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Roots and branches

Newsletter of the Mennonite Historical Society of B C

"What we have heard and seen,
we will tell the next generation."
Psalm 78

Menno Simons tulip developed for his 500th anniversay in 1996. Copies of this postcard were also distributed at Mennonite World Conference 2003 in Zimbabwe.

THIS ISSUE: GARDENS & GRAVEYARDS

Come to the 2006 Cemetery tour : see page 2 for details.

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

Editorial:

In her memoirs, my grandmother, Justine Sawatzky, writes about how, as a child, she visited the cemetery in Rosenthal each Saturday with her grandmother, Maria Pauls. Oma Pauls sat quietly on a bench near the graves of her husband and two children, deep in thought, while young Justine ran about picking flowers and reading the inscriptions on the stones. Justine was buried in Maclure Cemetery in 1986. I think she'd be happy to know that there are now weeping willows and benches, flower gardens and shrubs at Maclure Road Cemetery, and that families still wander around and read the inscriptions on the stones and wonder about the people buried there.

In this newsletter, we've featured graveyards and gardens. We will be continuing this theme for the summer issue and would like to present stories of garden seeds or plants introduced to Canada by Mennonites. Articles or personal stories on this topic would be most welcome.

Feedback from our readers is also encouraged. We'd like to thank Mary Martens of Wynnewood, PA who wrote "Your little pamphlet is a great idea. Many Canadian born Mennonites might find it interesting to know the history of our people. How peaceful and self-sufficient we had arranged our lives. Then came the horrible revolution, Communism, destruction, starvations, and death. I often think of it at my old age (93) when I can't sleep at night. I found the article on Platt-deutsch informative but I don't like the sound of it. We spoke it at home. I like the High German much more or better."

lbp

MHS BC's Spring event: Maclure Road Cemetery Tour, May 13, 2006

The **Maclure Road Mennonite Cemetery tour** will take place May 13, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. followed by a funeral Faspa and short memorial service at Bakerview Mennonite Brethren Church (2285 Clearbrook Rd.)
Participants will meet at a designated site between Road Two and Three in the cemetery where family members and friends will read short biographies of some of the people buried here. Later, there will be time to visit these clearly marked graves, or to wander through the cemetery. Maps and lists of those buried here will be provided. We recommend that participants bring lawn chairs for use during the presentations.
To get to the Cemetery from the freeway, take the Highway 11 exit (92) to Abbotsford/Mission. Follow the signs to Highway 11. Turn right on Maclure Rd.

Faspa tickets are $5.00 and may be obtained at the archive office.

Future Events

May 13 **Annual General Meeting** of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC will be held at 5:30 at Bakerview Church, following the Maclure Road Cemetery Tour (see above). All members and those interested are invited.

June 11 An evening of **Hymn singing** followed by coffee and *platz*. Arnold MB church, 7 P.M. A collection will be taken to further the work of the Society.

October 14 **Annual fundraising banquet** at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church. Speaker: Harvey Dyck

February 17, 2007 **Quilt show** and story telling; lecture by Ron Matthies (former MCC director)

Roots and Branches is a publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC and is mailed three times per year to those who donate $25.00 or more per year. All donations will be receipted for tax purposes. Your contributions are needed to further this work!

A Mennonite Moses – David Toews

a lecture by Dr. Helmut Harder (author of *David Toews was Here*), reviewed by Henry Neufeld

He was teacher, pastor, school board chair, church conference leader, negotiator with governments and businesses, husband, father and leader. Not just another leader, but charismatic in the true sense of the word with a divine gift of inspiring followers with devotion and enthusiasm. "People of our day are like dwarfs standing on the shoulders of David Toews," said Harder at the February 11 lecture.

When Toews was young, his parents joined the Klaas Epp trek from Ukraine to Tajikistan to await the Second Coming. Disillusioned after four years, the family returned to Ukraine but soon moved to Midwestern USA where they had relatives.

David Toews completed teacher training in Kansas and taught in public schools there for five years after which H.H. Ewert, principal of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute, invited him to preach in Gretna. After teaching here for two years, Toews attended Wesley College (now the University of Winnipeg) and then taught school at Burwalde, Manitoba for one year.

In 1889 Toews went to Tiefengrund, Saskatchewan where he homesteaded and taught school. In 1900, he married Margaret Friesen, and was ordained in the same year. Toews was one of the founders of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and of Rosthern Junior College, where he taught and was principal.

In 1921, Toews and other Mennonite leaders met with Prime Minister Mackenzie King to request relaxing immigration criteria so that Mennonites fleeing the Soviet Union after the Revolution could immigrate to Canada. The following year, he became executive director of the newly formed *Mennonite Board of Colonization*. He negotiated a contract for $400,000 with Colonel Dennis of the Canadian Pacific Railway to bring more than 3000 Mennonites to Canada, a move that brought criticism from Mennonites in Canada and the U.S. By the end of 1923, 3000 immigrants had arrived from Russia; another 5000 arrived in 1924. By 1929, 21,000 had come to Canada.

In 1929, the borders of the USSR closed. Enforced collectivization led to widespread famine in Ukraine. In a four-month period in 1933, Toews received about 7,000 letters from the USSR begging for assistance. By 1934, over $160,000 was sent to help alleviate the famine.

In all this time, the *Reiseschuld* had not been fully paid. Shortly before his death on February 25, 1947, Toews heard through J.J. Thiessen that payment of the debt was complete. David Toews was buried at the Rosthern cemetery. "He was a great personage to our people, he was God's faithful servant," said Harder.

Toews served as an ordained minister for about 45 years and on the Canadian conference executive for 31 years, (24 years as chairman). In those years, his family made many sacrifices so his work could continue. His leadership style was visionary, persistent and tenacious. In 1938, Bethel College granted him an honourary Doctor of Divinity degree in "recognition of his sacrificial services rendered to the Mennonite church… motivated by the virtues of faith, hope and charity."

From time to time a great person influences history that affects a lot of people. If Toews is described as a "Mennonite Moses" then surely Peter J. Dyck (also from the same Saskatchewan area) is another "Moses" who followed in Toews' footsteps a generation later. Where is our "Moses" today? While we seem content (perhaps too comfortable) in this land, surely a Moses is needed on other issues.

A revised edition of Harder's *David Toews Was Here* is available from the MHSBC office.

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Our Volunteers: Erica Suderman

by Helen Rose Pauls

Erica Sawatzky was a Winkler town girl, second child of eight in the "Photographer Sawatzky" family. She thrived in school, singing in Justine Enns Wiebe's children's choir and playing violin in the orchestra. Erica remembers a wonderful childhood, compelling teachers, and a strong town spirit shaped by literary evenings and festivals. When her parents moved to B.C in 1956, Erica stayed behind and attended Normal School in Winnipeg. Her dorm was one story above the school's library and she systematically read her way through the books from left to right.

In 1957, Erica was hired to teach elementary school in Abbotsford, where she met and married Peter Suderman. She taught for 31 years in various

Erica Suderman

districts, aside from the ten years she stayed home to raise two children.

"Books were very near and dear to me, and I loved categorizing and cataloguing, so I took courses to become a teacher-librarian," says Erica.

Erica enjoys technology and automated four libraries as well as teaching special classes for gifted and talented students.

Her interest in Mennonite history was kindled when her father asked her to type genealogy lists for her parent's fiftieth anniversary and for a Sawatsky family reunion. "When I retired from teaching, I hoped to pursue Mennonite History," Erica says. "Esther Born got me involved in the Abbotsford Genealogy Society and also brought me to the archives. When Hugo Friesen showed me the archives room, I felt like a kid in a candy store."

Erica began to translate obituaries from the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Der Bote* into English. She indexed them, extracted the data and typed them into a genealogical data base, and the information became part of GRANDMA [Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry]. Always a studious person, she enjoyed working with data and began to organize various projects and to oversee the volunteers who did data entry.

