people was that we were more or less equal before God within our community of faith. We, the congregation, heard ourselves worshipping our God collectively, as a community, through song.

In the high liturgical traditions, one of the symbols of ecclesiastical power has been the bishop's staff, a visible sign of his special office, a sign encouraging people to listen carefully as he speaks. In modern times, evangelicals worshipping in their increasingly deadened sanctuaries now have their own way of showing who has been given authority--the microphone. Whosoever has access to the

microphone can be heard and is therefore the person with the power at that particular moment. (In semi-progressive but acoustically 'dead' congregations, the leader carries a mike around for others, sharing his power with selected individuals who must first gain his approval before being granted the right to speak to other believers.) In our acoustically deadened sanctuaries, those of us without mikes are relatively powerless. The changes in our sanctuary acoustics have now created an acoustical gulf between those whose every whisper can thunder to the farthest carpet thread and those who would have to speak quite loudly indeed even to be noticed by the people four pews away. Strangely, in some of our new churches, expensive microphones are required for a professional speaker to be heard by as few as 70 people (Bethel Mennonite; I lecture to 110 without a mike at UBC, and do not have to raise my voice all that much).

With the advent of the 'worship teams', congregations have installed impressive amplification systems which enable each musician to have a separate microphone.

"[One] reason churches are building dead sanctuaries is because of a particular philosophy of church growth. If you want to be "contemporary", the thought is you need high tech sound systems for amplification. For a system to operate at its maximum (implying sound coming from the stage), you need a dead room. While this is great for events which are miked on the stage, it sounds the death knell for active congregational participation. The belief is that this kind of sanctuary (an ironic term, for I often want to flee from these places) coupled with the sound system, will then provide the optimum arena for producing contemporary worship (meaning that of the worship team [drum, guitars, synthesiser, miked vocals])...."

"I believe there is an illusion occurring, whereby people believe that the more volume coming from the front means a greater amount of participation occurs. In fact, it appears to be the opposite. We have lots of sound coming from the front, but many mouths are not moving. Two factors contribute to this: the sound from the front defeats any sound a participant can produce; and the songs are generally too high for men to sing."²

In some of our newer and truly deadened sanctuaries (e.g., Kilarney Park MB), two microphones are required if the congregation is to hear their grand piano properly—the grand piano—an instrument which can be heard when competing against a full orchestra in our concert halls without any amplification whatsoever. I also find that, as Tony Funk stated above, the increased amplification of

'worship teams' essentially overpowers the congregation's combined (unamplified) efforts. This means that we are now on the verge of drowning out the 'voice of the people' during congregational singing, much as in commercial pop concerts. Where will this lead? Will the time ever come when our churches will resort to giving each member in the pews a microphone so that congregational singing can once again ring out as in the days of old?

Suggestions

If your congregation is about to embark upon a remodeling or rebuilding campaign, why not have your congregation (as a group of people, not just its committee) collectively evaluate the designs used in other churches? To do this, I suggest that your congregation schedule your own worship services in the various sanctuaries you wish to inspect and experience. During your visit, listen to the speaking of your ministers (voices to which you are accustomed), have your 'worship team' and song leaders lead you in an extended period of singing songs with which you are familiar, read aloud responsively from the pews, have some sharing and prayers be given from the pews. See if your congregation (and your architect) can experience a wide range of architectural designs before even thinking of expending money on something which might prove unsatisfactory to everybody.

Once the walls, floor, and ceiling of your new sanctuary have been closed in, meet within them for corporate worship and try out the sanctuary for sound just as you had done when visiting other churches. Initially you will have to cope with acoustics that are far more lively than when all of the furniture will be installed, but if you keep listening to the room as it undergoes construction, you may be able to make changes in furnishings while it is still possible to do so without financial penalty. Some congregations have followed this procedure, bringing in rugs, blankets (imitating aisle carpets), and chairs from home (imitating types of pews they might order) as they have sought to make final decisions about flooring and seating. Few Mennonites buy their cars without a test drive, but our approach to buying sanctuaries is often carried out more in good faith than with solid assurance of success.

If you now attend a church which has its wall-to-wall carpets and sound-absorbing pews, my heart goes out to you. I have friends who have either changed congregations so that they can once again enjoy singing in church or have become resigned to knowing that their sanctuary will not improve during their lifetime. To such people I can only say: Spread the word, invite people to your church, explain that you want them to hear how truly dead congregational singing can become, and then warn them not to follow your

² Private communication from Tony Funk, music professor at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, B.C.

congregation's example. (In order to rectify your acoustical problems, you may have to spend serious money.)

