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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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Annual Fundraising banquet—

Soviet Mennonite Uprootings: through Communist documents and Mennonite eyes
Speaker: Professor Harvey Dyck. **see pg 2.**

'Dies war einmal die Heimat' LBP photo

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Editorial

History—keeping our story alive—takes many forms. Scholarly essays and lectures are only one aspect. Story abounds in our everyday lives: the plants we grow, the food we eat, our stories, songs, poems and dances. The Great Oak of Chortitza has lived through many stories in its lifetime and there are stories connected with the large variety of plants brought by settlers to this new land. Cooking a 'heritage meal' for children and grandchildren is another way of bringing the past to life. Local cemeteries are rich sources of story.

You can help keep our story alive. Contribute letters, articles, stories to the Roots and Branches. Become a member of the Society. Volunteer at the Archives. Tell stories to your friends, children, grandchildren. Our past is too rich to let die.

Thanks to Lora Sawatsky for her work as contributing editor to Roots and Branches. Lora is now concentrating on her volunteer work at the Archives; her work on the newsletter will be taken over by new board member, Bob Martens. LBP

Future Events

October 14, 2006, 6 pm. Annual Fundraising Banquet At Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church. Speaker: Professor Harvey Dyck. Topic: **Soviet Mennonite Uprootings: through Communist documents and Mennonite eyes.** Tickets are $15 and must be bought in advance from the office or board members. Free shuttle bus service from Garden Park Tower to Eben-Ezer at 5:00 pm.

Professor Dyck is emeritus professor of Russian and East European history at University of Toronto, as well as director of the research program in Czarist and Soviet Mennonite Studies at the Monk Centre for International Studies.

During the last 15 years, he has helped pioneer the retrieval of Mennonite materials from Soviet archives. His books and articles cover international relations, East-European foreign policy, and Mennonite subjects. Some of our readers will be familiar with his book *A Mennonite in Russia; the diaries of Jakob D. Epp, 1851-1880*. Currently, he is preparing a four volume collection of sources on Johann Cornies.

November 11, 2006 Genealogy workshop. . Speaker TBA; call office for details.
November 17, 2006. Bakerview Church, 7 pm. "Controversy, Consensus and Change; Theological Issues in the Mennonite Churches in the 20th Century." Lecturers: Dr. David Ewert (Abbotsford) and Dr. John Neufeld (Winnipeg.)
February 17, 2007. Garden Park Tower. Lecture and quilt show. Speaker: Ron Matthies.

InMagic update from a report by Erica Suderman: As of June, 60 boxes of materials have been described and arranged. Average cost of acid-free materials per box is $25. Because this process is labour intensive, more volunteers have been recruited and trained. Also, the staff has had three in-service training sessions with Linda Willis, and feels confident that they can now produce permanent and professional description and arrangements of our records.

Hymns and Platz in Arnold

When people who've grown up in Arnold meet, they often hug. There were lots of hugs as approximately 165 people attended the hymns and platz evening on June 11 at Arnold MB church. Ushers handed out programs and hymnbooks at the door, since Arnold, like many other churches, now sings 'off the wall.' Ruth Derksen Siemens and her husband Vic, both 'alumni' of Arnold, led in singing a number of familiar hymns. Helen Rose Pauls used a PowerPoint presentation of photographs to tell stories of Arnold's past—there were many smiles and chuckles as people recognized familiar faces. Later there was faspa in the basement, a low-ceilinged room where, at many weddings of the past, it took 3 or 4 'settings' before everyone was served.

It was a comfortable, inspiring evening for those of us who cherish the old hymns. Thanks go to Arnold Church for hosting this event, John Neumann for supplying the photos, and to David Giesbrecht for arranging them in Power Point.

More 'Hymns and Platz' events are being planned in the future. by Louise Bergen Price

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!

Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of Maclure Road Mennonite Cemetery

May 21, 2006

"Today we are experiencing something the author of the Hebrews writes about in Chapter 12:1. We are "encircled.. with such a great cloud of witnesses." The reference is to those who died in faith – and on this sacred plot of ground we are surrounded by hundreds of such witnesses. Individually and collectively they belonged to a community that nurtured us. They have impacted us by their words, their life style and their steadfastness in the face of adversity. As we look at the gravestones of a few individuals this afternoon our minds are flooded with memories of what has been, of instances and happenings associated with people who lie buried here. There are memories of personal kindnesses, of words of encouragement, of selfless love. We remember those who made lasting contributions to the community at large, who promoted visions of what could be and who worked sacrificially to implement those visions. We give free reign to our varied emotions – a sense of loss, tears, perhaps anger, solemnity, pain. Yet there is also joy, celebration and a resolve to carry on, to emulate the lives of those buried here."

These words were read to the more than 200 persons, including many young people, who gathered in the Maclure Road Mennonite Cemetery on 21 May 2006 to participate in the Memorial Cemetery Tour. It was not exactly a balmy day, but the rain held off for the two and one-half hours needed for the tour.

Maclure Mennonite Cemetery is the final resting place for a great many important Mennonite personalities. The selection process proved a formidable task for the organizing committee. Following lengthy discussions and compromises 29 names were chosen. Hard work by volunteers and office staff ensured that participants could follow proceedings from a booklet containing biographical sketches of the persons honoured.

It was inspirational to hear the many stories of selfless dedication to the public good both at home and abroad. In the process the Historical Society also obtained permanent records of individuals whose stories might otherwise have been lost. Perhaps the tour also contributed to a better understanding of the Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren traditions by demonstrating how very similar our stories really are.

The tour concluded with a Faspa at the Bakerview MB Church. The program included a brief Annual General Meeting detailing the Society's activities and projects during 2005. A $500.00 scholarship was presented to Jennifer Dijk for her excellent research on the early story of settlers in the Greendale area.

A short Liturgical service of Scripture and prayer ended the program, but not the lengthy time for visiting and meeting people "from the past." It may be of interest to the readers that the Alberta Mennonite Historical Society sponsored a Memorial Cemetery Tour at the Coaldale Mennonite Cemetery on June 3, 2006.

Submitted by the committee 2006: Ben Braun, Jean Neufeld, Agatha Klassen, Jacob Tilitzky, Hank Klassen, Lillian P. Toews (Chair)

Book Review: James Urry: Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood

(Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006)
reviewed by Robert Martens

For centuries, Mennonites have wrestled with Jesus' cryptic comment, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's": that is, to what extent should a Christian be involved in political affairs? Nevertheless, argues James Urry in *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, Mennonite scholars have generally ignored the political aspects of their own history. Urry's book is an attempt to correct this imbalance. Politics pervades our lives; an analysis based on pure ethnicity is clearly not enough.

In the Schleitheim Articles, the Anabaptists rejected participation in the structures of power, and regarded government as merely "custodial," as an institution founded on violence and therefore better left to its own devices. In time this position softened – Menno Simons, for example, was equivocal on this issue – but many Mennonites remained a separatist people. A second stream developed, however, as some Mennonites engaged with political structures and attempted to develop their ideas within the institutions of the "world." These two polarities, separatism and involvement, would incite a furious debate that has lasted in the Mennonite world until the present day and often resulted in acrimony and schism.

In 1944 Harold Bender contended that the "Anabaptist vision" was among the first historical declarations of separation of church and state. Urry questions this. Anabaptists / Mennonites never intended anything so secular, he argues. Rather, they generally took a more passive approach, rejecting involvement in all the "things of this world." This may be, in fact, the central thesis of Urry's book. The bureaucratic state has been historically perceived by Mennonites as the real threat to their church and community. Consequently they sought special protection through "privilegia," legal agreements established with lords, kings, czars, and eventually political authorities in North and South America. The Mennonites' passive sectarian approach was primarily imperiled not by a religious inquisition, but by the rise of the nation state, with its constitution and equal rights for all individuals, and its consequent rationalism, disconnection from the social, and its definition of religion as something private and emotional.

The Mennonite emigration to Russia in and after 1789 was an attempt to delay history. Europe was rapidly transforming itself into the modern nation state, and Mennonites hoped to avoid these developments by moving into the backward east. The Manifesto of Catherine the Great issued in 1763 had guaranteed freedom of religion and exemption from military duty for new immigrant groups, but the special Privilegium granted by Czar Paul to the Mennonites in 1800 was even more explicit on issues such as the military and taking of oaths. The Privilegium was regarded with such veneration by Mennonites that it was kept on permanent display in Chortitza.