One of these is the EWZ: *Einwanderungszentralle* (immigration) files of those who fled from Russia to Poland and Germany in 1943/44. Erica's most intensive project is just beginning. In 2001, she took a weekend archival course and saw the possibilities of *Inmagic*. (see article below) "This is a three to five year project," says Erica. "We have volunteers working on this every day of the week. We have a wonderful volunteer *family* at the archives, who really care about each other and are keen about the same things."

Aside from spending time with her two grandchildren, Erica is dedicated to archival work. "I am thrilled to be doing something I am so passionate about," she says. "It gives me such a sense of purpose! I heard somewhere that being busy doing things one enjoys is cheaper than psychiatry."

The Magic of *Inmagic*:

by David Giesbrecht, Archivist, MHS BC

The Board is pleased to announce the introduction of a major electronic innovation for our Centre at Garden Park Tower. Recently we acquired an archival indexing software called InMagic, a state of the art software commonly used for finding information in archival collections. This software requires a very large investment of time to enter all of the relevant details so that our collection becomes electronically searchable. An implementation group of eight volunteers led by Erica Suderman is presently laying the foundation for this project.

With the completion of the initial training and preparations, volunteers will begin entering data in February 2006. The first set of records to be entered will pertain to BC Mennonite churches and schools. When completed, searches can be conducted by entering any word that would naturally occur in that particular record. Our hope is to have the churches and schools indexed by late summer. In addition, we have several large personal donations or *fonds*, and many smaller collections waiting to be processed and entered.

Completing this project will take several years. The first part of the procedure is to ensure that our Centre has legal custody of the records. (If you have been a donor of materials to our Centre, you will shortly be contacted in this regard.) The next task is to arrange and describe all of our records according to the Canadian Council of Archives (RAD) standards. In all of these changes every effort will be made to protect the integrity of records entrusted to us, and where confidentiality has been requested, to ensure that any use of these records will conform to the wishes of our donors.

Presently some 200 people visit our Centre each month. Our concern is to provide visitors with a variety of searching options. The *Inmagic* software is primarily designed for archival searches. The GRANDMA database (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) with more than 800,000 names will continue to be our main source for genealogical searching. Our library books have been catalogued and entered into a separate software package. With the completion of the *Inmagic* project, finding information in our Centre will be considerably enhanced.

The Board wishes to express particular thanks to Erica Suderman and her group of volunteers for undertaking the massive *Inmagic* implementation project.

More volunteers are needed! If you can spare a few hours per week, or wish to have further details, please contact Mary Ann or David at our office by telephoning 604-853-6177.

A Tribute to Ron Isaak

by Ben Stobbe

Ron Isaak was a strong supporter of Mennonite historical studies. While he excelled in his chosen profession as a civil engineer he also devoted a great deal of time to genealogical research and writing. He contributed to "Roots and branches" and was helpful to many in showing how internet navigation and search functions were helpful in undertaking genealogical research. Even while battling cancer he continued to work on his project of researching his Isaak family history.

Sadly he could not finish this and other projects. Ron passed away in November 28, 2005. He is survived by his wife Bonnie Safronick Isaak and children Kristy, Jeffrey, Michael, James, and Jennifer.

He will be missed by readers of this newsletter.

Northern and Southern Mennonites – Helping Each Other by John L. Ruth

(from a talk at Abbotsford, October 16, 2005, edited by Henry Neufeld)

Tonight we recall two faith communities. We invoke their parallel narratives that begin with the birth of Anabaptist fellowships in Switzerland and Friesland in the 1520s and '30s. Both beginnings, emerging among proverbially conservative people, were paradoxically radical, and both ensuing peoplehoods settled into conservative mentalities. I'll call these Anabaptists "northerners" and "southerners." Both spread -- the northerners from the Netherlands to Prussia, Russia and the Americas; the southerners from Zurich and Bern to Alsace and southern Germany, then to Pennsylvania. The latter arrived in the USA about a century before the northerners moved to Russia. Most of you here at Abbotsford represent the northern tradition; I, the southern.

I'm here as a son of the Swiss-originating community in Pennsylvania, the oldest continuing community of Mennonites outside of Europe. I've come not as a professional historian, but to tell a few stories representing the flavor of that parochial, devout community. Specifically, some perceptions they had of the fellow-believers they helped during the migrations from Russia in the 1870's and again in the postwar 1920's, following the tragic imposition of communism.

One note I'll strike is a difference between the two communities in regard to what we might call the life of the mind. My Swiss ancestry was of a very utilitarian stripe. An old folk-saying from Bern starkly discouraged would-be artists: *Malen und sudeln sind nicht fein/ Versäumt die Zeit, und sollt nicht sein.* (Painting and scribbling are not fine/They should not be – a waste of time.) We Pennsylvania Swiss "Old" Mennonites certainly did not produce, then or now, the literature or art on the scale of what has come through the Dutch-Prussian-Russian-Winnipegian "northern" wing of Anabaptists.

Over the years leaders among the northerners and southerners have remained more or less aware of each other as spiritual siblings. There were various attempts, beginning in the 1550's, at formal covenant. All were unsuccessful, but meaningful.

In parallel manner, both northern and southern traditions had major divisions in the 17th and 19th centuries. Nevertheless, there was a historical series of helping each other, and some major joint projects. Even so, there was never a major joining until the beginning of the 21st century in America at Nashville, Tennessee at the formal inauguration of a grouping called "Mennonite Church USA." A similar coming together had occurred in Canada, though not involving the Mennonite Brethren congregations.

When my southern ancestors moved from Switzerland to the Palatinate around 1650, they took on the northern name – *Mennist*. A decade later they signed on to a northern Confession of faith (Dordrecht, 1632), and reaffirmed it in Pennsylvania in 1725. Two centuries later, I was baptized under it. Both wings in America sing the words of the northern Menno Simons: "We are children of God's peace." Both northern and southern Anabaptists have been imprinted from the moment of their people's awakening with the Christian motif of mutuality. That was a central feature of their spirituality.

This parallel is more than a footnote to our shared story: it is an insight into how the gospel was understood in the very birth of our fellowship.

When the southern Swiss *Geschwister* were in deep trouble with their governmental regimes in the 1600s, the liberal Dutch reached out to them with material and spiritual and even political aid. It was with that encouragement that my Swiss ancestors came to Pennsylvania 150 years before the first Russian Mennonites followed them to the New World.

Over the centuries, it was of course difficult for my southern group to visualize graphically what was happening with the northern picture in Prussia, Volhynia, south Russia, and later the diaspora of colonies from the Crimea to Siberia. By the time the Russian Mennonites began to look abroad for a new home, the Pennsylvanians were in their third generation. Even after this long time, when the name "Mennonite" was heard, the charter motif of mutuality that was engraved on the hearts of both northerners and southerners awakened, and in mutual aid, they found each other's hearts – and stomachs. Our meal tonight, is an appropriate remembering, a kind of sacrament recalling that sharing.

Memories of the 1874ff. Russian Migration

After 1773 there was very little cross-fertilization between the "southerners" of eastern Pennsylvania and the "northern" Dutch-Prussian-Russian wing. Then, in the early 1870's our Indiana-based *Herald of Truth* began publishing news and even appeals from a group of Russian Mennonite colonies in Volhynia (Polish Russia). Too poor even to buy passage to America, they wrote earnestly to America:

> We feel compelled, beloved brethren, to beg and pray of you in the name of the whole Church, to manifest toward us, for heaven's sake, your kindness and Christian love ... and beseech you ... to furnish us with ... a loan ... [of $40,000].

