

# Roots and branches

Newsletter of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

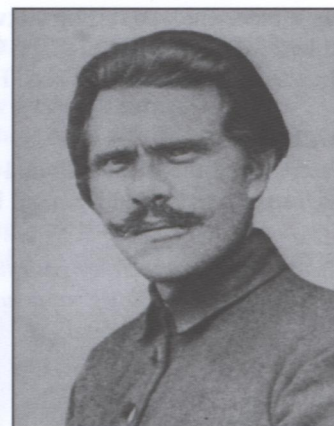
"What we have heard and known  
we will tell the next generation."  
Psalm 78

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When anarchist Nester Machno and his band terrorized Mennonite villages during the Russian civil war, whole families were killed, and an unknown number of women abused and raped.

How should God-fearing pacifists respond? Take up arms, or trust in God? Opinions were divided, and a number of villages formed *Selbstschutz* (self-defence) units to protect family and property.

Dr. John B. Toews will explore this issue in his lecture titled: "In Defense of Mothers and Sisters: the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* in Ukraine, 1918" at MHSBC's fall fundraising banquet on October 13, 2007.  
See page 2 for details.



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## Editorial:

The 'best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley' says poet Robbie Burns. And that's what seems to happen with themes we choose for various editions of our newsletter. But, as chosen themes get put on the shelf for use another day, new themes emerge. The theme that emerged for this edition is 'people.' Those, like Menno Simons whom history has deemed significant, and those who live quiet, unassuming lives yet have a great impact on the lives of others.

Anna German, the singer whose past was a mystery, came to my attention through Mennonite friends in the Netherlands. When I first started researching her past a few years ago, there was little information available aside from the article by Lucia Thijssen. While this article was interesting, the facts were vague. Much more is available now, each account adding a small piece to the puzzle. I have footnoted the article so interested readers can follow up on this story.

This issue also pays tribute to Jean Neufeld, long-time MHSBC volunteer, who passed away suddenly July 28. She will be sorely missed. LBP

## Letter to the Editor

A number of pieces in the March 07 issue gripped me deeply. The horror of the Wilhelm Gustloff passengers is the worst--and to realize that we knew none of this.

Stinging nettles saved many of our people, too. Cousin Susie Friesen credits that nourishment for the survival of most of their family. On a visit to Stuttgart, we watched our relatives whip each other's back and legs to stimulate circulation.

My mother enjoyed raising silkworms. I still have a few samples of her silk yarn.

Robert Martens' visit to Tiede, Orloff in Zagradovka is also part of our story ...Thank you heartily for Roots and Branches, Hilda J. Born. (see Hilda J. Born's story on page 3.)

## Archive Corner

Each month, the volunteers and staff at the archive office assist visitors in finding genealogical information. One such search requested by email brought the following response:

*Thank you very much for your help to find something about my parents.*

*Especially the "Einbürgerungsurkunde" is very interesting. So I saw where we have been during our way from Russia to Germany in Poland. After mother died nobody had known details about this terrible trip.*

*And all the dates from grandpa etc.*

*Thanks again, we are very happy, Lilli Ternäben and family*

## Future events

Oct. 13, 2007. 6 pm Annual banquet. Speaker John B. Toews

Emmanuel Mennonite Church Tickets: \$20.00 on sale at the archives.

Topic: "In Defense of Mothers and Sisters: The Mennonite Selbstschutz in Ukraine [1918]."

Nov. 10, 2007. Genealogical workshop. Speaker Henry Schapansky and others. Phone office for details.

Nov. 24, 2007. 7 pm. Lecture. "Ben Horch: his contributions to Mennonite musicology." Speaker: Peter Letkeman. Choir led by Holda Fast Redekopp.

Feb. 23, 2008. 7 p.m. "Letters from the Gulag" with Ruth Derksen Siemens, art by Edith Krause. Bakerview MB.

October 2008. "Memory, History, Thanksgiving." Banquet and other special events celebrating the post-WWII refugee trek to Canada.

**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!

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## He Did Not Die in Vain<sup>1</sup>

by Hilda J. Born

*My father seldom spoke of his teenage years. We knew there must have been sadness that still hurt him deeply. So we did not pry. However, in 1993, after Glasnost made it possible, I finally saw my Klassen aunts, Father's half-sisters. They told me some of the terrors they'd experienced.*

Grandpa Franz Klassen's sleep was troubled on the night of November 28, 1919. Again and again he dreamed that nowhere could he find enough lumber to build a casket for his son. He tossed until morning, and then told his wife, Cornelia, about the dream. It was with hesitation that they accepted a friend's invitation to a birthday *Fesper* that afternoon.