But the inevitable could not be delayed. Even as the Mennonite "*Völklein*" took governmental regulations and made them their own, the bureaucracy of the Russian state was becoming increasingly powerful. The work of Johann Cornies, the gifted and often despised Mennonite organizer, was an attempt to solidify the status of the colonies within the bureaucratic structure. And the Great Reforms (1861 – 1881) of Czar Alexander II made it quite clear that law was for everyone, and that the special status of privilegia was a thing of the past. The Mennonite response was usually one of turmoil. The most traditionalist left for Canada in the 1870s. The Mennonite Brethren attempted, among other things, to integrate more fully into the mainstream Russian culture, and in so doing frequently quarreled virulently with the "*kirchlichen*" from whom they had separated. Mennonites in Russia finally met to draw up a common constitution in 1917, but by that time it was too late. The nightmare of the Soviet Union was about to begin.

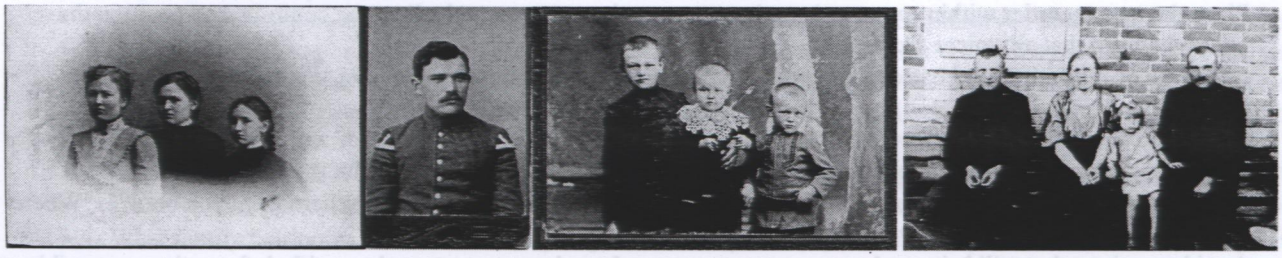
The Mennonite emigrants to North America in the 1870s, suspicious of the republican politics of the United States, generally chose Canada as their destination under the naive misconception that Queen Victoria would grant them a privilegium there. The most traditional, such as the Kleine Gemeinde, refused even to vote in their new land, but other Mennonites, particularly in the West Reserve of Manitoba, were soon involved in politics. Urry describes in fascinating detail the machinations of Conservative and Liberal politicians in their attempts to corner the Mennonite vote in Manitoba. During World War I, however, Mennonites were briefly disenfranchised in Canada. They soon became the "quiet in the land," and many again moved on in the 1920s when legislation focused on educational issues threatened their way of life.

The Russländer refugees of the 1920s brought with them a sophistication and level of education quite foreign to the Kanadier immigrants of the 1870s. After their devastating experiences in the USSR, the Russländer also bore a hatred of all things socialist, and some embraced a concept of universal "Germanness" often characterized by anti-Semitism.

The *Mennonitische Rundschau* in fact published articles in the 1930s in support of Hitler. The grinding poverty Mennonites experienced in Canada, their nostalgia for their Russian homeland, the failure to establish traditional colonies in Canada, and a chronic distrust of democracy all helped account for the excesses of the "Germanness" movement, but this period remains a black mark in Mennonite history. Urry does not spare the rod. The "Golden Age" of Russia, he asserts, was a fantasy created in retrospect that cloaked the deep divisions experienced in the "Mennonite Commonwealth." The "organizational genius" attributed to Russländer was sometimes scarred by inflated claims to power and support of Nazism. Mennonites, Urry maintains, often demanded privilege while neglecting concomitant responsibilities, and at these times might better be called "the loud in the land."

James Urry's *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood* is written in a rather dense academic style and sometimes lacks a passion that would galvanize his story. His concentration in the last third of the book on politics in Manitoba and Winnipeg may make the book less interesting for readers in other parts of the world. But Urry brings his readers the gift of bringing the raw and seamy currents of politics to light. Mennonites have often abandoned realism and interpreted their story too piously. Urry's difficult but fascinating book does much to rectify the whitewashing of their turbulent history.

Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood is available at the MHS Archives.



Remembering and Recording: Oral History Interviews

by Ruth Derksen Siemens

"If we do not remember, we cannot respond" (Mary K. Deeley, 2000).

Memories are important — they encapsulate attitudes and beliefs, wisdom and knowledge that lie at the heart of a person's identity and experience. Stories we collect are valuable not necessarily because they represent historical facts, but because they embody human values and truths — a particular way of looking at the world.

Oral History, verbal story telling, is the most traditional way of learning history. The first historians were people who told stories of their experiences and those of their ancestors as far back as they could remember. We need to remember what history is. History is not only to be found in documents, letters or textbooks, but also in the memory of people who witnessed or lived through events. It's not just a collection process – it's also a theory of history (ethnography) which maintains that the common folk and the powerless have a history as well as those who are famous, or those who are the "conquerors."

The following is a brief guide to interviewing:

Before the Interview

1. Schedule a time and place to conduct the interview. If you plan to use a tape recorder, ask permission.
2. Explain the purpose of the interview, and what will happen to the tapes and/or notes afterwards.
3. Conduct some background research at libraries, archives, and on the internet. Books, pamphlets, photographs, maps, and family documents provide information on your subject and assist in planning questions,
4. Prepare a list of questions. Make sure they are open-ended. Avoid questions that elicit simple yes or no answers. Questions that begin with "How" "What" or "Why" usually elicit a more complete response than questions that begin with "Do" or "Did." For example, "How did you travel to Canada?" or "What was it like to travel?" instead of "Did you like traveling?"
5. Know which questions are central to your subject, but don't be limited to your list. Questions are meant simply to help focus and guide the interview.
6. Structure the interview. Think of the interview as a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Build on your questions and link them together in a logical way.

Equipment

Tape-recording supplemented by note-taking are the most useful methods of recording: tape-recording allows you to do more complete documentation, and captures the inflections, tone, pauses, and other subtleties of performance. A small cassette tape recorder with either a built-in or an external (plug-in) microphone is a good choice. Use high-quality 60-or 90-minute cassettes (longer tapes can stretch or break). Bring spare cassettes, an extension chord and batteries (in case of limited electrical outlets).

A camera also captures a visual record of the person you are interviewing or objects that assist in telling the story (quilt, artifacts). A zoom lens attachment is useful for documenting old family photographs, letters, birth records, or scrapbooks. A video camera can capture and visually record the activities and the interview itself, but not all subjects are comfortable with this medium.

During the Interview

- Wherever stories are told and traditional customs observed can be places to interview (the home, workplace, church hall, community centre).
- Begin by providing interviewees with your name and telephone number. Discuss the purpose of the interview and describe the nature of your project.
- Place the tape recorder within easy reach so that you can change tapes and adjust the controls, and position the microphone so that all voices are heard.
- Eliminate or minimize loud background noises (radio, television, street noise, a loud-ticking clock, clattering dishes).
- To test the equipment, tape a few seconds of counting or conversation. Re-wind tape and orally label the tape by recording your name, your subject's name, the date, the location, and the topic of the interview.
- An opening question that will help put your subject at ease is often biographical: "Where were you born?", "Where did you grow up?" or "What is your earliest memory?"
- Avoid questions that will bring only a yes or no response. In order to get as much specific information as possible, be sure to ask follow-up questions: "Could you explain?" "Can you give me an example?" or "How did that happen?"
- Show interest and listen carefully to what your subject is saying. Keep eye contact and encourage him or her with nods or smiles, but avoid any verbal interruptions (mm's. oh's, ah's and giggles)
- Participate in the conversation without dominating it. Don't be afraid of silences — give the person you are interviewing time to think and respond. Be prepared to detour from your list of questions if necessary.
- Visual materials can stimulate memories: old photographs, family photo albums, scrapbooks, letters, birth certificates, family Bibles, tools, heirlooms, and mementos can trigger stories.
- Don't turn the tape recorder on and off while the interview is in progress. Not only are you likely to miss important information, but it disturbs the flow of the story.
- Number each tape as you take it out of the tape recorder. More specific information is best added later.
- Near the end of the interview, take a quick look over your prepared list of questions to see if you've covered everything important to the story.
- Be sensitive to the needs of your interviewee. If he or she is getting tired, stop the interview and schedule another session. Between one and two hours is usually the right amount of time for an interview.

Sample Questions: Biographical

- What is your name? Where and when were you born? Where did you grow up? Where have you lived? What jobs have you had?

Sample Questions: Family Folklore

- What do you know about your family name? Are there stories about its history or origins? Has it undergone any changes? Are there any stories about those changes? Are there any traditional first names or nicknames in your family? What are they? How did they come about? Are there any naming traditions? What are they?
- Do you know any stories about how your family first came to Canada? Where did they first settle? Why? How did they make a living? Did your family stay in one place or move around? How did they come to live in this area?