This plea awoke the original Anabaptist sensitivity among the insular Pennsylvania Old Mennonites. The spring 1874 session of the Lancaster Conference appointed a "Mennonite Executive Aid Committee of Pennsylvania for the Mennonite Congregations in West Prussia, Poland and South Russia." The Secretary of this eastern Committee, John Shenk, sent the *Herald of Truth* a heartfelt admonition for Mennonites in general. Theology and mutual aid were one:

> Dear reader, should we not love Jesus, who has done so much for us, as we love ourselves? Should we not try to <u>show</u> our love to him in every possible way? I dare say you would all answer, Yes, certainly. How <u>can</u> we show our love to him? We have just now a glorious opportunity ....

This is the original ingrained logic of both our "northern" and "southern" Mennonite ancestries. It goes beyond marveling at Christ's suffering on our behalf to giving it concrete expression in every possible way. 'Our religion,' as editor John F. Funk chimed in, 'requires of us a common sympathy for all our brethren in the faith....'

At one point, the Eastern Committee found itself accused of heartlessly dumping Russian Mennonite refugees on the frigid open Kansas prairie, and 'censored,' complained the secretary, 'as if we were some of the most inhuman people living.' This was because some immigrants, arriving at Hutchinson, Kansas with only bread to eat after a five-day train-ride, found the temperature well below zero, and the town's officials refused to allow them into several empty buildings.

The earlier-arriving Mennonite Bernard Warkentin, who came from Kansas to St. Louis to meet the newcomers, was quite angry that the eastern Mennonites had not taken better care of these confused immigrants, and that they did not send more money immediately.

The memory of the 1870s migration from Russia to the United States has not remained vivid in the historical imagination of the Pennsylvania "Old Mennonite" community. This is perhaps partly due to the disappointment my community felt on finding that most of the Russian Mennonites they had helped financially had opted to join the General Conference (founded in 1860 among a small group of progressive Mennonites) rather than the much larger and older Old Mennonite fellowship.

There were positive individual stories. One is of a baby born on an immigrant-filled ship several days before it docked in Philadelphia in 1875. On landing, the parents, John and Anna Dirks, were taken in by a Mennonite farm family near Souderton. Shortly thereafter, John became ill and died, and after a while Anna took her children to live among her relatives in Kansas, only to receive a letter inviting her to come back to Pennsylvania and marry the man for whom she had

been washing floors in Bucks County. Thus it was that Annie Dirks brought back to my community her two children, including the baby whose full name commemorated the ship they had arrived in: Susanna Freudenport Illinois Dirks.

A great-grandson (Willard Swartley) became an influential Bible professor at the Associated Mennonite Biblical seminaries at Elkhart, Indiana. Doubtless not one of his students was aware of this background, an example of the blending of "northern" and "southern" Mennonite stories.

A Vignette of Harmony from Ohio

Cultural differences between Russian and Swiss Mennonite hosts were memorably subsumed in the case of Jacob Huebert, who found a permanent home in his adopted community. After several years of working on the farm of his original sponsor, Elmer Shank of the Old Mennonite Midway congregation, the one-time aspirant to the Moscow Symphony from Chortitza worked on road gangs. He had escaped to America with no expectation of ever again playing the cello. But after his parents came to Canada, his musical father insisted that he again get an instrument." So I saved my money," Jacob remembered, "and bought one." Persuaded to play one night at a local Reformed church, he found his evident gift profoundly affecting his audience. Four years after coming to the community, the "Little Symphony" of nearby Youngstown, Ohio called on him when their first cellist failed to appear at a banquet where they were scheduled to play. That night in 1927 marked the beginning of a 33 year career with the Symphony.

Much as in my own community, the Old Mennonites of Ohio did not sanction instrumental music in public. So Jacob brought to the congregation he joined no connection with his more sophisticated art. Yet, he felt spiritually at home among the folks who were probably unaware that he sometimes played his cello for silent movies they were forbidden to attend. Ten years after his arrival, after long observing a young member named Grace Lehman, Jacob cast the die of his spiritual future and married her. While her family was of a much simpler culture than he had musically imbibed at Schönwiese, he felt that "It was the direct leading of God that I met her." Together they raised four children, and lived together for thirty-six years until Grace's death in 1969.

His talent won the attention of New York booking agencies, and he was offered a position with the Cleveland Orchestra. For twenty-eight years he made his living as a piano technician. Though he generally worked from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 o'clock in the evening, he never missed a concert. The conservative Swiss congregation at Midway held its Russian member and son-in-law in lifelong respect. The feeling was mutual, even as few in the Mennonite fellowship ever heard him play anywhere. What they saw of him up front was his serving, like those before him at Midway, as a simple song leader, striking a tuning fork and beating time. The details of his prior life were little known.

A granddaughter found that though he had the reputation of being a man of God, his "righteousness and faith" were framed by a "meaningful silence" regarding cultural themes. Never during a service in the church he loved did he play the cello. By virtue of his attitude, the "north" and "south" of our two narratives flowed parallel without clashing. It was left to a granddaughter, inheriting both stories in one person, to present, in a Ph.D. thesis, a manuscript of choral songs once sung by her ancestors at Schönwiese, and brought to rural Ohio by her immigrant grandfather.

In evoking the mixture of Mennonite caring and scruples that have flavored the convergence of "northern" and "southern" stories, the practice of mutual aid, so deeply ingrained in the Mennonite soul, must emerge whenever history requires.

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Photo at left: Sara Snyder Friesen's DVBS class

CAOBO Russian Land "Restitution" Plan

by John Konrad, Chair MHS of BC

The Proposal

Solicitations have been made to persons with "Mennonite" names inviting them to participate in a plan for restitution and development of Mennonite lands in Ukraine. The project is driven by Paul H. Willms, chief executive officer of a company CAOBO, and a Ukrainian associate, Boris Tankhilevich, president. Both are shareholders of this Everett, Washington real estate development company, incorporated in Delaware for this specific purpose.

The plan is to negotiate with the Ukrainian government the conveyance to CAOBO all of the lands generally in the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies (over one million acres) on the basis that they were forcefully confiscated from Mennonite landowners by the Soviet Regime.

Subscribers are required to subscribe to a minimum of 1000 shares (US $ 1.00 each), thus becoming shareholders in the corporation with the right to participate in any future profits. Additional subscriptions will be required to carry the development forward if CAOBO is successful in obtaining the lands. There is to be no tie between specific lands and individual subscribers. As we read the proposal, any one can subscribe regardless of whether or not they are Mennonites, former land owners or their descendants.

Our Analysis

This proposal is characterized as a restitution project, yet it is difficult to reconcile the proposal with any notion of restitution from the perspective of the descendants of former land owners. We believe that the plan is mischaracterized and should be seen as a highly risky business venture that does not have any direct economic benefits to former land owners.

The promoter purports to represent the descendants of former Mennonite land owners and will need to sustain this notion in any negotiation for the lands. We believe it would take many years to compile, qualify and obtain the consent of former land owners to allow CAOBO to represent them. There would be a need to trace land titles to specific former owners and to tie them to descendants in Canada, US, Russia, Paraguay and other countries. The plan simply assumes that CAOBO can step into the shoes of the descendants of former land owners without their specific identification or consent.

The plan does not recognize the sensitivity of land privatization in this former Soviet state, where land ownership and exploitation have been linked since the 1917 revolution. The plan is silent on what would happen to the thousands of people who now occupy these lands. Many of the large collective and government farms have been turned into corporate farms which are now owned by the former workers. Some village properties with a few acres of attached garden land have been sold to individuals. As far as we know there is no enabling legislation in place to handle restitution of private lands to descendants of former owners, let alone to an American real estate developer. It is difficult to imagine that a land transfer of this magnitude could be negotiated by way of political or legal process without in some way resorting to the purchase of influence, or the sharing of proceeds from the transfer with senior government officials, a practice not uncommon in former Soviet countries in the privatization of major assets.