While they were gone, Machno riders galloped into the village of Tiege where the family lived. Grandpa Klassen's place was immaculate, so that's where they turned in.

Nineteen-year-old Franz, who was the local schoolteacher, had just walked in with his armful of books. His sister, Tina, eleven, and Helena, nine, were already at home and were preparing supper under the supervision of their older sister, Maria. Brothers Johann and Henry were getting ready to head out for barnyard chores.

Hoof beats on the yard startled the young people into action. With lightning speed, the girls fled through the back door and vanished into a dugout shelter between the lilacs that had been readied for just such an emergency.

The riders stomped into the house without knocking. They spotted Franz's watch and told him to hand it over. He did. Next they poked around for valuables, but found nothing that appealed to them.

"Money! Give us money now!"

The boys emptied their pockets, but this pittance angered the bandits.

"We don't have any more!" the boys protested.

"You are lying. Give it to us or we'll shoot!" the robbers demanded, insisting that they wanted one hundred rubles or they'd shoot all three.

Franz knew it would be impossible to come up with the money and, even if they did, their safety was not guaranteed. He also knew that while he was sure of his own eternal destiny, his brothers were not, so he offered to stand as hostage while his brothers went off to collect more money. Secretly, though, he urged them to hurry off and not to return.

While waiting for the money, the felons heaped clothing and linens on the dining table and emptied the kerosene lamp on the heap. As dusk fell, and the boys had not returned, they got tired of waiting. They lit the pyre, carried out their revenge, and rode away.

About this time, my grandparents, Franz and Cornelia were heading home with their little ones, Anna and Elizabeth. From the end of the village they smelled smoke and were shocked to see their buildings ablaze. Rushing toward the barn to free the animals, Grandfather came upon the body of his oldest son.

Frantically, my grandparents called and called for their other children, but there was no answer. Fearing the worst, they were about to collapse in despair when Johann and Henry crept out of the darkness. They had been hiding in the underground root cellar which was so overgrown by creepers that it was indistinguishable from the surrounding countryside. Finally someone thought to look in the dugout shelter and found the frightened girls.

But no boards could be found to make a coffin for Franz.

After suffering two more harrowing days of raids, the villagers dug a long trench for the seventeen men and one woman who'd been murdered in the village. They found enough sheets to wrap each body.

Both Johann and Henry rarely spoke of that tragic day when they were sixteen and seventeen. But it was the pivotal day in which each pledged lifelong service to Christ.



Family standing at the mass grave

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from *Third Daughter* by Hilda J. Born, available from the author or at *House of James*.



## A Tribute to Jean Neufeld

by David Giesbrecht

In our office, Thursday is known as Jean's day, for that is the shift when she is the person in charge. Jean began volunteering with the Society about ten years ago, and I do not recall her ever missing a shift, unless of course she and Wilmer were traveling, or something very urgent prevented her from coming.

Over the years she gave of herself in a variety of ways, serving on our Board of Directors for a term, and more recently, taking on the responsibility of scanning and identifying our large collection of photographs. She was also very active in creating indexes for some of the German immigration records we have in our Center.

Visitors to the Center in the past several years could not miss seeing Jean's handiwork, the photographs which line the entry to our office. Within the past two weeks, she had prepared a new set of pictures featuring BC Mennonite churches, a choice emphasizing her deep concern that the work we do in the Society connect to our local congregations.

Jean was always a willing worker at each of our public events. Most recently, at our musical concert at the Central Heights church on May 6, she set up a display of carefully selected of rare music books from our collection.

Jean brought another very precious gift to our Center. Often I have observed how skillfully and gracefully she met visitors who came looking for information. In fact, it was a deep delight for me to observe the professional way she performed such public service. She set a wonderful tone in our office, and always seemed optimistic. Whenever we discussed some work to be done, her typical response was either, "You bet" or "fabulous."

On behalf of the Society and all of us who knew and loved Jean Neufeld, I want to acknowledge her many contributions to our cause. Jean's family has lost a wonderful wife, mother, grandmother. We have lost a much-appreciated colleague whose contribution will not be easy to replace.