- If your interviewee is a first-generation immigrant, you might ask: Why did you leave to come to Canada? What possessions did you bring with you and why? What was the journey like? Which family members came along or stayed behind? What were some of your first impressions and early experiences in this country? What traditions or customs have you made an effort to preserve? Why? Are there traditions that you have given up or changed? Why?
- What languages do you speak? Do you speak a different language in different settings, such as home, school, or work? Are there any expressions, jokes, stories, celebrations where a certain language is always used? Can you give some examples?
- Do you know any courtship stories? How did your parents, grandparents, and other relatives come to meet and marry?
- What are some of your childhood memories? What games did you play when you were a child? Did you sing verses when you played games? What were they? What kinds of toys did you play with? Who made them? Did you make any yourself? How did you make them? What kinds of materials did you use? What kind of home entertainment was there? Was there storytelling? Music? Were there craft traditions?
- Does your family have any special sayings or expressions? What are they? How did they come about?
- How are holidays traditionally celebrated in your family? What holidays are the most important? Are there special family traditions, customs, songs, foods? Has your family created its own traditions and celebrations? What are they? How did they come about?
- What special food traditions does your family have? Have any recipes been preserved and passed down in your family from generation to generation? What are they? What are their origins? Have they changed over the years? How? Have any of the ingredients been adapted or changed? Why? Are there certain foods that are traditionally prepared for holidays and celebrations? Who makes them? Are there family stories connected to the preparation of special foods?
- Does your family hold reunions? When? Where? Who attends? How long have the reunions been going on? What activities take place? Is there a central figure who is honored? Why? What sorts of stories are told at these events?
- What family heirlooms or mementos do you possess? Why are they valuable to you? What is their history? How were they handed down? Are there any memories or stories connected with them?
- Do you have any photo albums, scrapbooks, home movies? Who made them? When? Can you explain their contents? Who is pictured? What activities and events are documented?

After the Interview

- The person you interviewed needs to sign a written release that provides permission to comply with any restrictions requested. Always ask permission to use the results of the interview in the ways you both agree on. It is important to respect confidences and privacy.
- Label all your tapes and notes with the date, person's name, location of the interview, your name, project title, and any brief thematic information that might be helpful.
- Consider preparing a tape log (topic-by-topic summary) of the contents of the recording after the interview. You can use the counter on the tape recorder to note the location of each new topic. With this tape log, you will later be able to go back and select portions of the tape to listen to and transcribe (word-for-word translation of the tape-recorded interview). Complete tape transcriptions are important, but they are also very time-consuming. A good compromise is to do a combination of logging and transcribing: log the general contents of the tape and transcribe, word for word, the parts that you think you might want to quote directly.
- Store the tapes in a safe place where they are protected from heat, water, and other damage.
- Consider sharing your findings (with the permission of the interviewee). You may simply want to index and/or transcribe your tape-recorded interviews and store your materials in a safe place where you and other members of your family or community can have easy access to them, such as a local archive, school library, historical society, or community organization. Or you might want to organize and share your information with others by writing a family history, organizing an exhibition, compiling a family scrapbook, or making a memory quilt, publishing a newsletter or magazine, or producing a video documentary.
- Consider sending a written thank you to the person you interviewed and, if possible, include a copy of the tape(s).

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Scholarship winner: Congratulations to UCFV student Jennifer Dijk who has been awarded the first MHSBC scholarship. More about Jennifer and her research project will follow in the next newsletter.

The Great Oak of Chortitza

by Helen Rose Pauls

Most of us associate the city of Chortitza with the 'great oak.' Once a massive tree in the center of the village, it is often depicted sheltering children on its lower branches with young mothers and baby carriages resting in its shade, or lovers circling it for good luck. Surrounded by grass and flowers in a park-like setting, it evokes stories from the past.

The first scouts to the region from Prussia are said to have wintered beneath it. Later, it became the meeting place, the focal point of village life as population grew, and has become mythic in proportion.

According to N. J. Kroeker's *First Mennonite Villages in Russia*, it shaded two acres with its mighty branches in full leaf, and a sense of "reverence and peace could be found beneath this tree, which cast a spell like the biggest cathedrals in Europe." (Kroeker, p. 194) The tree sheltered wedding receptions, family celebrations and numerous large gatherings.

Formerly on land owned by the Gerhard Braun family, the tree and its surrounding acreage became part of a public park after the 1930's.

Although the tree is called 'The Hundred Year Old Oak', Soviet scientists estimate it to be 700 years old. In Henry Pauls' *A Sunday Afternoon*, the artist entitles his painting of the tree, "The 700 Year Old Oak, Chortitza."

The tree so captured the imagination of the villagers at one point, that Kornelius Hildebrandt constructed a wooden collar which he fashioned around the oak's trunk, with coil springs and a sliding pointer and scale which measured its yearly expansion.

"But, the mighty oak - which measures 118.8 feet in height and 21 feet in width at the base, and has a 142-foot branch span - is dying. And, it can no longer tell tales of bygone days, years, centuries and eras." (http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/1996/399609.shtml accessed 2006/07/26) H. Pauls, photos.

Over the last decades, visitors to the Chortitza homeland have brought back many pictures of this monumental tree. They have also quietly brought back acorns and seedlings kept alive in the farthest corners of overstuffed suitcases, wrapped securely in moistened handkerchiefs.

Some of these have survived and are being enjoyed in the flowerbeds and backyards of Mennonite travelers living in the Fraser Valley. Three healthy trees grow in one yard on Sumas Prairie alone, and 'grand-parented' seedlings are being grown by another local historian.

In 1971, *Mennonite Life* states "The big oak tree is a living specimen of an exciting past….having withstood drought, flood, malicious caterpillars and the axe of that enemy of nature, man." Unfortunately, those of us who have visited this tree recently have witnessed its destruction. One green branch remains on a bare broken skeleton. A former Vernon orchardist believes that its death can be attributed to the fact that the trunk was covered up to the depth of several feet with earth during the park's renovation.

"Grandchild" of the Great Oak.

Perhaps the demise of the magnificent oak parallels the demise of our people on the rolling steppes of distant memory. Perhaps the flourishing younger trees on the Sumas Flats represent the fruition of hope of our forebears who came to this country.

Seven-Hundred Year Old Oak—some noteworthy dates in its life

1-99 years	1300? An acorn falls to the ground in Chortitza; an oak tree sprouts
	1328 Marco Polo dies
100 years	1415 Jan Hus burned for heresy; 1483 birth of Martin Luther
	1492 Columbus 'discovers' America; Ferdinand and Isabella expel all Jews from Spain
200 years	1536 Menno Simons leaves the Catholic church
	1556 Cossacks laid foundation for military fort on Chortitza Island
300 years	1600's movement of 'Dutch' Mennonites to the Danzig area
	1610 Galileo proves the Copernican system in which the planets circle the sun
	1613 Michael Romanov starts Romanov dynasty which lasts until the Russian Revolution
	1697 Czar Peter visits western Europe
400 years	1729 birth of Sophie Augusta Frederike of Anhalt-Zerbst, later Catherine II (the Great)
	1776 Cossacks expelled from Chortitza Island
	1789 Mennonite immigrants shelter under Great Oak
500 years	1812 Napoleon invades Moscow; forced to retreat
	1861 Czar Alexander proposes to abolish personal serfdom (half of population)
	1863 emancipation of slaves in United States. 1867 Canada becomes a nation
	1890's *Russification* and compulsory service introduced; thousands of Mennonites emigrate
600 years	1914-1920 Great War. Russian Revolution. Civil war (fighting, epidemics, and starvation linked to this war cause 20 million deaths in Russia.)
	1921 Russian Famine. Birth of MCC. Lenin's New Economic Policy. Thousands hope to emigrate.
	1929 Stalin becomes dictator. End of Mennonite migration out of USSR.
	1931-33 Stalin engineers artificial famine in Ukraine in which 7-10 million Ukrainian die
	1937-38 Stalin's Great Terror
	1941 Germany invades Ukraine. 1943 Germany retreats, Mennonites flee USSR along with retreating Germans, ending this era of Mennonites in Ukraine.
	1989 Bicentennial of Mennonite arrival in Ukraine; hundreds of Mennonites tour area
	1991 Collapse of Soviet Union. Great Oak begins to decline
700 years	2000 Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine is established in Molochansk.

Rustling for plants

by Lois Klassen

I spend too much money in garden centers --what gardener doesn't? -- yet the plants I treasure most are those that cost me nothing but time and patience; they were gleaned from other people's old, established gardens.