Subscribers are warned in the subscription agreement that the investment carries substantial risks and that the investment should be considered extremely speculative. Given that the company does not own the assets and has no authority or right to represent the descendants of former land owners in any negotiations, this warning is an extreme understatement.

Perhaps most significant, the proposal is naïve in that it fails to recognize an important tenet of Mennonite faith which is to forgive and move on rather than resort to legal means of redress. Among those who have contacted us for clarification or are otherwise aware of the CAOBO plan, none have been sympathetic to the "restitution" idea.

Recommendation

The board of directors of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC at a meeting on March 23, 2006, accepted a resolution unanimously recommending that descendants of former Mennonite land owners reject any appeal for subscriptions by CAOBO to invest in the proposed business venture as the scheme is inconsistent with Mennonite values and will harm humanitarian efforts currently underway by our Mennonite institutions in the region.

John Konrad, President (jikonrad@telus.net)

Press Release: Friends of the Mennonite Centre Ukraine. January 3, 2006

Just after Christmas 15,000 Mennonites in Canada received a prospectus from the "CAOBO Company," a newly-incorporated U.S. start-up, selling stock in a highly speculative venture to reclaim former Mennonite lands in the Ukraine. The title of the twenty-eight-page prospectus is: "CAOBO Company: A Plan for the Restitution and Development of the Mennonite Lands of Ukraine."

We encourage you to read the article in the Winnipeg Free Press on Monday, 26 December, "Land speculator stirs up memories. Plan to reclaim Ukraine farmland questioned" (http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/subscriber/local/story/3235420p-3745912c.html).

FOMCU board members have been following this story both in the United States and in Ukraine. We have spoken directly with Paul Willms, the U.S. real-estate developer who created this venture, and his advisor, Boris Tankhilevich, and have expressed our opposition. We are also in communication with sister Mennonite agencies in Ukraine.

Neither FOMCU nor other Mennonite humanitarian agencies in Ukraine endorse the "CAOBO Company" offering.

This is a project with many difficulties. We think it is important to distinguish between the notion of "restitution" as a way of exploiting an old injustice to acquire huge tracts of land for free, to which we are strongly opposed, and genuine economic investment for the benefit of Ukrainians, which we support. Ukraine needs both internal economic reforms and foreign investment, but of the kind suited to the Ukraine social and economic environment.

FOMCU continues to analyze the CAOBO Plan and will provide further statements. We are troubled, however, by both practical and ethical issues.

These include but are not limited to the following:

1) for the Willms plan to work, the Ukraine Parliament must pass a Restitution Law specifically granting CAOBO Company ownership of more than 500,000 acres of prime farmland. Such a law would be unprecedented. Moreover CAOBO is selling stock even before such a law has been drafted. And if the CAOBO Plan fails, investors will almost certainly lose their money;

2) the "restored" lands would be owned by the CAOBO Company, a U.S. for-profit development company, not by individual Ukrainians and not by Mennonite descendants of former owners. The land would therefore not be restored in the true sense of the word.

3) Crimean Tatars, German Lutherans and Catholics, Jews, Bulgarians, and Swedes, among other ethnic groups, also lost their property under communism but would receive no restitution under this plan.

At its Annual General Meeting in Toronto on Dec 28, 2005, FOMCU members approved the following motion:

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine unanimously expresses grave reservations about the initiative of the CAOBO Company of Everett, Washington, USA to acquire gratis large areas of land that once belonged to Mennonites.

THE STONES CRY OUT: Greendale and South Poplar Cemeteries

from articles submitted for the Cemetery Tour of 2005, abridged and edited by Lora Sawatsky

Representatives of the First Mennonite Church and Mennonite Brethren Church presented a memorandum to the citizens of Sardis on October 20, 1947 regarding the purchase of a five-acre plot to serve as a cemetery. This land was situated at the west end of Watson Road and was given the name, *Greendale Cemetery.* This proposed name was presented to the municipal office for acceptance and confirmation. A cemetery committee was chosen. A general meeting of interested people was held November 22, 1947 at which time the purchase of a cemetery was discussed. Agreement was reached that the recommendations presented by those present at the October 20th meeting should be followed with one change: lot sizes should be 20' by 18'. Furthermore, it was agreed that representatives from the churches should establish the administration of the cemetery. (*Greendale Cemetery Memorandum, Oct. 20, 1947 and the Greendale Cemetery minutes, Nov. 22, 1947)*

Johann J. Stobbe (1901-1947) was the first to be buried in the Greendale Cemetery. He was killed in a tractor accident. His wife, **Maria (Berg) Stobbe,** (1904-1978) is buried next to her husband.

Johann and Maria immigrated to Canada in 1924, arriving in Quebec City, then travelling by train to Rosthern, Saskatchewan. From Rosthern they moved to Laird, and then to Blaine Lake where Johann was employed on a Doukhobor farm for a few years. From here they moved to Mullingar before moving to BC in 1941, where they eventually purchased a farm on Chadsey Road, Sardis (later renamed Greendale). (Henry Stobbe)

Jacob Bernhard Harder (1900-1975), minister and choir director, was born in Friedensfeld, Zagradovka Colony, Russia. During his ninth year the family moved to Chortitza in Siberia where he was baptized and accepted into the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1923. Shortly thereafter, the family relocated to Slavgorod where he met **Kaethe Klassen**. Jacob and Kaethe married August 8, 1926.

Harder was secretary for the Mennonite Central Committee and his name appeared on the "black list." Searching for safety, the Harders left for Moscow in 1929, immigrated to Canada and settled in Sardis (Greendale), B.C. Jacob and Kaethe had five children, two born in Russia and three in Canada.

Jacob served as lay minister in the Greendale MB Church 1931-1974, and assumed the duties of unsalaried interim pastor for approximately the first 20 years of the church. He directed the church choir (1931-1963), and the German choir (1967-1974). In addition to his church duties, he taught in the Greendale and Yarrow (Elim) Bible Schools. Jacob B. Harder was known to say much with few words. (Peter Harder)

Gerhard J. Peters (1906-1999) emigrated from the Molotschna Colony to Manitoba in 1925 at age nineteen. Five years later, he married **Anna Friesen** and they farmed in Manitoba for fourteen years and then left for the Fraser Valley. After a two-year stay in Atchelitz, they moved to Greendale. Following his ordination to the ministry in Greendale Church in 1945, he attended Canadian Bible College in Winnipeg for four terms. Gerhard preached fluently in German, English, Russian and Ukrainian. He served at the Springstein Mennonite Church in Manitoba and at the Wellington Ave. Mennonite Church in Chilliwack. He was one of the primary influences in building the Menno Home in Abbotsford. For three years Gerhard and Anna commuted to Vancouver Island to officiate at Sunday morning services in the Black Creek Mennonite Fellowship. He served two years as moderator for the BC Mennonite Conference, three years in the service of MCC and nine years on the Canadian Mennonite Missions Board. He made numerous trips to the Ukraine to preach, teach and encourage. Gerhard died at age ninety-three. (Sig and Laura Peters)

John Peter Doerksen (1905-2000) left Moscow for Mexico in 1925 at age nineteen. He sailed on a freighter for thirty-two days with stops at Spain and Cuba and finally arrived in Rosario, Mexico.

John's love for farming took him to Winnipeg where he worked for Canada

Packers as well as on various farms. In 1933, John and his friend, Peter Thiessen, rode a freight train across the Prairies to BC. When John arrived in Chilliwack, he made his way to Greendale where he met his future bride, **Susan Schmidt**. In 1935, John and Susan moved to Harrison Mills. After eight years at Harrison Mills, they purchased land in Greendale, built a house and barn and in 1943 moved onto their dairy farm. For 27 years they farmed their 30-acre site on Keith Wilson Road where they raised three children.