I also suggest that your church select a design that promises to be more resonant rather than less. (Can you get by without a microphone? Preachers used to be heard by hundreds, over the crying of babies!) It is simple enough to add beautiful banners, quilts, a few lovely rugs in order to absorb sound, but it is truly expensive to increase the sanctuary's resonance by replacing your new pews or changing your floor covering or ceiling.

When building a church and thinking about its costs, ask how long you expect the new structure to serve God's people: Is this to be a one-generation church building (if so, try to save lots of money, cut costs), or is this building to last for 500 years? If you intend to pass your new sanctuary on for several generations, invest in it properly. Once the sanctuary is built, there is little most congregations can afford to do to change it significantly (to paraphrase Moses, the decisions of the fathers will be visited upon their children and their children's children--

people will be stuck with the building and its acoustical properties for years to come.)

If we unthinkingly continue constructing sanctuaries whose acoustical properties discourage the 'voice of the people', we will quickly become denominations populated by spectators expecting to be entertained, people whose main acts of participation will be those of listening and financial giving, but hardly that of continuing to build upon our love of congregational singing and sharing. Our music will increasingly be generated from the front stage with soft singing from the pews—the singing being drowned out by the amplified thunder of the worship teams.

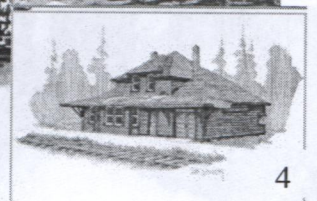
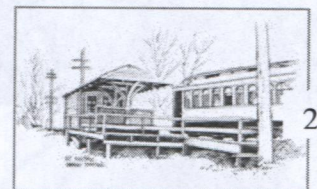
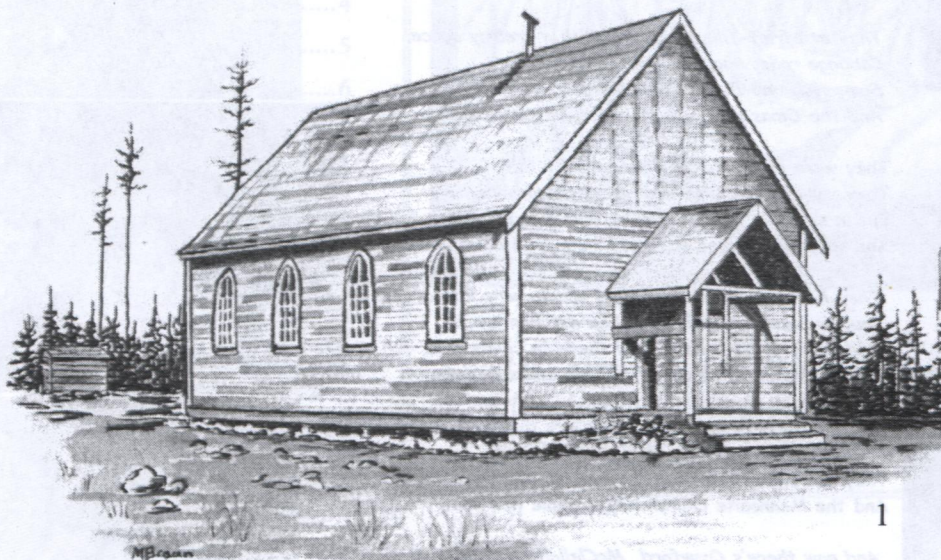
Our God has been worshipped by the 'voice of the people', long before the beloved Psalms first resounded through the temple's resonant (uncarpeted) stone structure. Even the soft accompaniment of the harps of the temple's 'music teams' were performed satisfactorily without amplification to those throngs. In faith, I now look forward to a possible revival of interest in improving the acoustics of our sanctuaries so that Mennonites can soon reclaim the 'voice of God's people.'

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Available at Mennonite Historical Society of BC office or by mail. (Cost of mailing not included.)



1. Cogan Mennonite 1936 (Pen & ink, Mary Lue Braun) 2. BC Electric Rail station, Yarrow est. 1910 (Pen & Ink, Ted Driediger) 3. John I. Haas hop field, Sardis (Photo courtesy Chilliwack Archives) 4. CPR depot, Abbotsford built between 1891-1905 (Pen & ink with ink wash, Dan Sawatzky)

THE MENNONITES

Words by Elsie Ens c2004, tune: Irish Rovers, "The Unicorn"

A long time ago, in the fertile Ukraine,
There were thousands of families who farmed the plain.
But they were forced to emigrate - they lost all their rights.
These peace-loving folks were the Mennonites.