One of these is a small lilac bush that started as a sucker dug out of the ground at the base of an ancient shrub in a friend's garden. Hoping that my sucker would bloom true to type, I nursed it along in a pot for a year. It was two more years before my patience was rewarded with a highly scented cluster of creamy blossoms exactly like those of the parent bush. The flowers appear white, but white does not describe their luscious depth of colour. Reminiscent of clotted cream or the warm colour of antique linen sheets, the blossoms of this shrub combine amicably with every other plant in my garden.

Near the small lilac, there is a clump of bearded iris which blooms a very peculiar shade of maroon; a color that recalls the velvety upholstery of a 1940's era overstuffed couch. Unlike the companionable lilac, this plant is not a social success in the garden. If this iris were a student her report card would say, "must learn to get along with others," yet I love her for her odd, compelling colour. This plant began as a small rhizome, carried from my first house, an old cottage in Yarrow that had once belonged to the "nursery Reimers", themselves transplanted from their home in Russia. For all I know, clumps of this odd iris may be common as borscht in every babushka's garden in Eastern Europe but to me it is a plant of rare beauty. Planted near flowers more ordinary in colour, my unnamed iris is an aristocrat among the peasants. The only places in which I've ever seen this plant growing are the gardens of my friends who have received

rhizomes as a gift from me. By giving away pieces of my garden to my friends, I hope they will be reminded of our friendship as I am each time I pass the plants that others have given me.

Some years ago, a gardening friend and neighbor died of cancer. Before her old house was sold, her son gave me permission to retrieve a few gallica-type roses growing in among the waist high weeds of the vegetable beds. I planted them in a temporary nursery bed in my own vegetable garden where they proved to be terrible mildew magnets and did not produce a single bloom for the first few years. My neighbour had thought enough of that particular variety to go to the trouble of rooting a whole row of them , I reasoned, so I ought to allow them bed-room in my garden in honour of her. When, eventually they bloomed, I discovered they were one of my favourite varieties - the "Charles de Mills" rose - ancient in heritage, deep magenta in colour with abundant, perfectly swirled petals around a central eye, and fragrant enough to give a person a headache. I also discovered the probable reason this rose has survived through the ages - - its prodigious ability to sucker into neighbouring beds which also explained its presence in my neighbour's vegetable beds.

Another fragrant old rose I am nursing along is one which I call the Mrs. Tjart Rose. It came as a cutting from one of my school friends who inherited her parents' Clearbrook garden. This rose, whose true name I don't know, is red, highly scented, and has an old fashioned muddled form. Mrs. Tjart rooted her plant from a cutting. Her daughter, like her mother before her, is doing her part to ensure the survival of this mysterious rose by sharing cuttings with friends.

Friends aren't the only source of plant material. The American Pillar and a Chevy Chase which are rambling over a rustic arbour in my back garden were acquired when I "helped myself' to a few cuttings from the roadside fence of a nearby army base.

Helping oneself to cuttings is known in some gardening circles as plant rustling and has been legitimized through nonprofit societies such as the Rose Rustlers in Texas who make a mission of finding and propagating old varieties of roses by visiting abandoned farms and old graveyards. (It bears mentioning, of course, that the original plants are left in the ground unharmed and only small "slips" are carefully taken with sharp pruners for propagation purposes.) In this way, I also helped myself to a beautiful crimson polyantha climber - probably Crimson Showers - that was growing in a thicket of blackberries near the Vedder River. The rose has lived up to its name, showering blossoms generously along the length of a cedar fence.

The amount of effort and patience required to produce plants in this way doesn't seem very worthwhile by today's standards of efficiency, yet, thrift aside, it provides a link to old gardens and old friends which is priceless. The sharing of plant "slips" is something I remember my grandmother and mother doing. In my garden the "army base roses" bloom alongside plants which were acquired more legitimately: Mrs. Tjart's rose, Rebecca's lilac, Elizabeth's lemon lilies, Charla's hardy geraniums and the wine coloured irises from the Reimer sisters' garden.

This year, I planted a pale pink, climbing rose that was given to me by a friend who lives on Sumas mountain. She found the parent plant growing up a tree in the forest near the Straiton Community Hall. I imagine a settler planted that rose. Soon it will festoon Mrs. Funk's old apple tree in the Klassen's garden in Yarrow.

Kjen Jie noch Plautdietsch? Low German Names for Flowers, Vegetables and Fruit

Stinknaäjeltje–Marigolds
Steefmurrakje–Pansy
Je länja, Je lieva–Sweet William
Stockroos–Hollyhock
Feiltje–Violets
Roose-Roses
Päppakruit–Summer savory
Schesnick–Garlic
Süaromp–sorrel

Schaubel-Bean
Komst–Cabbage
Bockeljzhonn–Tomatoes
Eeadschocke–Potatoes
Zippeln–Onions
Päppaschoete–Peppers
Gurkj-Cucumber
Peetaselj-Parsley
Dell-Dill

Aupell-Apple
Bäre-Pears
Plüme-Plums
Kjorsch-Cherry
Orbüs-Watermelon
Jaalmere-Carrots
Kjrekjle–Damson plums
Auppelkose-apricot
Mülbaa-Mulberry

by Louise Bergen Price. Most Low German spellings according to *Kjenn Jie Noch Plautdietsch? A Mennonite Low German Dictionary* by Herman Rempel http://www.mennolink.org/cgi-bin/dictcgi. Accessed Aug 1, 2006.

The way we ate in 1914: "A Typical Russian Mennonite Menu
(from manuscript in possession of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC) translated by John B. Toews.

Around 1980 J. G. Neufeld of Fresno, California allowed me to Xerox a manuscript in his possession compiled by a D. Peters. He did not supply me with any further information about the author, who provides varied descriptions of pre-revolutionary Russian Mennonite life. Neufeld had a life-time interest in things Russian Mennonite. My long time research assistant, Katherine Hooge of Saskatoon made an excellent transcription of sections of the manuscript in 1981.[1]

July, August, September		
Sunday	Breakfast	White coffee, tea, fruit *Platz*
	Lunch	Roast mutton with fruit, potatoes, fruit juices, bread
	Fesper	Tea, fruit juice, rhubarb *Platz*
	Supper	**Buttersuppe**[2], buttered brown bread
Monday	Breakfast	White coffee, fruit *Platz, Ruehrei*
	Lunch	**Kjieltje**, fried ham, brown bread, watermelons, melons, *Bulki*
	Fesper	White coffee, white bread with rhubarb marmalade
	Supper	Cooked barley porridge, butter, brown bread
Tuesday	Breakfast	White coffee, *Ruehrei*, white bread, syrup
	Lunch	Green bean soup and *Schnetki*
	Fesper	Watermelons, melons, *Bulki*, syrup
	Supper	Buttermilk *Mus*, buttered bread, eggs
Wednesday	Breakfast	White coffee, *Schnetki*, fried potatoes, brown bread
	Lunch	Rhubarb *Mus*, fried ham, brown bread
	Fesper	Watermelons, melons, *Bulki*
	Supper	**Cherry *Mus***, fried potatoes, brown bread
Thursday	Breakfast	White coffee, white bread, marmalade
	Lunch	Cherry *Wareniki* with sauce (sunflower oil with cream)
	Fesper	Watermelons, melons, *Bulki*, butter
	Supper	Boiled potatoes in jackets with gravy (sunflower oil with cream)
Friday	Breakfast	White coffee, white bread, syrup, fried potatoes, brown bread
	Lunch	Rhubarb *Piroschki*, thick sour milk
	Fesper	Watermelons, melons, *Bulki*, butter
	Supper	Sweet boiled milk with bread, **Glomskuchen**
Saturday	Breakfast	White coffee, white bread, *Ruehrei*, brown bread
	Lunch	Beans fried in onion fat, clabbered milk, brown bread
	Fesper	Watermelons, melons, *Bulki*, butter
	Supper	*Armer Ritter*, sweet milk with bread crumbs

There were several things that I found interesting about the menu aside from its calorie count.

1. The rarity of roast chicken, beef and mutton on the menu. If the menu is somewhat representative the use of eggs must have been rather liberal. Peters cites 150 chickens as normal for summer, down to 75 in winter , by spring to 40. Why did the flock not make it to the dinner table more often? Meat (usually pork) as a major item on the menu is rare.
2. The seasonal use of watermelons and melons is well documented in the July and October menus. Peters estimated that the average farm produced 500 pood (8190 kilograms) of watermelons. Since watermelons are a known diuretic and since they were consumed at Fesper one wonders about calm and restful nights in the Russian Mennonite home.
3. Special thanks to Lydia Janz/Toews and her consultants and to Agatha Klassen. They helped to enlarge my knowledge of Russian Mennonite foods.