John Peter Doerksen joined the First Mennonite Church in Greendale in 1946 where he remained a member until his death. (Taken from John Doerksen's Memoirs, 1995)

Katherine (Braun) Koehn (1914-2003), born in Orenburg, USSR, immigrated with her family, to Canada in 1929. Here they lived temporarily with Johann and Susanna Braun (uncle and aunt), in Yarrow before moving to Sardis (Greendale) in 1930.

At age 15, Katherine found employment in Vancouver, where she learned to read and write English. She attended a Baptist Church where she committed her life to Christ and was later baptized in the Greendale MB Church.
In 1933 she married **David Koehn.** David and Katherine had three sons, eight grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren. (One granddaughter is married to the current mayor of Chilliwack.) Katherine kept busy with family, farm, employment, and church. In spite of her busy schedule, she took time to develop her talent in painting. She died January 12, 2003. (John Koehn)

South Poplar Cemetery

The history of the South Poplar Cemetery is directly connected to the Mennonite settlers who pioneered the south Abbotsford area in the 1930s and 40s. Construction of the South Abbotsford church building on Gladwin Road began in November of 1935 and a two-acre plot was purchased for a cemetery in 1937. The first funeral was conducted August 9, 1938 for **Grace Buhler**, a South Abbotsford member who died at age twenty-five. About twelve to fifteen churches of the two Mennonite conferences made use of this cemetery. The burials at the outset were few, with an average of five per year (1938- 44). However, 1945-1950, the number of burials averaged seventeen per year and the years 1948-1950 averaged twenty-three burials per year. Since South Poplar Cemetery would soon reach capacity, municipal authorities made space available in the Hazelwood Cemetery. Later, in 1966, the Maclure Road Mennonite Cemetery Society was formed and this property is now the main burial site for Abbotsford Mennonites. (Henry Klassen)

Franz C. Thiessen (1881-1950), educator, conductor, minister, was born in Rueckenau, Molotschna, Ukraine. In the late 1890s, Franz joined the Rueckenau Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1900 he married **Lydia Wieler** who died in 1908. Two years later he married her sister, **Margaret**. There were six children from the two marriages. After taking his training in Halbstadt, he taught schools in the Ukraine and eventually became principal of a secondary school in Davlekanovo, a growing settlement near the Ural Mountains. He became the conductor of the school and church choirs. The choirs performed Mendelssohn's oratorio, "*Paulus*" – a first for the Mennonite community.

In 1925 the Thiessen family immigrated to Canada and settled in Saskatchewan. For seven years he taught at the Rosthern Junior Academy. However, as a result of the depression, the family moved to Winnipeg. In 1939 the Winnipeg Northend MB Church elected Franz as pastor. In 1943 Franz Thiessen was asked to teach in the Abbotsford, BC Bible School and one year later he became the first principal of the Mennonite Educational Institute. He wished to remain in this work until he died and God granted his wish. He died on the way to school, February 24, 1950. (Victor Thiessen)

Peter J. Reimer, born in Steinfeld, Ukraine in 1887, left Russia, together with his family, in 1926 and settled in Boissevain, Manitoba. In 1937, during the Depression, the Reimer family moved to BC, purchasing 103 acres at the corner of Clearbrook and Huntington. This property was mostly forested except for one small area that had been cleared leaving huge stumps. While clearing three stumps with dynamite, one stump failed to ignite. When Reimer neared this stump to check, he was caught with the full

impact of its explosion and died February 27, 1953. Peter Reimer loved to sing and often went about his chores singing familiar songs. (The Family)

Mary L. Klassen was born in Riga, Latvia in 1891 to German Lutheran parents and died in Abbotsford, BC, Dec. 6, 1976. Mary and Cornelius (C.F.) Klassen were married in Moscow, Russia in 1926 and came to Canada with their two sons in 1928, settling in Winnipeg, MB where three additional children were born, one of them dying in infancy. They moved to BC in 1948. In 1950, Mary purchased a four-acre plot on Old Yale Road, which became the family home. Mary's grandson, Steve, is currently developing this property to house the new *Mark Retreat Centre.*

Mary was an invaluable secretary to her husband in his role of collecting the "Reiseschuld." In Moscow she had served in the Mennonite Centre as MCC's first secretary abroad. Later, many Clearbrook residents remember Mary as receptionist for Dr. Buir.

C.F. Klassen died in 1954 while working for MCC in Europe; Mary died much later in 1976. There are two surviving sons, Wally and Herb, eighteen grandchildren and forty great grandchildren. (Maureen Klassen.)

John A. Toews (1912-1979) was born in Rueckenau, Ukraine. The Toews family immigrated to Canada in 1926-27 and settled on a farm in Namaka, Alberta. John attended the Coaldale Bible School and the Prophetic Bible Institute in Calgary. Following his marriage to **Nettie Willms** in 1935, he studied at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas and graduated with a Bachelor of Theology in 1940.

He began preaching and teaching at home and abroad. He taught at Coaldale Bible School (1940-46), MB Bible College (1947-67; 1976-79), MB Biblical Seminary in Fresno (1971-72) and Trinity Western University (1972-76). Periodically, his work took him to South America and Europe. Amid the pressures of teaching and preaching, he managed to complete his B.A. at the University of Saskatchewan (1947), his B.D. at United College in Winnipeg (1950) and his PHD at the University of Minnesota (1964).

J.A. Toews was particularly concerned that the MB church and conference remain rooted in its Anabaptist heritage, especially in its non-resistant teaching. In addition to many essays, he published three significant books*: True Non-resistance through Christ* (1955*); Alternative Service in Canada during WWII* (1959); A *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (1973).
(John B. Toews)

Hilda Janzen was born in 1932. Although she started elementary school in Coaldale, Alberta, she completed her grade thirteen at the Mennonite Educational Institute in Abbotsford, BC. In 1967 she attended the MB Bible College in Winnipeg. She completed Normal School in Vancouver and later graduated from UBC with a BA. Her first teaching positions were in elementary schools in Ladner, Barrowtown, and Harrison Hot Springs.

Following these initial years, she taught at the Mennonite Educational Institute for 20 years. She was particularly dedicated to the English and German departments. In 1969, she catalogued the school's library. She loved to coach drama, and is remembered with fondness by many of her students. She died in 1981, four years after her cancer was diagnosed. (Helen Janzen)

Sleep walkers, ghosts or angels? The story of Helene Hoeppner Hildebrand.

by Louise Bergen Price

In 1833, during the pioneer days of the Chortitza settlement, Helene Hildebrand disappeared from her house in the middle of the night; her body was found the following day in the Dnieper. What happened, and how did she get there?

Grandson Cornelius Hildebrand wondered, too. Over the years, he asked questions of relatives, finally writing down what he remembered. In 1934, his son, Kornelius J. Hildebrand, submitted this story to *Der Bote*. I first read Helene's story in a handwritten genealogy book, a blue scribbler left in my Oma Sawatzky's papers. Her sister, Mariechen had an identical account, as did their cousin, Jacob Pauls, all painstakingly copied from the *Bote* article.

Later, my sister, Helen Bergen, located an English translation of this account at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg entitled, "When angels walked the earth." In this shortened version by Kornelius J. Hildebrand (Helene's great-grandson) 'figures in white' become angels and there is no mention of the inebriated couple gallivanting in the cemetery. This account ends with: "Then my grandmother would point out the places: here the boat landed, this is the gate the angels went through, here the Russian girl did see those two angels, over there is the cemetery!"

David Rempel, (a great-great-grandson) takes a more prosaic approach. In his book *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, 1789-1922* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 2002) Remple suggests that Helene walked in her sleep, and drowned. "Whatever the cause{of her death}, a litany of superstitious fables soon surrounded her death resembling such Gogolian tales as *May Night*..." (p. 53)

Can someone sleepwalk for seven kilometres, along the river and a village street? My own feeling is that she suffered from severe depression. In any case, I have become fond of my great-great-great-great grandmother Helene Hoeppner Hildebrand. That she was well-loved is shown by the tear-stained faces of her children, and by the fact that a granddaughter was later named in her memory. Although Helene was born in 1775, her grandchildren's lives overlapped with my grandmother's. There are only 'three degrees of separation' between her life and mine!