## Jean Neufeld: A generous soul with a listening ear

by Mary Ann Quiring

Jean Martha Neufeld, fourth child of John C. and Martha (Harder) Schmidt, was born 28 July 1935 in Waldheim, Saskatchewan. Jean spent her childhood in Waldheim. She came to the Lord at a Janz Brothers Crusade when she was twelve. She baptized upon her confession of faith shortly after, and was received into the membership of Brotherfield MB church. After graduating from high school, she attended business college in Saskatoon from 1952-1954.



She worked for Marvin's Drycleaners, and it was in a coffee shop close to work where she met Wilmer Neufeld who was working for Moore-Smith & Co. Heating & Air Conditioning. After a one-year courtship, they married in August, 1955. Jean was now a wife and also looked after her mother-in-law who lived with them. The birth of their daughter Cheryl on August 8, 1958, was a bitter-sweet, since Jean lost her brother Loren on August 23. A son, Douglas, was born to them in 1960. A year later Jean lost her only sister

Ruby. Jean was deeply affected by the loss of her siblings. Brian, their third child, was born in the summer of 1964.

In 1966 the family pulled up their roots and moved to Germany where Jean supported Wilmer in his singing career. They were there until 1972.

In 1972 the family moved to Calgary where Jean continued homemaking. In 1976, she became Office Manager of the Jewish Community Center & Society. Her work there was very much appreciated.

When they moved to Abbotsford, Jean looked for other ways to volunteer. She became a valuable member of the MHSBC team and faithfully worked at many aspects of the archives, all the while bringing her aging mother to their home for many, many day visits. For the last two years she also volunteered one day a week at the MCC store.

Jean's health was a concern, but she was not a complainer. She was a stalwart helpmate to Wilmer during his times of illness. She was a generous soul and lent a listening ear to all who needed it. Her seemingly boundless energy was infectious and those around her were also encouraged by her smile, easy laugh and resounding "YOU BET!" We have not just lost a great volunteer, but a dear, dear friend.



## Choir festival of praise and worship: *Sängerfest* 2007

Over nine hundred people gathered inside Central Heights Mennonite Church for MHSBC's first *Sängerfest* (Festival of Song). This intergenerational event featured the Pacific Mennonite Children's Choir directed by Wes and Kim Janzen, Tony Funk's Valley Festival Singers, and two choirs from Bakerview: the Liturgical Choir and Bakerview Fellowship Choir both directed by Ernie Block. An added highlight was Dr. John B. Toews' historical sketch on the origin of *Sängerfest* and four-part singing in Russia.

Neil Matthies led the audience in singing, culminating in the 'Mennonite anthem' *Praise God From Whom all Blessings Flow* and the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Special thanks to pianists Carmen Fast, Irene Funk, Betty Suderman and Linda Stobbe. Thanks also to Holda Fast Redekopp, director of the Bakerview Liturgical choir.

The planning committee, consisting of Ben Stobbe, Tony Funk, Neil Matthies, Ernie Block, John Neufeld, and Helen Rose Pauls, was inspired by the enthusiastic response from choirs and directors, and plans are underway for a similar event in March 2009.

## *Sängerfest*: A historical sketch

by Dr. John B. Toews

*Sängerfest* celebrates a long-standing Russian Mennonite tradition. Singing by numbers, *Ziphern*, had been introduced to Mennonite children in Prussian schools. Among the early Mennonite settlers to Ukraine were at least four Prussian-trained teachers, among them Tobia Voth who taught singing by ciphers during the 1820s.

Hymn books brought along by the settlers had only words; people depended on the song leader, or *Vorsänger*, to remember the tunes. Sometimes this could have unsettling results as in this account:

*"The song leader assumes his place... and announces number 358 and begins singing in a powerful voice. But the others are not to be outdone...50 voices join in so energetically and with such gusto that it seemed they wished to topple the walls of Jericho or set the Midianites to flight. They sing with full lungs. There is to be sure much variation in tone between C and A.*