[1] This menu is also found in First Mennonite Villages in Russia, pp. 80-81. (N.J. Kroeker, 1981); in several cases, I have substituted Kroeker's translation of the food item. (ed.)

[2] Recipes of items in bold print are found on page 12.

Recipes

Birnenmus (Pear soup)[3]

Pour 1 litre of milk into saucepan, add 1 pint canned pears. Mix ½ cup sugar with 3 heaping teaspoons flour and 1/3 cup milk into a smooth paste. Add to pear/milk mixture. Heat and stir till thickened. Serve with Glomskuchen.
In the same way you can make other fruit soups.

Glomskuchen (Cottage cheese cakes)[4]

375 gram dry curd cottage cheese, 1 egg,
1 teaspoon baking powder, 3 heaping tablespoons flour,
pepper and salt to taste
Mix ingredients, form into patties, fry in butter until done.

Buttersuppe (Butter soup)[5]

6 cups water, 1 medium potato, 1 cup noodles,
2 Tablespoons chopped onion, 3 stems parsley,
2 bay leaves, salt & pepper to taste
When vegetables are done, add
½ cup whipping cream, 1 Tablespoon butter, and serve.

Sauerkraut Suppe[6]

Boil 1 ham bone or pork hock in 8-10 cups of water
Add: 1 large onion, chopped. 1 bay leaf, ¼ cup pot barley, 2 chopped carrots, 2-4 potatoes, 1 red or green pepper.
When potatoes are partly done, add
2-3 cups sauerkraut, dill and parsley. Cook until potatoes and sauerkraut are tender.
Serve with sour cream .

Grünen Borscht (Green Borscht)[7]

Boil 1 ham bone in 8-10 cups of water
Add: 1 large onion, 1 bay leaf, ¼ cup pot barley,
2 carrots, 2-4 potatoes, 1 sweet pepper.
Cook until potatoes are tender. Add 2-2 ½ cups sorrel, dill, and parsley. Cook a few minutes more.
Before serving, add 1 ½ to 2 cups buttermilk or sour cream. Guten Appetit!

[3] Irene Bergen
[4] Irene Bergen
[5] Irene Bergen
[6] Mika Bergen
[7] Mika Bergen

Wassersuppe (Water Soup)[8]

Boil salted water with bay leaf. Add *kjlietja* (tiny noodles made by mixing a bit of water into 1 cup of flour and a pinch of salt, and working to form crumbs.) Cook until kjlietja are done.
If you are lucky enough to have some fat, fry an onion and add to the soup. Of course, Kjieltje will taste much better if you can make them with egg instead of water. (1 egg to 1 cup of flour and a pinch of salt).
In the famine years, we ate Wassersuppe every day.

The Whole Steppe before the Fall

by Elsie K. Neufeld

My mother at twelve sits in the shade of an acacia
its wide bole worn as the Ukrainian steppe behind
the rich land bearing far less than this tree its branches
bent low and seed dropped in her apron meals

every day now water and bones boiled over
and over for soup. Knives and forks long ago hidden
my mother pretending her hunger is gone, and afterwards
eating more blossoms. Tongue against teeth like plough

turning fields under a star-and-sickle flagged sky and she
every day wanting more. Lips chapped, her people
and land bled by famine and she not yet a woman.
Bloated, like the roots of the tree and hungry, so

hungry, my mother at twelve ponders the limbs'
rhythmic squeak and cracked bark then remembers
her father. A loud knock after dark, his hand
in her hair as he told her a story of manna

falling to earth and in its aftermath, quail.
His last whispered words a prayer in her ear
Let none of them starve.

My mother at twelve, her tongue swollen
and teeth filled with grit, swallows again
and again a husk caught
in her throat.

from *Half in the Sun: Anthology of Mennonite Writing. forthcoming October, 2006.* *(See p. 17)*

[8] Irene Bergen

Sam Martin Went to Prison

During World War II, over 10,000 young men from various backgrounds wanted to serve their country in ways that did not include bearing arms. These Conscientious Objectors (COs) worked on farms, in industry, as medics (some on or near the battle fronts), or in alternative service camps. Others, like Samuel V. Martin, were sentenced to jail time. Sam Martin Went To Prison *is the moving account of a young man who stayed true to his beliefs through adversity and with the support of his community. The complete story can be found in the book by William Janzen and Frances Greaser or on line at www.alternativeservice.ca*

The young man stood before the elevated judge's bench, trying to convince Justice Harvey that he was sincere in his beliefs. He was a member of Duchess Mennonite Church in Alberta, attended regularly, and agreed with his church and the Bible that killing was wrong. Judge Harvey was not convinced. He sentenced Sam Martin to thirty days in Lethbridge jail after which he would be handed over to the military. If, however, he joined the Merchant Marines, he would remain a free man. Martin said no – his convictions would not allow it.

On April 4, 1944 Sam was arrested and taken to Brooks where he was handcuffed and walked across town to the train station. On the train he remained shackled and under guard. He was placed in a jail in Calgary where he was photographed, finger printed, and searched. A few days later he was taken to Lethbridge. Here he did various jobs but was lonely and worried what would happen to him.

Before the 30 days were finished he was sent to the Currie Military Barracks where he was met by the Regimental Sergeant Major who instructed him to wear a military uniform. Sam declined. The sergeant snarled and shouted, "You will wear a uniform! I am in charge here, and there has never been a person under my control whom I haven't been able to break! Take off your clothes and put on an army uniform or go naked!"

After Sam quietly and respectfully refused, he was sentenced to solitary confinement and a diet of bread and water - three days bread and water, three days regular food. The cell was brightly lit all the time and bare except for a pail for a toilet. When he wanted to sleep he was given blankets. The only clothes he had was his underwear.

Sam was determined to remain steadfast; his faith in God would carry him through. When the guards noticed that he did not put on the uniform they turned off the heat in his cell. When there was still no change in Sam's actions, they opened the window, allowing in the cool spring air. Sam closed the window. The guards stormed in, yelling, swearing and threatening him. They opened the window; when they left, Sam closed it again. After a number of attempts the guards gave up, but kept the heat in the cell off.

At the end of his sentence, guards forced Sam into a uniform. He was so weak he could not resist. They led him away in handcuffs and took him to the Mewata barracks in Calgary. Once alone, and with much fear, he took off the uniform. Again he was charged with disobeying an order. While Sam remained strong in his convictions, the poor diet, the chill, lack of clothing, poor sleeping conditions, and worry about the future were taking their toll.

He was again sentenced to solitary confinement in a 5 x 7 foot cell, with a drinking cup and a pail. He wore only his underwear but could have put on the uniform at any time. At 10 pm he was given three blankets which were taken away each morning at six. For hours he would sit in a corner with his arms wrapped around his legs. Or he would pace, three steps forward and three steps back. He wondered if his friends and family had forgotten about him; he received no news from the outside.

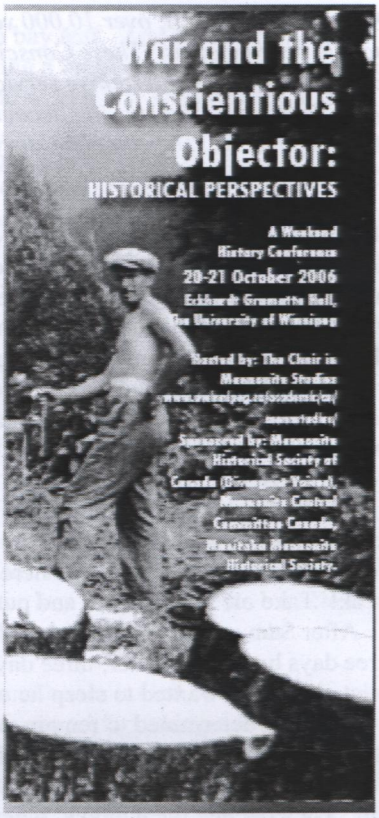
His friends and family had not forgotten about him. They prayed and wrote letters to him and to the officials on his behalf. One day the guards decided to give Sam his mail. They threw 45 letters into his cell. Sam was overjoyed and wept. Reading the letters gave him strength and hope.

At the end of his second 28-day sentence he again was asked to put on his uniform; again he refused. This time he was taken before a tribunal where his pastor served as his character witness. In the end he was sentenced to another 90 days in the dreaded Currie Army Barracks. He was again mistreated but due to pressure from his community, Mennonite and non-Mennonite clergy, and a doctor who had deep concerns about his long-term health, he was treated more favorably in the latter portion of his third sentence and in his other terms.