How they found my Grandmother

by Kornelius Hildebrand (1833-1920) translated by Louise Bergen Price

As my dear father, Jakob Hildebrand has recorded, on the night of July 18, while everyone slept, his mother, Helene, left the house. She was barefoot, dressed only in her white nightgown and black night cap. She was found dead in the shallow waters of the Dnieper seven kilometres away. Her footprints showed that she had walked from the house to the river, apparently wading downstream to the shallow waters till she reached the Nachbarstein. Here the huge rock barred her way; she could go no further and must leave the Dnieper and follow the village street around the cliff before heading down to the river again. In doing so, she would pass Bernard Dyck's yard.

Mrs. Bernard Dyck, still awake, heard the dog bark. She looked out the window and saw three figures dressed in white walking down the road. Panicking, she blew out her lamp and jumped into bed over top of her sleeping husband. When he asked why she'd come to bed in such a rush, she told him about the three figures. He didn't believe her but she insisted that she'd heard the dog bark and seen the men.

On that same evening, Peter Wiens, who lived six households from my grandparents' place, arrived home from his fishing trip just as the sun went down. After supper, he and his wife went down to the boat to retrieve the fishing gear. As Wiens stood there, he noticed a boat drifting toward Father's garden. The boat moved quickly even though the Dnieper was smooth as glass. No one rowed the boat and it left no ripples on the water. When the boat reached the shore, two people got out without first pulling the boat to shore. They walked through the fence, across Father's garden and up the hill called the Hofacker.

Sinaida Gulega, volunteer caretaker at the Insel Chortitza graveyard, at Helene's gravestone.

Wiens called to the people that they should tie the boat up, or the current would take it away. There was no answer. He called again, in Russian this time. Still no response. Wiens thought perhaps they were men who bring logs down from the Dnieper (Flößer) who wanted to steal mulberries from Father's garden. Wiens' wife had seen all these things. Wiens walked over to the stranger's boat to pull it ashore, but when he arrived, the boat had disappeared. Neither he nor his wife could understand this puzzle.

While this was going on, my mother was milking the cows next door (the cook, who usually milked, had a sore leg.) Our cow pen was on Wiens' side, our house stood in the middle of the property, and the garden on the other side. The cook sat in the garden, taking care of us boys. Suddenly, she saw two white figures walk through our garden. In fear, she left the three older boys and ran to the cow pen. 'Come quickly,' she called to Mother. 'Two men in white are walking toward the Hofacker.' Mother came and saw the men seemingly suspended in the air, gliding without difficulty through the high weeds. They did not answer when Mother called.

Father had been rounding up some horses that had broken through the fence and gone up to the Hofacker. On his return, he had to pass the graveyard. Suddenly, his mare shifted and refused to move. Father looked around and saw the two figures. He assumed it was Neufeld and his wife. These two often indulged in brandy—it would not surprise him to see them wandering around the graveyard in white clothes.

Father returned home where he heard what Mother and the cook had seen. Whether he also heard about Wiens' experiences that night, I don't know, but he would likely have heard all about them the next day when the story of Grandmother's disappearance was told.

Grandmother was found at the Butendick across from the city of Alexandrowsk, seven Werst (approx. 7 Km) below our village, lying where the water was very shallow. The current could not have carried her this far—apparently she had walked up to there at night. We concluded this from the footprints and from what Mrs. Bernhard Dyck had seen. Why did she have to walk so far?

According to Johann Schellenberg, this is how Grandmother was found. Cousin Heppner, who was also a fisherman, lived in Nieder Chortitza. He took his boat down the Little Dnieper near Burwalde where he met Russian fishermen who told them that they'd seen the body of a dead Jew in the water. 'A Jew is holding Schabes.' they said.

Heppner didn't believe their mocking comments and headed to Chortitza Island to visit his cousins. He pulled his boat ashore and struck out over land to the village. His relatives met him with tear-stained faces and told him that Grandmother had left the house at night; they'd searched everywhere but had not found her. Heppner remembered what the Russians had told him. Quickly, a boat was made ready and a number of men set out to search the area. Towards evening, the boat returned carrying the body of my grandmother. The boat was heaped with branches to provide shade, for it was a very hot day. Helene was buried that same day on the Insel Chortitza cemetery.

This story has been written down by Kornelius Hildebrand, grandson of Helene Hoeppner Hildebrand. The information has been gathered from stories of the relatives, 77 years after the event. My parents never gave direct answers when we asked about this event.

Kornelius Hildebrand.

Transplanted on new and alien soil: a heritage garden

by Lois Klassen

'Mrs. Funk's rhododendron,' over 60 years old

When we first moved to Yarrow, nearly three decades ago, we purchased a small house on a large lot. At the back of the property was a modest, un-insulated barn which, we were told, had housed a Russian widow and her refugee children one bitterly cold winter in the early years of the settlement . The garden and small orchard surrounding the buildings included a collection of perennials, trees, and shrubs which had survived many changes of ownership.

Some of the plants I discovered in that garden were common enough -- plants such as Festiva Maxima peonies, (white, streaked with flecks of red), Queen Elizabeth roses, lilacs, hazelnuts, transparent apples and sour cherries for pie-making. There were, however, many rarer plants such as the wine-brown bearded irises whose colour recalled the plush upholstery of the 1953 Meteor in which my husband had taken me on our first date. There was an old pear tree which bore russet coloured winter fruit with a gritty rind. The fruit was crunchy inside, juicy, impossibly sweet, and excellent for baking. No one we asked could name the cultivar; no one we knew had a pear tree like it, and no pear has ever tasted as good since.

The most unusual and most beautiful plant in the garden was a flowering tree whose weeping branches erupted in a fountain of snowy blossoms in the spring . In the summer, it bore bushels of small red fruits resembling apples but growing in clusters like cherries. Since no one seemed to be able to tell us what the tree was, we didn't dare harvest the fruits. Then, one year, a visiting relative identified the tree as a Siberian crabapple. As a child she had stuffed herself with the bitter fruit of this tree--the only fruit in the harsh Siberian environment of her childhood which her mother could spare for eating fresh. When we subsequently learned that the original owners of our little house had been three sisters from the Reimer nursery family we realized that the Siberian crabapple, the wine coloured irises, and perhaps even the russet pears were likely started from seeds, tubers and cuttings brought over from "the old country".

Eventually we outgrew that small house and moved on to another Yarrow family home - the Funk house on Community Street; a home built and occupied by the Funk supermarket and feed mill family for over forty years before it passed to us . Along with a larger house we gained a larger garden. As with the first property, this second home and garden resonated with memories of its original occupants. An old photo of the house shows Mrs. Funk standing on the front steps. In the foreground of the photo is a small rhododendron shrub next to the front sidewalk. In the 60 years since that photo was taken, the lower branches of the rhododendron have been pruned away to allow people to pass underneath . The friends and relatives helping us move in were forced to duck under those flower-laden branches to reach the front door.

We couldn't take the pear tree with us but I carried divisions of the wine coloured irises to my new garden to plant beside some familiar favourites. Another Queen Elizabeth rose , several decades old, eight feet tall with a trunk as thick as my arm, shot its branches skyward that summer covering itself in pink blooms with three-foot-long stems. In the backyard, we found another transparent apple tree (apparently holding up the small garage) - a tree which it took us a few months to identify, so festooned was it with ivy and covered in lichen and mosses that it resembled an exotic broad-leafed evergreen. Ivy, moss and lichen notwithstanding, it dropped a bumper crop of yellow fruit onto the lawn and has continued to do so for nearly twenty years, in spite of infestations of tent caterpillars and a winter storm that broke off half of its main branches.