*"The preacher sits down, leans over towards the Vorsänger and whispers: I would like to have the hymn 'Folget mir ruft uns das Leben!'" The Vorsänger replies in a whisper that all can hear: "I am not certain whether I know the tune, I will try it quietly first." But his self confidence gets the better of him, he announces the song and begins to sing immediately with full force. But something is wrong – and all stop singing. He tries the melody to himself again but it doesn't want to work. Again everyone is silent, waiting until the song leader has found the key to the mystery...but he doesn't give up. Instead, he begins to sing tentatively, searching for familiar ground, and as he discovers familiar melodic tunes, his voice grows more and more strong. An old grandmother joins in with a shaky voice-- the confidence of the Vorsänger is bolstered by the sign of familiarity, his voice swells to an intense roar, so that all are carried along by it. The melody does not completely fit the metre of the text, so the ends of the lines that don't fit are swallowed up. The hymn roars on, like the rattling of swords and the pounding of the surf, so that the loose window panes in the old frames begin to rattle. And our dear Lord God must certainly be pleased. The service closes with the Aaronic blessing, and all stand up from the unpainted benches strengthened and comforted..."*

In 1837, Prussian-trained teacher Heinrich Franz compiled a hand-written hymnbook with cipher notation which was used in the schools for two decades. Franz published a hymnal in 1860, stating, "The holy art of singing has lost much of its beauty, clarity and correctness since it has been preserved and carried on solely by ear."

Although children sang in four-part harmony, singing in the churches still followed the old practice, and there was great resistance to the new ways. "A generation which had sung solely by ear and became quite accustomed to disharmony and melody embellishment naturally found the new music strange," stated Toews.

A diary from the 1860s shows how things went in one settlement:

- Jan 9, 1860. *"The minister, Isaac Klassen, compared such singing to a pub song and made all sorts of inappropriate comments about it... He himself got up during the four part singing in order to pronounce the benediction. Two persons immediately left the service."*



- Feb. 8, 1860. Diary writer Jacob Epp tries to mediate: *"I told them cipher singing was nothing new but something old which the notes in very ancient songbooks proved. They (Isaac Klassen and his wife) talked themselves into such a feverish pitch that their faces reddened and their facial features became twisted."*
- March 20, 1866. The community has built a new church. At the service the schoolteacher Heinrich Olfert is in attendance as are many of his students. *"At the conclusion of the service a cipher melody (Ziffermelodie) was sung. The children joined in with ringing voices."*
- April 7, 1868. *"At the end of the sermon song number 108 was sung according to numbers. Jacob de Veer walked out and waited in the cloakroom until it was finished."*
- April 21, 1868. *"de Veer rushed out in anger and drove home without taking his daughter. Peter Peters slammed the church door so hard when he left that it sprang open again."*
- April 28, 1868. At a funeral service for Jacob Epp's grandson, Jacob de Veer *"suspected they would sing cipher melodies so while the funeral guests were taking their places, he walked about in the vestibule with his cap on his head and his steaming tobacco pipe in his mouth. When the singing began, he made quick tracks for home."*
- Finally March 7, 1879. *"Peter Peters has not attended a public worship service since April 21, 1868--- but now his defiance has come to an end---only Jacob de Veer persists in his obstinacy."*<sup>2</sup>

Throughout Europe, choirs and music festivals were beginning to flourish. By 1885, five hundred choirs from Germany, Switzerland, England, Sweden, France, Poland and Russia belonged to the Christian Choral Union. A Russian Choral Association was organized in 1886.

By September 1893, a festival in Rückenau, Molotschna, had 7 Mennonite choirs with 120 singers and 2,000 listeners. The next year, there were 11 choirs with 300 singers rendering 50 different songs. Some of the 2,500 guests drove 200 kilometers by enclosed wagons – and yes, there was Faspa with coffee and zwieback. For Mennonites in Russia the choral festival was now a permanent institution.

The evolution of choirs and choir music was an interdependent process. In the transition to four-part singing, elementary and secondary school children used Bernhard Natorp's cipher tradition. As musically literate adults, they enhanced their singing skills by participating in church choirs. In 1880, Heinrich Franz published a second edition of his Choralbuch. Not long after, a new generation set to work expanding the number of choir songs available. For example, in 1886, H. Janz published 96 hymns in cipher notation that he called *Liederstrauss* (Bouquet of Songs). He borrowed freely from five different hymn collections. As he stated, "They are mostly new songs, but with a few older, familiar ones added." He felt his small hymnal could be used "in worship services, in homes, Sunday School and especially choirs."