Sam Martin endured several more prison terms. On May 8, 1945 Canada ceased to be at war in Europe. On November 8, 1945 Sam was given an industrial leave to work in his brother's garage and on April 12, 1946 he was formally discharged from the military. In total Sam served over 18 months in prison, at times in very difficult circumstances – but remained true to his convictions throughout his entire experience.

- summarized by Conrad Stoesz

War and the Conscientious Objector: A History Conference. October 20 and 21, 2006



During the Second World War, 10,000 Canadians sought alternatives to military service. Their story remains virtually untold, having been largely relegated to short print-run books and contributions to archival collections.

On October 21 - 22, 2006, a history conference will highlight the experience of Canadian conscientious objectors in the Second World War, when about 60% of Mennonite men who were called to military service refused to participate in active military service. Instead, they sought options for alternative service through a program negotiated by Mennonite leaders with the Canadian Federal Government.

Though their experience reflects Mennonite church teachings, many people know nothing or very little about the story and significance of the conscientious objectors, even within the Mennonite community.

This conference will take a critical look at the experience of the Canadian conscientious objector in the Second World War and interpret it in today's context, a time in which war is widely offered as a way to peace and democracy.

The *War and the Conscientious Objector* conference will feature speakers from a wide variety of backgrounds. Planners have invited speakers from BC to Quebec, from various Mennonite denominations as well as from the Jehovah's Witness, Doukhobor and Quaker denominations. In addition experts on pacifism in Canada, university students, peace activists and Second World War conscientious objectors will engage the topic.

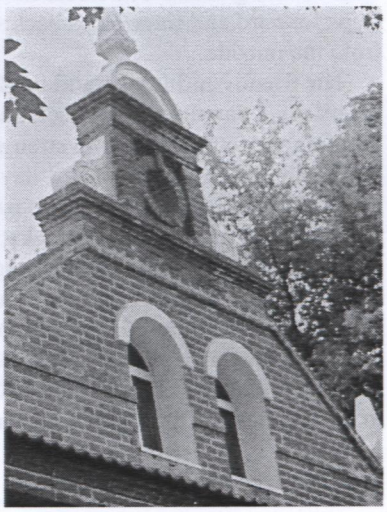
The 65-year-old story of the Second World War COs offers one model of dealing with war in today's world and forces people to ask, "What is the right response today to war and violence?"

The Chair of Mennonite Studies will host the lectures at the University of Winnipeg's Eckardt Gramatte Hall. As in past years, the public is invited to attend; all sessions are free. Selected lectures will be published in the peer-evaluated publication *Journal Of Mennonite Studies*. The planning committee for the conference includes, John Derksen, Esther Epp-Tiessen, Royden Loewen, Conrad Stoesz, and Hans Werner. The conference is sponsored by the Chair in Mennonite Studies, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, D.F. Plett Historical Foundation, and Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

For more information on conscientious objectors visit www.alternativeservice.ca or on the conference visit www.uwinnipeg.ca/academic/as/mennstudies. For specific information contact Royden Loewen r.loewen@uwinnipeg.ca or 204-786-9391.

Letters from Molochansk

by Ben Stobbe



July 6, 2006 When I left Molochansk at the end of last October the sky was cloudy and the weather had turned cooler. Now on my return the sky is cloudy and the locals tell me the weather is cooler than it was a week ago. The appearance of other things has remained the same--mothers weave their bikes with their on-board children and cars bob and dodge the sharp-edged potholes, meandering around weaving bikes and darting dogs. Calling doves and the territorial, yapping dogs wake me up early with the thought 'it's good to be back.'

The Mennonite Centre with its freshly-polished interior looks well tended. The Baergs and Regehrs along with the witty, caustic and caring comments of Kate, our Director, have kept old programs going and started new ones.

However, my arrival was incomplete. My two luggage bags were left in Frankfurt and my Linda remained in Victoria. She will come after teaching summer school.

When I came into the Mennonite Centre that first morning in my crumpled airline clothes looking like a hockey player in the playoffs (no shaving kit), the dear ladies took charge. Olga, our receptionist, phoned Austrian Airlines in Dnipropetrovs'k and after a bit of a run-around contacted the baggage people. They agreed to start the hunt. Ira, our cook, suggested Olga is far too nice a person to take on this job--for this you need to be more demanding and assertive. If I let her be in charge of this project she'd get the bags delivered and they'd even throw in few extra bags just to get her off the line! Well, it turned out I didn't need Ira's persuasion--Olga's charm worked; the bags were delivered that very evening right to my apartment door–a trip from Dnipropetrovs'k which is well over 2 hours. And I didn't need any other bags. I was impressed with Austrian Airlines and with Olga.

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At least a couple of times each week we have a common lunch in the kitchen. Often it is the highlight of my day. On Thursday Ira made borsht. Now, Ira's borsht is very good on its own but it's even better with a good dump of heavy Ukrainian sour cream. And so when the sour cream was handed about in a plastic squeeze container, I noticed that others were liberal in their application. They put gobs in, and so did I, declaring that I love the Ukrainian sour cream. At this point Kate said, "well, then you will like this mayonnaise even better!" I held my composure and slurped it down like everyone else. I had another bowl, this time without mayonnaise. Mayonnaise belongs in sandwiches, not as an add-on to borsht. This fine meal was topped off with a slice of bread decorated with cheese and a sardine.

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One thing that I suspect hasn't changed that much is the interest of men in watching women work. For example, our maintenance man is a very good and conscientious worker. But as soon as Olga, our receptionist, takes out the broom to sweep the steps and another lady comes out to weed the flowerbeds, he pulls out a cigarette and watches. I feel embarrassed and recall last year when a similar incident happened. I responded by grabbing a rake and joining the women. The watching male was not upset--in fact, I suspect he felt sorry for me. The women, however, were very upset. This was not proper that I would join them and rake the lawn. Join my gender and smoke the weed--they would go and pull the weeds out of the garden. The women do win out in the long run as shown by demographics; their life expectancy is much longer than that of men who fill their lungs with tar while the women exercise.

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On Friday I asked Olga where I could buy eggs, as the market was already closed. Olga said that Ina, a staff member here, was going home and she would take me to a neighbouring store (close by and cheap, I was assured). They didn't have any eggs. But dear Ina was not going to let me get out without buying something. I needed milk, so I bought that. Then she wanted me to buy sardines; however, I just couldn't see myself living off those. I could see she felt a bit hurt that I didn't buy sardines and I felt bad. Then her eyes lit up and she explained to the portly man behind the counter that I wanted something that resembled a baked square. I knew I could not reject her a second time so I said "da". When he wanted to cut a 4x6 inch piece, I showed him I only wanted a 4x2 inch piece. And a good decision that was, for his knife cut through that pure fat as though it were water! Ina was overjoyed, now I can be fattened up with good Ukrainian *salo*. The top has a tanned, bacon look, the inside is white. It does have a nice smoked odorific waft to it. I fear a conspiracy has developed among the ladies to get some weight on me.

After taking it home, I asked Kate what I could possibly do with this, short of giving it the heave-ho. She said, "You are so lucky to get smoked salo--that is a real treat. Cut it in thin slices and put it on bread." "Won't it raise my cholesterol and be hard on my heart?" I asked. And then this highly trained nurse said, "Not if you take it with beer. The beer stimulates your liver and the liver gets rid of fat!" We Canadians have so much to learn.

Birthday party at the office

We intend to put our weekly offerings on a blog site. So if you go to www.lindaandben.blogspot.com. you will see this message and have an opportunity to join others in providing responses. Hopefully in future reports we can start some discussions. We do, of course, very much appreciate personal correspondence, at benlindastobbe@yahoo.ca.

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The way we were: Eben-Ezer, the beginning

by Louise Bergen Price

West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, 1957, the first spiritual home of many postwar refugees.

It was not an easy step to take, but on February 4, 1963, 61 members of West Abbotsford church met in the basement of John and Mary Bergen's home to discuss the feasibility of starting a new, German-speaking fellowship. At the centre was the issue of language. Although West Abbotsford members had been encouraged to keep German as the language of home and church, many young people, born and raised in Canada, no longer spoke fluent German. Further, it was felt that other English-speaking Mennonites, and the 'Engländer' in the surrounding area, needed spiritual nurture. How could one preach the message of salvation if one spoke only German? Evangelist George Brunk emphasized this message on his very successful tent mission to the Fraser Valley in 1958. By 1959, some English Sunday School classes in West Abbotsford were in place and discussions started to form an English-only church plant, but nothing materialized from these discussions.