*There were Friesens and Peters, and Loewens and Wiebes,
The Hooges and Hamms, Bergen, Nickel and Wiens,
Some Epps and Lepps and Redekops, Sawatzky and Wall
And one could be related to them all.*

They brought their traditions and their Mennonite rules;
On Saturdays their kids went to German school.
In church, the men and women sat separately,
and they all sang in four-part harmony:

*There were Thiessens and Klassens, Regier and Braun,
Hildebrandt, Penner, Funk, Stobbe and Krahn,
The Froese and Toews and Sudermans, and Janzen and Vogt;
They kept themselves apart from the "English" folk.*

They worked very hard every day of the week,
But Sunday was for church and an afternoon sleep.
The house was clean and food prepared the day before,
'Cause visitors could just show up at the door.

*They'd have Zwieback and rye bread, with jam and cheese,
Peppermint cookies and Perishky,
Delicious homemade liverwurst, hot mustard that was sweet,
And watermelon pickles for a tasty treat.*

The women would meet to sew quilts for each bed.
Folks helped each other out so they'd all get ahead.
They butchered cows and pigs, and fried up the lard,
And they smoked farmer sausage in their back yard.

*They ate fruit-filled perogies with a creamy sauce,
Cabbage rolls, Borscht, and apricot Platz,
Some rich and fluffy Easter bread, baked in a tin,
And the Omas gave you more 'cause you looked too thin.*

They were real big supporters of the M.C.C.
They volunteered time and gave generously,
But in shopping, they would bargain if a price was too steep,
And some would even say they were kind offrugal.

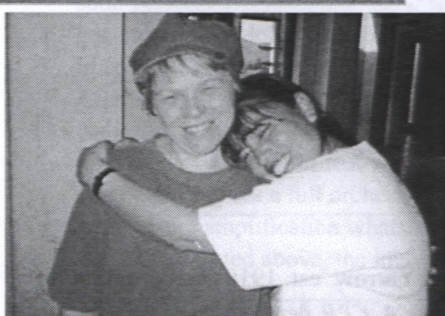
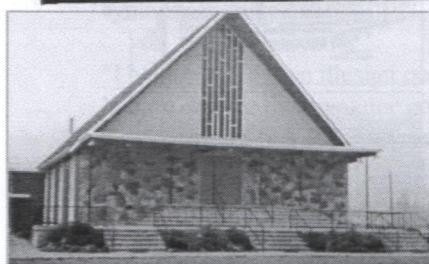
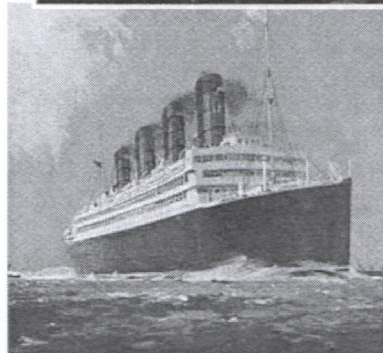
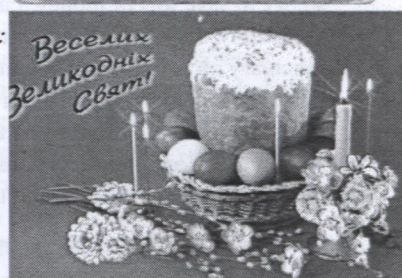
*They had huge family weddings which were lots of fun,
Laughing and joking in their Low German tongue.
And every living relative was there to celebrate;
They fed the whole crowd for ten cents a plate.*

Well, years have gone by, things are different today,
The new generation has found its own way.
They opened up the church doors, so all may come in,
And the Mennonite church has a whole new spin.

*And now there's Crawford, McClelland and Balaban,
Rogusky, Colussi, Doyle, Fryer and Chan.*

*The Greggs and Grays and Hennesseys, and so many more;
And they're still all related as before --*

Cause we're all brothers and sisters in...the...Lord



Photos from family albums of Louise Bergen Price. Left column: Pauls' home, Chortitza; SS Ascania; Tabea Frauen Vercin; Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church ; L. Price with Noemi Zegarra. right column: Justina and Maria Janzen; Easter Paska; Janzen brothers; Bergen/ Price wedding; Samantha Anneliese Price(2005).