In 1889, enterprising Mennonite musicians began to publish songbooks especially suited for choirs. All were in cipher notation and all borrowed freely from other sources. In the 1890s, the growing compendium was named *Liederperlen* (Pearls of Song) When the last volume was published in 1915, Mennonites in Russia had some 935 choral works at their disposal.

Revolution and civil war, the bloody tyranny of Stalin's rule, the disruption of WW II—these events meant emigration to Canada in the 1920s, dispersment to labour camps in the former Soviet Union in the 1930s, flight and emigration to Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

But amid all the difficulties in adapting to strange lands, there was singing – singing in four parts and from cipher notation. When survivors of Stalin's holocaust begin to organize their churches in remote places like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan or Kirghizia, the old songs were not forgotten and cipher notation trained a new generation of singers.

One hundred and seventy years ago, a lowly village school teacher on the vast Ukrainian steppes dreamt of hearing children sing. Soon elementary and secondary schools re-echoed with the songs of children and adolescents. That dream was encapsulated in one hymnbook and subsequently impacted Mennonites scattered throughout the globe.

<sup>2</sup> David Epp. The diaries of David Epp, 1837-1843, translated and edited by John B. Toews. (Vancouver: Regent College, 2000.)



### **This New Melody: another perspective**

(from *Discovering our Wiebe Heritage*, p. 281, 282) <sup>3</sup>

...So this younger generation decided to bring in a new type of music and a new type of melody and they just came in and overpowered the older generation and their style of singing. As a matter of fact right in one of the church services they decided to sing at the given cue which they had practiced. So they were just taking over, forcing their type of music onto us all, even though the older generation didn't like it. It was a rude way of doing things.

In this group of singers was also Jacob Wiebe, who was a brother of the Wiebe that had passed away. And so from that time, this new melody became more prevalent in the churches. The older generation stayed in the background and the higher educated young people took over, and carried on with their music. And the same thing happened in the Chortitza church, and that's how the old Bethaus was conquered with this new more modern way of singing in the church.

In Burwalde the old songs were still being used for a little while, and so during this time the older people who didn't like the new style of music in the church just went to the Burwalde church. I'm not sure how long the older music was still used in this church, but with time the new music found its way into this church as well, to the point where the older fathers in the church just took their hymnbooks and walked out of the church. So it did create quite a bit of strife between this new singing and those that didn't agree with that type of music, and so they went to one of the elders of the church, Älteste Gerhard Dyck, and tried to make some kind of peace, and they decided to stay with the new music that had been started if it must be, even though many God-fearing souls had a great problem accepting this.

In time, in 1872, we immigrated to America... We did at last arrive in America after a nine-week journey. So I was at last where I longed to be. As it says in the verse, as we left Russia, 'So I lead you through the wilderness to speak with the elders.'

So we had to get to work, and we chose a place where we could, with the advice of others, begin to build a church. With the agreement that each house owner should provide one log, the church was built. So we thought back with stirred hearts on that beloved land that God had promised to give to the children of Israel. So the time came that the *Bethaus* would be dedicated to the Lord. I was among the group that stood in front of the church and with great emotion and stirred hearts, we sang 'Swing wide the gates of Jerusalem and let your people into the temple ....'

So the doors were opened and the old battles seemed to begin again. Here in Manitoba, the old style of singing was started, which I very much liked and was used to. But that the new song should overcome the old way of singing that we were used to in Russia, created a lot of unrest. Many were not in agreement and did not want to go with the singing of the new melody. So there was no other way to solve this division than that the people had to separate and divide...

So the new group that did not want to go along with the old style of singing seemed to use the music problem as a bit of a reason to separate themselves from us. This was a bit of a guise, because there were also other reasons. Some of them had to do with doctrine, and the way people lived, so there seemed to be more to it than just the singing, which was used as an excuse for them to leave. So we had many meetings with the brethren, consultations, much prayer and concern, but in the end the new group left our fellowship. And many of these people belonged to the Hoffnungsfelder.

It was not really possible to apply the church discipline in this case since there were so many that seemed to be in agreement to leave for one reason or another - some even said just to improve their economical situation. So they just banded together, not to be part of us anymore. We continued to be concerned in prayer before the Lord, that the Gospel might not be hindered and that the Truth might be adhered to concerning the doctrine that we believe according to the Word of God.