For the large number of members who were recent refugees from Europe, worshipping in English was not an option. Although by this time the school-age children were fluent and most of the men who worked out had learned English, most of the women had not. Neither had the old people.[9] Now, after a scant 15 years in Canada, they may well have the freedom to attend church, but they would not be able to understand God's word. This was a bitter pill to swallow.

Language was not the only issue that divided the postwar immigrant group from the others—their experiences had changed their whole world view. Most had lost family members to Stalinist repressions; very few had arrived as complete families. On their way from Ukraine to refugee camps in Germany, Holland and Austria, they had rubbed shoulders with people of all nationalities. Men and boys had been conscripted into Hitler's army. Women and girls had worked as servants, nurses, teachers, translators, secretaries. They had come through Europe's old cities, now in ruins. (Some narrowly survived the bombing of Dresden.) They had come through unimaginable difficulties, and they had survived. Along the way, though, many of the men had become addicted to smoking, and most enjoyed an occasional bottle of beer or glass of wine. They were familiar with Charlie Chaplin, and they knew how to waltz. Although they soon learned what was acceptable to their new co-religionists in Canada, they still enjoyed circle games brought from Ukraine--*Grünes Grass, Schlüsselbund* and others--games now frowned upon as being 'too close to dancing.' And while dancing was prohibited in this new community, roller-skating at Cultus, by couples, to the accompanyment of Strauss waltz music, was all right. It was most puzzling.

Refugee camp in Austria, 1947: people of many cultures and traditions, among them Mennonites.

[9] By 1960, 30% of the congregation preferred English, 40% were bilingual, 30 % spoke only German. (Margaret Koop: 'Our beginning,' Eben-Ezer Mennonite Gemeinde [yearbook], 1978. p. 10.)

In any case, by January 18, 1963, the discontent that simmered was brought to a head by a petition presented by Jake Redekop Sr. that a group be allowed to organize to form a new German-speaking church. Thirty-three families wanted to leave, but had not attached their names to the petition, foreseeing perhaps Rev. Froese's attempt to 'counsel with each independent family represented by that letter' [10]

A congregational meeting on February 1 lasted until 11pm with no resolution in sight until Peter Funk said, "Why not let them go. I can't understand German that well, and they can't understand English. Does it not then seem reasonable that they should be allowed to leave?"[11] This comment seemed to sum the situation up, and the Eben-Ezer group was granted permission to go ahead.

Eben-Ezer building site. Rev. Jake Tilitzky on left, then Jake Wall, John Redecop and ____?

Now work started in earnest. At the February 4 meeting, it was decided to buy a property on the corner of Windsor and Marshall. Jake Siemens was elected as chairperson and a building committee voted in. Two weeks later, the name 'Eben-Ezer' was chosen to represent this congregation. Sod turning followed a week later. Heinrich Neudorf was elected as minister, Isaak and Mika Bergen as deacons, and Jake Tilitzky called as leading minister.

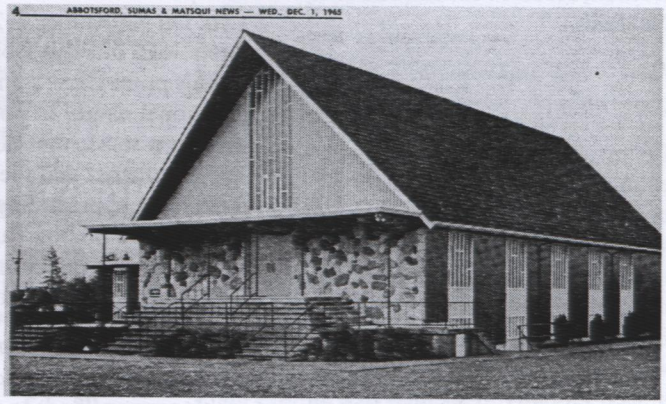
Everyone who could, took part in building the new church. Farmers volunteered during the day; others took the evening shift. Women contributed baked goods for coffee breaks (and picked up the slack at home and on the farm). Omtje Peter Regier, one of the older members of the congregation, cooked coffee twice a day.

By July, the building was complete and the people of West Abbotsford were invited to join the new congregation at Eben-Ezer to celebrate the dedication of the building. Rev. J. B. Wiens of Vancouver, Rev. H.H. Neufeld of Chilliwack, and Rev. P.J. Froese spoke at the all-day dedication services.

Sunday morning services continued much as they had at West Abbotsford: a period of singing before the service, then Bekandtmachungen (announcements), more singing, Bible reading, one or two sermons. We could depend on A.A. Harder to lecture us on moral behaviour and dress code, and Heinrich Neudorf to speak on the second coming. And on Jake Tilitzky's sermons to be brief, anecdotal, and to the point. I remember one of his sermons word for word. It was during one of those three sermon marathons that happened during Thanksgiving or Missionsfest. The first two speakers had gone well over their time limit. Jake stepped to the pulpit and intoned: 'Die Zeit is kurz, o Mensch sei Weise,' and sat down. (Time is short, oh humans; use it wisely.')

I was fifteen during those heady days, a member of the youth choir and part of the first group of baptismal candidates. I remember the excitement of our 'own' church. I remember also the surprise of a new culture. Nick and John Peters, who led the Eben-Ezer youth group, had grown up in Paraguay and brought with them German folk songs, Mennonite circle games, and the everyday use of Low German, all with a twist of South American flavour.

Within a year, the church membership doubled to 149 and the basement was no longer adequate to house all the children for Sunday School. Again, volunteers stepped forward. Sod was turned on September 28, 1964; dedication of the building was celebrated December 13, 1964.



***Eben-Ezer, 1965, with Sunday School wing** at left.*
Motto: "Bis hierher hat der Herr geholfen" 1. Sam 7:12.
(Thus far, the Lord has helped us, NRSV)
Photo from Abbotsford, Sumas and Matsqui News, Dec 1, 1965

In those early days, when hundreds of untrained voices filled the church, singing from the heart in four-part harmony, there was no doubt in their hearts—the refugees had found a home at last.

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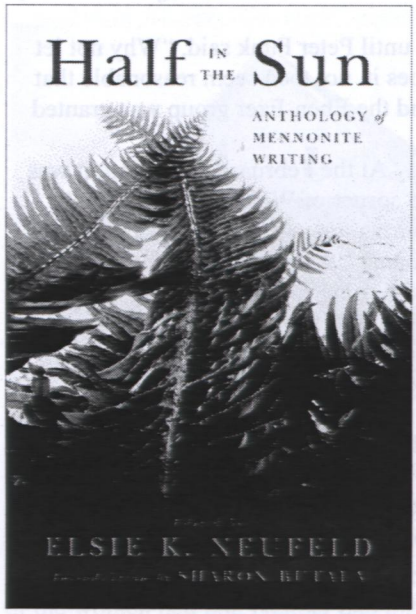
[10] David F. Loewen: Living Stones: a history of West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, 1936-1986. p 31.
[11] Loewen, p. 32

Half in the Sun: a West Coast Mennonite Writers' Anthology

by Helen Rose Pauls



An anthology of west coast Mennonite writing, *Half in the Sun*, should be available by October. We interviewed two of those who helped bring this idea to fruition, Robert Martens and Len Neufeldt.

How, when and why did this idea come about?

Robert: The idea came at a poets' evening when Elsie Neufeld quietly suggested an anthology of west coast Mennonite writers. Her idea immediately struck home with me. Something just felt right. Besides, with so much ethnic writing happening in Canada, and indeed globally, it seemed like an idea whose time had come. It was time for us West Coast writers to shed any false Mennonite humility, to stand up and say, "Hey, there's talent out here too."

Len: This idea had been in my mind for a long time, and Elsie's message offered the first suggestion that getting a West Coast Menno literary anthology project underway was actually being considered and that Elsie would be the driving force.

How did the search for writers take place?

Robert: We set about forming a committee of five individuals: Maryann Jantzen, Elsie Neufeld, Leonard Neufeldt, Louise Bergen Price, and myself. We sent out invitations to Mennonite west coast writers with whom we were already familiar, asking them if they'd be willing to contribute some writing, and if they could pass on the news. Very early on, we vowed, given our Mennonite experience with guilt and humility, never to call for "submissions." (Unfortunately, in at least one of the versions of our invitations, the word seems to have re-insinuated itself. You can't escape your past.)

This turned into a typically Mennonite relational process, with a cousin knowing an in-law whose friend knew a friend whose sister went to school with someone who was a writer. The project seemed almost to take off on its own, as Mennonite networking performed its magic. But this is not to negate the very hard work involved, particularly on the part of Elsie Neufeld, who approached the project with the incredible work ethic appropriated from centuries of Mennonite culture. Elsie scanned literary journals and books for writers with Mennonite names - recognizing those names is another advantage, I suppose, of living as part of this ethnic history. It wasn't always that easy. Names like Campbell and Tournemille are decidedly un-Mennonite, but the roots were there.