Like the venerable apple tree, remnants of long-ago Yarrow gardens in this former Mennonite settlement have survived the vagaries of insects, harsh winters and blistering summers. Shrubs of fragrant weigelia, electric blue hydrangeas and billowing bridal wreath spirea are often all that is left of the gardens that were the proud creations of women with last names like Martens, Funk, Friesen and Reimer in a time when lot sizes were larger, as were the families that lived in the modest houses that lined the streets.

Near the corner of Yarrow Central and Community Street is one such modest house, the former home of choir-director Reimer. His daughter Holda recalls that her mother's garden was a showpiece among showpieces when flower gardening was akin to a competitive sport for the women of the town. Now a double row of spring bulbs -crocuses, snowdrops and grape hyacinths - are all that remain of that once proud accomplishment. They push their blooms up through the hard packed lawn, between the cars parked there, to mark the location of a long lost path to the front door.

Like the Russian widow and her family, many of the people who planted the gardens of Yarrow had survived war, famine, and displacement to be themselves transplanted on a new and alien soil. Yet they endured to bear families and leave a legacy that went beyond utility to beautifying their new surroundings. It is a fitting memorial to these pioneers that some of the fruit trees, shrubs and bulbs they tended have tenaciously survived to bring pleasure to successive generations.

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Enjoy singing the old hymns? We are beginning a series of "Hymn Singing and Platz" evenings in some of our more historic churches, and will begin at Arnold M.B. Church on Sunday, June 11, at 7 P.M.
Anyone interesting in an evening of good singing and good fellowship is welcome to join us. No admission, but a collection will be taken to further the work of the MHS of BC.

Letters from Molochansk, *October 2005*
by Ben Stobbe

This week started with a Sunday morning baptismal service in the Molotschna River. For those of you immersionists who remember the Jordan near Yarrow BC this was a classic repeat. To get to the site I drove along a country road weaving the Lada through a herd of community cows. Shortly after going over a wooden bridge there was a goat-trail on the left that followed the river. I worked my way down a sharp drop off and soon found a group of about 100 huddled along the river facing a brisk wind. As soon as I wanted to step out of the car with my nicely polished black loafers a young girl came running up and kindly pointed out where a cow had deposited 2nd base. Nothing really changes. Mennonite boys are still trying to make spears out of the bulrushes and parents fear the water and keep a keen eye on their children. I imagined that this scene has often been repeated on this river.

The service came to order with the clearing of voices, the gathering of some singers and the appearance of an accordion. A song, words from the Minister, another song, more words, a poem, some shuffling, and then the appearance of the older candidates, older women, dressed in white. There was a railing leading into the water and two wreathes of flowers anchored in the river which had a bit of a current.

After the service I volunteered to take others in the car. Soon I had 4 in the back seat and an ethnic Mennonite woman beside me in the front. She has returned from Kazakhstan to live in Molochansk instead of going to Germany. This is where she grew up and this is where she is staying. We quickly skipped over 60 years of English and Russian and conversed quite well in German.

Other scenes from this week included very different groups who use the facilities at the Mennonite Centre. On Wednesday we had a mom's group from the community. This is a group of young moms who come from the community with their babies for a time of visiting and support. The government recently decided to give an allowance giving families 8000 Grievnas for each baby born. That is about $2,000 Cdn., a tremendous amount, and it's a good time to be mid-wife or an obstetrician. The next best thing to selling strollers. Even in sleepy Molochansk you see young moms pushing the future of the country in front of them.

In the afternoon the neighbourhood kindergarten teacher came in with her little charges and set them up in the computer room. Soon they were drawing away with their paint program. Very few village kids in this entire country have the benefit of such a resource.

On Friday we had a special luncheon for the pensioners. October 1 is National Pensioners' Day, and to celebrate this the kitchen put on an incredible lunch of "ketletin", mashed potatoes, salad, tea and sweets for dessert. Ira, our cook who did most of the work herself, made 120 meatballs, 25 kilos of mashed potatoes, and a massive amount of salad. She peeled all the potatoes--with a knife--by herself. Her husband mashed them. We couldn't feed all the pensioners at one sitting. Virtually none of them can walk easily; they hobble with canes, branches or sticks. A few fortunate ones have hand-propelled wheelchairs, the type where you pull two levers. Some of them are bent over so badly it is

painful just to watch. Mostly women--men don't live to this age. One woman walked sideways, hardly lifting her feet. None came by car. Some came and took the opportunity to use the phone, others sat outside taking in the warm autumn sun. That's what makes this place so dynamic. You can go from strollers to walkers, from moms-to-be to moms-that-were. All have needs and all are thankful.

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I did not realize how important the humble bicycle is until I saw the many different uses for a bike here in Ukraine. In the cities, buses and Marshruta taxis appear very well used, but here in the villages most people walk or ride bike.

In Molochansk there are very few (I have seen perhaps 3 or 4) North American-styled road or mountain bikes. The bikes here are sturdy, generally older one-speed working machines. These are draft horses. They can be used to carry heavy loads--just put the pile of wood, branches, sacks, etc., all on the bike and then walk alongside. Quite an efficient way to carry a cumbersome load. Sometimes the loads are so big the bike can hardly be seen. Other times a person will carry 3-metre boards, pipes, etc., while riding

the bike. People go fishing with their long poles sticking out behind their bikes. Or, cargo is fastened along the side of the bike and then the rider straddles the cargo. It's also amazing to see what can be carried on the back of the bike, including such items as full propane tanks, not the smaller barbeque type we are familiar with, but long, one-foot-wide cylinder types. At times you see big sacks probably containing sugar or flour. I have seen two sacks plus the cyclist. Some people fasten a wagon-like device behind the bike to transport sand, bricks, or even vegetables to market. I suspect that at most, 15% of families in Molochansk have a car.

The bike is also used for family transportation. In the mornings mothers bike their youngsters to day-care/kindergarten. One youngster sits on the bar in front of mom; a second sits on the carrier in the back. There are very few children's bikes. Young kids, boys and girls, will ride an adult girls' bike where they don't have to straddle the top cross bar.

Often kids ride an adult bike, always standing on the pedals because they are too short to sit on the seat. Some of these bikes have a carrier in front where a small child can sit. One of our staff has her two children come to the centre to visit her. The older boy who is probably 8 or 9, pedals with his younger sister, who is barely two, sitting in the carrier upfront. He has to look around her when he pedals. I want to get a picture of them.

The terrain here is prairie-like, and very flat. So a one-speed bike works well. Out in the field you can spot a person herding cows on his bicycle. He scoots around with his one-speed like a cowboy.

A new one-speed Ukrainian- or Russian-made bike costs around 300 UAH, about $80 Cdn. Many people still ride bikes they purchased during Soviet times. These bikes are very basic, easily repaired and last forever. Many of the seats have hardly any leather and people seem to be sitting directly on the springs. Occasionally the only part of the pedal that remains is the metal tube, no rubber pieces. And the bikes are ridden by all. Many older people, even some babushkas who have a hard time walking, still get on a bike. Often you see a husband and wife cycling off to work together on one bike.

To see a young man carefully trying to maintain his balance on the bike while obviously under the influence is quite hilarious. Generally those people ride slowly, carefully and deliberately, but swerve from side to side and are obviously a real danger to themselves. The beauty of the bike of course is that it has it own test of sobriety. Even when really drunk, many can drive a car, but to balance on a bike is another matter.

Bike helmets make as much sense to the locals as seat belts do. How can North Americans speak of freedom when they must bolt themselves to the car or put a rigid bowl on their heads? At night cyclists travel by braille. That must surely be the reason for having so many potholed roads. Once you hit a certain wheel twisting, denture creating, hole, you know where you are in this land of no lights at night. No wonder people see so many stars.