So it was decided to carry through with this division under the verse: 'Separate yourselves from them and touch not the unclean thing.' So each one was sent away in peace.

With the agreement that each house owner should provide one log, the church was built... So the time came that the *Bethaus* would be dedicated to the Lord. I was among the group that stood in front of the church and with great emotion and stirred hearts, we sang 'Swing wide the gates of Jerusalem and let your people into the temple ....'

<sup>3</sup> from: Elaine Wiebe and Gladys Wiebe. *Discovering our Wiebe Heritage*: Peter Wiebe 1861-1920 (Saskatoon, SK: Private publication, 1998) 370 pp.



## Book Reviews

Karl Koop, editor, *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition, 1527-1660*. (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2006.) Reviewed by Robert Martens

Even though confessions of faith may have been more prevalent in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition than in any other Protestant stream, they have largely been overlooked by historians and scholars. Karl Koop's recent compilation of fourteen early confessions will help rectify this oversight. Why then, until recently, have these documents been so commonly ignored? The introduction to *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist Tradition* suggests some possible answers. An anti-creedal bias has predominated among some scholars; there has been a suspicion that confessions were politically rather than theologically motivated; that their ill-educated authors wrote badly; and some scholarship has proceeded on the assumption that Anabaptist theology emphasized practical community ethics rather than the confessional inner or spiritual life.

It may have been, however, Harold Bender's powerful essay, "The Anabaptist Vision," published in 1944, that most hampered the study of confessions of faith in the Mennonite tradition. Bender reenergized Mennonite studies by arguing that Anabaptism was not a mere heretical movement, but a recreation of the ideals of the early apostolic church, and that it stressed the concept of a church community based on the ideals of love and nonresistance. In a practical theology such as this, a statement of beliefs would be secondary. Bender's ideas were an appealing option to historians who were not attracted to the fundamentalism that was making its mark on the Mennonite church. To this day, "Anabaptism" seems a code word among Mennonites for a theology that accentuates social justice issues.

The Anabaptist/Mennonite story has been a deeply divisive one. Its congregational structure, in which local churches enjoy a great deal of autonomy, and in which decisions are largely made from the ground up, may be partly responsible for this. And perhaps the "Mennonite disease" of conflict, shunning, and splitting has motivated the writing of numerous confessions of faith: these documents were a political necessity, a clarification of either unity or separation. In the nearly constant atmosphere of mistrust, however, even confessions became the focus of quarrels.

Was there a coherency among early confessions of faith? The introduction to this book argues that certain beliefs seemed to remain generally a constant: free will, daily discipleship, the church as the body of Christ, baptism as a symbol of regeneration, the Supper as an emblem of community, and church discipline. Perhaps a bias against hierarchy might be added to this list. The theology of these Anabaptist confessions is reasonably orthodox in tone, but that inspires the question why Anabaptists/Mennonites were so continually suppressed by political and religious powers. Reading between the confessional lines uncovers an abiding wariness of the powers of the "outside world."

Even so, emphases in confessions altered greatly over time. The Schleithem Articles of 1527 are aflame with the fervour of a young movement: "... the calling of the one God to one faith, to one baptism, to one spirit, to one body ..." (28). "Now there is nothing else in the world and all creation than good or evil, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light ..." (28). "The sword is an ordering of

God outside the perfection of Christ" (30). "... [I]t does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: the rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the spirit" (31). In the Swiss Brethren Confession of 1578, the ardour has somewhat cooled, and the admonition is given to serve government faithfully. The language is still occasionally heated, however: "We ... confess that all the arrogance, pride and pomp of this world are an abomination and hated by God" (90). At the same time, usury is condemned and a life of farming extolled. "[C]hildren of God should seek and win their daily nourishment with honest manual labour, that they should seek to share with those in need. But they shall not engage in lazy, dishonest and useless merchant enterprises" (87).

The above confessions originated among southern Germanic people. In the Netherlands, meanwhile, Anabaptist division was rampant and confessions were being written in great numbers. The Kempen Confession of 1545, while stating that "we are to do good to our enemies" (97), nevertheless engages in scurrilous language directed at perceived false teachers. The 1554 Wismar Confession, to which Menno Simons contributed, is sometimes appallingly intolerant of opposing points of view. The more "liberal" Waterlanders, who were perhaps encountering the pleasures of prosperity and assimilation, produced confessions with a peaceful and spiritually inward perspective. The lengthy Thirty-Three Articles of 1617, on the other hand, were conceived by the more "conservative" Old Frisians. This document is often smug and bitter, directed at an enemy which is now



other Mennonites with "evil opinions" (170). The language is frequently a mindless recitation of old ideas, the dogmatism, tedious. But the early Anabaptist ideals still survive: "... among the people of God no beggars will be found" (225).