And the roots were showing. We've debated what it means to be Mennonite - ethnic? religious? cultural? - but that is something we'll never be able to clarify. At the core of a "Mennonite" individual there seems to be something recognizable to another Mennonite. And this seems true even when there are great differences in values and beliefs. Something from the heart, maybe the belly, that shouts "Mennonite" - and then, true to tradition, in humility, decrescendos the shout to a whisper.

Len: On November 7, 2003, Elsie sent out the description of our "Proposed Anthology of West Coast Mennonite Writing" to possible contributors and friends. At this point Elsie demonstrated amazing detective powers in finding numerous additional names of potential contributors, many of them talented emerging writers unknown to Mennonite or literary circles in B.C. Close to 45 writers submitted work. We discovered that the Mennonite identification was a drawing card, whether the authors were practicing Mennonites, were affiliated with other groups, or were unaffiliated. Sharon Butala, one of Canada's foremost literary authors who has written the introduction to this anthology observes that " Mennonite identifiers bleed through the words of many of the writings included, perhaps most".

There is a theme of bitterness and anger running through much of published Mennonite writing. Did you find this theme running through west coast Mennonite writing as well?

Robert: On a Sunday afternoon in Feb. of 2004, Elsie and Walter Neufeld welcomed to their home on Sumas Mountain a large and lively group of west coast Mennonite writers. Over wine and cheese, and possibly platz (memory fails me, but no Mennonite gathering would be complete without platz), we read our poetry and prose to each other, were moved, shed the occasional tear, talked rather hopelessly about what "Mennonite" means - but what I remember most of all was the laughter. Laughter of course is very Mennonite. One needs only to think of all the Low German jokes told over the years, and many of them carried a bite. But Mennonite writing in past decades has frequently been morose, even guilt-ridden, as writers sought to dissociate themselves from the very real abuses perpetrated by members of their ethnic community.

Robert (cont'd) Our group of west coast writers, however, seemed much more at ease with their past. The difficulties were frankly acknowledged - we weren't kidding ourselves - and then often gave way to some sort of acceptance. Perhaps it has something to do with the differences between Mennonites themselves - our west coast writers mostly have a *Russländer* background, while Mennonite writers in previous decades often have had another history. Perhaps it has to do with a growing confidence among Mennonite writers, a feeling that the struggle with the ethnic community doesn't have to lead to depression and isolation. Or it might simply be a new generation of writers. As I grew up in Mennonite Yarrow, the ethnic community was swiftly breaking down, and attitudes were opening up. Both sad and joyful. But I've been told of previous Yarrow generations that were particularly "wounded" by the intolerance and oppressiveness of a closed community. This seems to have been the experience of Miriam Toews, but it was not my own.

Andreas Schroeder, who was present that Sunday afternoon, remarked to me how pleasantly surprised he was at the good spirits of the individuals meeting that day - but frankly, as west coast Mennonite writers had not gathered before this event in any major way, we didn't really know what to expect as the first writer walked to the podium. Our motto in this project, our *Sprichwort,* has been "you learn by going."

Len: Readers will not see the work as Mennonite in the typical Prairie versions of recent decades: hard-edged, dark, brooding, angry, oppositional. Generally speaking, BC authors of Mennonite extraction do not agonize over their inherited past or the communities and families in which they gained their identities.

What has impressed you most about this project?

Robert: The quality of the writing! The enthusiasm and good will. The pride in participating in this project.

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This fall, watch for news about book launches for *Half in the Sun*. The book should be available in local bookstores and at the archives some time in October. This should be excellent and evocative reading, for, as Robert Martens says in one of his poems, 'a little Mennonite goes a long way."

"These writers record and witness, laugh and sometimes weep, over the past that formed them. There are no stories of hate, or of rage at all the pleasure forbidden, lost and denied by such a faith, and only the occasional expression of bitterness; there is a sadness, a yearning for the beauty of the simple certainty left behind forever, for the honesty of it, and even for the pain such simple honesty brought or caused – the unimaginable suffering of the European past that cannot be denied, that must be assimilated by even the coolest teen, or the doctorate-owning, university-professor poet. And always with that unshakeable nostalgia for the imagined perfection of belief.

How to use all of this? What to make of it? It is unlikely the answers to such questions will come from pastors or grandparents or history books. What is required is this – this anthology of first-rate poems and stories – where Mennonite artists struggle for meaning, for a truth, and to tell it slant. Give this to the children to read."

Sharon Butala, from the introduction to *Half in the Sun*: *Anthology of Mennonite Writing*

Mittagschlaf

i don't write poetry
on sunday afternoon. i don't
pray over our valley of sorrows
on sunday afternoon.
i don't plough fields, or
build barns, or
milk cows on
sunday afternoon. this
was taught by old
mothers and fathers:
mennonites
do not
on sunday afternoon.
nothing matters
on sunday afternoon. the
week so long,
centuries of grief,
a dark and homeless people
and loved ones taken, but
not
on sunday afternoon.
time for rest.
mittagschlaf: afternoon sleep
like a gentle wrestler,
you stagger to the nearest
couch, your shoes thud
on the floor, your
breathing warm and deep
as furrowed earth,
and tired bones nearly
dead with pleasure.

i write these words
on the anxious blank page
of the weekday. it's
raining hard, but i avoid
the comfort of the fire,
drink strong coffee, i
need to stay awake.
work hard, sunday afternoon
is close at hand. i don't
download dirty tricks
on sunday afternoon, or
pace the syringe streets,
or slip down the spine of the freeway.
i don't read poetry
on sunday afternoon,
the poem is complete.
on the seventh day
he slept. in his
dreaming soul, it is always
sunday afternoon,
he may never awake, he
shifts in his sleep,
a voice reaches out and
soothes his tangled hair,
peace, little ones,
the days of work
are nearly done.

by Robert Martens

Baby row

The baby is burbling at the end of her row. Soon little Katie will be whining, then whimpering, then giving off full fledged howls. The sun shines through the wooden slats of the square play pen, making a zebra pattern on the gray blankets.

On and on Anna picks. First she picks the outside of the bush, and then peers into the raspberry plant from above to find more berries, then squats and gets the last purple ones, like nipples on a sow, hanging soft to the touch. Her flat is filling rapidly. Sixty cents a flat. Seventy-five cents if she fills it fuller, but then the juice runs down her legs like blood when she carries it into the packing shed. Seventy-five cents more towards their own berry farm.

The baby is crying steadily now and her flat is almost full. Anna straightens, throws in two more handfuls, and takes the flat from the stand, the wooden hullocks hidden by the rich red fruit. She carries it high , over the bump of a second child due in the fall. Maybe a son this time, to go with the land they will purchase. If Werner can keep his job at the hop yard over the winter, they will have enough by spring. Old Wiens has promised them three acres of berries on good terms, with a sound little chicken house they can convert into a dwelling.

She places the dripping flat onto her pile in the shed, wipes her hands quickly on her skirt, and turns to little Katie. Anna sits in the dirt of her row, sheltered by berry canes, and tends to the child. She changes the soiled flannelette diaper and wraps the flour sack blanket lightly over the plump little body, laying her daughter on her side to nap in the shade with a bottle of cow's milk that she has tried to keep fresh wrapped all morning in a tattered quilt.

Up the row she hurries with an empty flat clutched in both hands, the baby almost out of earshot now. She hopes the child is quiet. Three more full flats materialize before the little one stirs. This time she is harder to placate. Anna sets some berries on the rail of the wooden enclosure within the little one's vision and hurries up the row. She knows that half of them will find their way to Katie's mouth and the rest will paint the playpen.

Spider webs connect the wires holding up the berry canes, and she realizes that the season is almost over. She will have to see Bertha Kroeker about picking beans there, or plums at the Rempels. Anna avoids the spiders and meticulously picks the inner branches. Mr. Doerksen has recorded her name at the end of the row, and she will not let him down.

On and on, she stoops and bobs and trudges, little feet thumping her ribcage. She places a red syrupy hand over the unborn child and whispers, "Next year it will be our own berry patch, our own land." She smiles and imagines his little toes, his little legs churning in his watery cavity, his male organs already formed. "John", she says. "Katie and John". One day the four of them will bend over soup in their own tiny kitchen warmed by the McClary stove, the woodbox full of hazelnut prunings and cants from Bowman's Sawmill. It will be bean soup from her garden with onions, dill, summer savoury, and the wee potatoes from the edge of the plant. They will have chunks of ham and good dark bread.

by Helen Rose Pauls