I do not wish for more cars in the villages. A great deal of village charm rides on the retro bike.

Peter J. Klassen: Writing for pure love of writing

by Robert Martens

The first generation of Mennonite creative writers were confronted by the starkly ambivalent sensibilities of their mother culture. On the one hand, Russian Mennonites of the nineteenth century were generally suspicious of the arts. On the other, they were relatively progressive, and reading had become a popular form of entertainment. Peter J. Klassen encountered these contradictions first in Russia and then in Canada, but began to write at an early age and continued to do so, passionately, throughout his lifetime.

He was born on June 7, 1889 in Orloff, Molotschna Colony. When he was four, his family moved to Spat, Crimea which was a centre of Mennonite culture and boasted the first Mennonite newspaper in Russia. Peter was a great lover of learning. He began writing poems and stories, attended a business school in Simferopol and eventually obtained a teacher's diploma. His first teaching assignment was in Ivanovka, near the Volga River. It was here that he met Elisabet (Liese) Loewen, and soon this poorly educated but fiercely intelligent woman became his wife.

Klassen disliked life as an employee. For a time he was a dealer of farm implements, and later an operator of a small flour mill. The Russian Revolution disrupted the Klassen family plans, however, and Peter resumed teaching in Ebenfeld, near Ivanovka. With his natural confidence, Klassen was emerging as a Mennonite leader. He was frequently asked to intercede for young Mennonite men who were being forced into the army. In 1922 a Soviet agricultural representative refused to unlock the granaries in fall, and farmers were becoming desperate. German-speaking Catholics, Lutherans and Mennonites appointed Klassen to travel to Moscow and attempt a resolution. Despite the enormous risk, Klassen agreed, leaving instructions that if he were not to return by a certain date, the farmers were to break open the granaries and plant their seed. In Moscow Klassen managed to convince the Minister of Agriculture of the farmers' case. He returned home to find the crops already six inches high.

These events, later recounted in romanticized form in his novel, *Heimat Einmal* (Once a Homeland), made Klassen a marked man. A Jewish party member, who had been treated kindly by Klassen's parents many years ago, warned Peter that he was on the Soviet blacklist. In 1925, after the necessary bribes, Klassen's family, which now included five children, managed to escape to Moscow and board a cattle train for Riga, Latvia. The family sailed to England and on to Canada, landing in Quebec City and then travelling on by train to Rosthern, Saskatchewan. For the next two years, Peter Klassen did odd jobs, mostly in construction, and directed the building of a church in Hershel, the first to be erected by Russian Mennonite immigrants in Canada. Soon, however, the Mennonite Board of Colonization requested that Klassen minister to ten Mennonite families in Superb, Saskatchewan, where a new property had been purchased. Klassen agreed. He and his family would live here for the next twenty years.

The small prairie town was somewhat stifling for Peter and Liese Klassen, who were more open-minded than most Mennonites of that time. Peter frequently read to his wife, even such authors as Moliére and Freud, far outside the traditional mainstream. The children were permitted to listen to Jack Benny and Hockey Night in Canada on the radio. The Klassen house was so crammed with books that they outnumbered the collection of the Superb library. Meanwhile Peter ministered to three local churches that formed a loose congregation, the *Ebenfelder Gemeinde*. The Klassen family home was frequently jammed with elders and parishioners. Making ends meet was a constant struggle, especially during the dirty thirties, but farm life, certainly not Peter's forté, at least kept the children fed.

Two years after arriving in Superb, Klassen resumed his writing. Preferring to stay indoors during the winter, he spent much of his time reading and writing. The Klassens were extremely committed to the preservation of German, and hosted Low German literary evenings in their home. In his poem, "*Mein Bekenntnis*" (My Creed), Peter expressed his devotion to his heritage:

Das deutsche Wort, die deutsche Treu	The German language, German loyalty,
und meiner Väter Glauben,	and my ancestors' faith,
Die halt' ich fest, wo ich auch sei,	I shall hold fast to these wherever I am,
*Die soll mir keiner rauben!**	and no one shall rob me of them!

These sentiments were regarded with suspicion by the mainstream Canadian society, especially during World War II, and caused the Klassens some trouble.

Klassen wrote extensively for Mennonite publications such as the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Der Bote*, but was perhaps best known for his whimsical children's column, "*Onkel Peters Ecke*" (Uncle Peter's Corner), which appeared in *Der Kinderbote* (Children's Messenger). He was also writing novels, loosely based on his own experiences under the Soviet regime, and often returning to a familiar cast of characters, the Günther family. Klassen's stories are exciting, and frequently feature cliffhanger plots. The language is a solid but limited Mennonite German. A pious theology of salvation is emphasized. Interestingly, female characters are often strong-willed, educated and attractive. The two-volume novel, *Heimat Einmal*, superbly analyzes Berko, a man consumed by desires for power and revenge; Berko is based on the Jewish-Russian individual who helped the Klassens escape the USSR.

By 1948 farming life in Superb was no longer viable for the aging Klassens. From an early age, Peter had been sickly and often in pain from a bad back. Writing rarely brought in more than a pittance. He learned of a bookstore for sale in Yarrow, BC, quickly purchased the property, and made the move to the west coast. Compared to Superb, Yarrow was progressive and intellectually exciting. Friends were easily made, and life was made easier by the fact that Klassen only ministered part-time in the United Mennonite Church. His bookshop was a delight to him; he could frequently be seen sitting at storefront, smoking and conversing with passersby. With his keen interest in world affairs, he came to be regarded as something of an elder. The Mennonite community of Yarrow, however, was in decline, and the bookstore soon went bankrupt. Peter Klassen would never see an end to poverty in Canada.

In 1951 the Canadian Mennonite Conference published 5000 copies of Klassen's novel, *Verlorene Söhne* (Lost Sons), to promote peace principles. The book had been previously written, perhaps in serial form, but now became Klassen's greatest success. It addressed one of his primary passions, the principle of *Wehrlosigkeit* (nonresistance), and in it Klassen struck a prophetic attitude. World War I, Klassen thunders, was a result of monied interests, Mammon. The response of Russian Mennonites to the war was weak and lifeless. The Mennonite community preached salvation, but without the essential element of peace: "*Sie hatten versäumt, ihren Kindern die Wehrlosigkeit im täglichen Leben vorzuleben.*"** (They neglected to live out for their children the principles of peace in their daily lives.)

In January of 1953 Peter Klassen suffered a stroke that partially crippled his writing hand. On the morning of July 17 he told Liese about a dream in which he was in a wonderful and oddly familiar place. Peter went out to help in the raspberry patch; there he suffered a final and fatal stroke. He died two days later and was buried in Yarrow Cemetery. Liese Loewen Klassen was devastated by his death but lived to nearly one hundred, dying in Abbotsford in 1992.

Peter Klassen was one of a pioneering generation of Mennonite writers. Like most others, he managed to overcome the writer's isolation from his audience by emphasizing content over form, ethics over "art for art's sake." Also like the others, he lived in poverty and wrote for the pure love of it. Klassen heard and followed the voice that perhaps artists know best:

Ziehn von der Erde zum Himmel ihn fort,	Drawing him from earth towards heaven,
*--Die Lichtmelodien, das Lied ohne Wort.****	melodies of light, song without words.

[A fuller account of Peter J. Klassen's life will appear in a volume of biographies of Yarrow individuals.]

*Peter J. Klassen, "*Mein Bekenntnis*," in *Unter dem Nordlicht: Anthology of German-Mennonite Writing in Canada*, ed. Georg K. Epp and Heinrich Wiebe (Altona: Friesen Printers, 1977), 27.
** Klassen, *Verlorene Söhne* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, n.d.), 91.
***Klassen, *Nordlicht*, 25.

Photo Gallery: Who are they?

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