Koop's book ends with two major Mennonite confessions of faith. The Dordrecht Confession (1632) was written as an attempt to unify opposing factions: "Both sides lacked a recognition of love as the principal garb and characteristic of the true followers of Christ" (291). The peace position is strong. In 1660 the Swiss Brethren adopted the Dordrecht Confession and brought it with them to the new world.

The Prussian Confession, drafted in 1660, was written, strangely, in German: strange because Mennonites had not yet adopted that tongue. Perhaps it was meant for government consumption. This document was reprinted at least five times in Prussia, three times in Russia (the last time in 1912), and at least twice in the United States. The language used is relatively gentle and intended to unite. "We believe that this church is made up of a large number of people around the earth who have separated themselves from the sinful world ..." (316). The Confession calls on Mennonites to be "subordinate to the authority of government" (324), but does not urge noninvolvement in politics. It

articulates that "one cannot practice revenge against one's enemy" (326), but does not speak to nonparticipation in the military. As to banning any church member who has wandered from official doctrine, the Confession recommends, "do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother" (327).

The Prussian Confession seems to aim at moderation as its goal. Its ideals of unity may, however, have been often lost on succeeding Mennonite generations, who continued their seemingly endless narrative of condemnation, division, and occasional reconciliation. Karl Koop's book sheds some welcome light on that troubled history. \*

Helmut Isaak. *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2006.) reviewed by Robert Martens



Menno Simons - wood engraving by Christoffel van Sichem 1610

At the turn of the sixteenth century, Holland was a hotbed of economic, social, and religious unrest. Already nearly half the population was urbanized, and industry and trade constituted a major component of daily life. War and fierce economic competition were responsible for a rapid increase in poverty, especially among urban dwellers.

But it was religious issues that galvanized and dominated debate. The invention of the printing press meant that new ideas, including subversive ones, could be quickly communicated. Anticlericalism had long been a common theme in Holland, and now was spurred on by outrage with unfair competition in textile and food production by monasteries. Trials for heresy became commonplace. The Sacramentarians rejected the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and emphasized the practice of a simple Christian life, sometimes called "evangelical-mindedness." This movement, which became increasingly sectarian, and in which women played a strong role, eventually merged with Anabaptism.

It was a time of great injustice, corruption, and violence, and some Anabaptists did not hesitate to wield the sword. The Peasants' Revolt of 1524-25 in Germany, in which peasants who submitted moderate demands to

the nobility were brutally suppressed by both Catholics and Lutherans, had attracted a number of Anabaptist-minded individuals. The events in Münster, however, began relatively peacefully. The guilds were strong in the city, and fingers were being pointed at monastic competition in the textile industry. The events of the Peasants' Revolt also were agitating the citizens of Münster. When Bernhard Rothmann, a reformer and erstwhile priest, arrived in the city, he was protected by the guilds, and the populace divided into opposing camps: the more conservative Lutherans, and the reformist Sacramentarians/Anabaptists. In 1534 the Anabaptist wing seized city hall and expelled from the city all those who refused to be baptized. Anabaptist pacifist ideas rapidly lost popularity. Münster became known to the desperate and impoverished as the "New Jerusalem," and many of the religiously oppressed now flocked



to the city, hoping to be present at the end of the world when Christ would return.

Bishop Franz of Waldeck ordered a siege of the city. Inside Münster a heightened sense of apocalypse prevailed. Jan Matthijsz, one of the early leaders, prophesied that Christ would return on Easter 1534 and implement a new and just society. When this did not happen he "committed military suicide" (37) by leading an attack on the besieging forces. Jan van Leiden now seized power, and under conditions of extreme hunger and stress, proclaimed himself King David of the new kingdom. He violently crushed all opposition, and introduced, among other measures, community of goods and polygamy. In 1535 the bishop's army managed to enter Münster. The Anabaptist leaders, including Jan van Leiden, were captured, viciously tortured and executed. Their corpses were hung in cages from the church tower; the cages remain there to this day.

Into this European world reeling with religious and economic conflict stepped Menno Simons, who took over the reins of leadership of Dutch Anabaptists. As Helmut Isaak points out in his book, *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem*, Menno was deeply marked by the prevailing atmosphere of dissent, especially by the debacle at Münster. Indeed, Menno's own brother may have died in a siege of the monastery at Oldeklooster. In the 1530s, Menno was sympathetic to many of the Münsterite ideals, writing that "our dear brothers" had "misbehaved a little against the Lord since they wanted to defend their faith with arms" (51). By the 1550s, however, partly in the interests of the survival of his "Mennonite" community, he denounced violent action, and rigorously imposed the ban on any who disagreed. "Weeding the tares from within

and relentless persecution from without had reduced the people of the New Jerusalem to a suffering minority from which any trace of rebellion had disappeared" (56).

Former studies of the thought of Menno Simons have generally been based on his collected writings, which give the impression that Menno's theology remained consistent throughout his lifetime. Helmut Isaak, however, traces Menno's thinking through the 1530s to the 1550s, and discovers great changes in emphasis-- political, social and religious--over the passage of time. *Menno Simons and the New Jerusalem* is the portrait of a man whose theology was not that of the study, not philosophical, but rather a reaction to the events that were shaking the continent.

As Helmut Isaak clearly describes, Anabaptists were far more concerned with the daily practice of Christian love than were Catholics of the time. Melchior Hoffman, whose ideas were influential in Münster, "shared the Catholic doctrine of the sinfulness and complete lostness of mankind," but in contrast did not focus attention "on the death of the sacrificial lamb, but rather on the incarnation of the Word of God" (58). The "Word become flesh," according to Hoffman, "fell from the mouth of God into the wild mussel of the Virgin Mary" (58); in the same way, the individual believer must make a covenant directly with God, rather than indirectly through the sacraments. He or she will then, after the symbolic act of baptism, enter the free community of love. It is interesting to note that the coins minted in 1534 Münster bore the inscription: "Unless a man is born again, he can not enter the Kingdom of God; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; the Word has become flesh and lives among us" (68).

Menno Simons, born around 1496, ordained a Catholic priest in 1524, and still a priest in the mid-1530s, essentially affirmed the Melchiorite doctrine of incarnation. His emphasis, however, was altogether different. "Whereas for Menno the incarnation of the Word of God meant forgiveness, brotherly love, suffering service and a new life, for the Münsterites it became the justification for an apocalyptic crusade" (66). Menno's specific ideology on the incarnation was somewhat subtle and confusing -- he was a much better organizer than writer -- but his intent was clear. He was not interested in a future apocalyptic incarnation: the New Jerusalem, he wrote, is already here, in the hearts of believers.

When Menno wrote the *Spiritual Resurrection* in the 1530s, he may well still have been a Catholic priest, and was careful not to identify with any reformist group. Spiritual conversion, as outlined in this tract, was limited to the individual, and was described in nearly mystical terms. Despite the confidence of his writing, however, Menno was undergoing an experience of severe religious agony. His entrenched desire for security and career as a priest did battle with a felt spiritual need to leave the Catholic church and make a clean break. By the time he wrote the *Meditation on the Twenty-fifth Psalm*, Menno had abandoned the priesthood. Menno writes in this book of his new-found Christian life, and exuberantly describes the New Jerusalem not only as an individualistic redemption, but as a living community of God. "Those who know the Lord will live upon Mount Zion.... They worry about nothing because the Lord will provide for their needs.... Their souls dwell in the fullness of the wealth of the Lord" (73). Menno,



in his opinion, had left Babylon and entered the New Jerusalem.

To his sorrow, however, persecution by the authorities continued. Menno's followers continued to be slandered with the epithet "Münsterite," and Menno was forced over the decades to disassociate his movement from the uprising of Münster. His views became increasingly linked with the idea of a suffering church, as he saw no end in sight to civil and religious oppression. The 1540s, according to Helmut Isaak, were transitional years in the development of Menno's communal values. By the 1550s, his ideas had become entrenched, and he preached the buttressing of God's suffering community by the liberal use of the ban. In his *Instruction on Excommunication*, Menno had turned, according to

Isaak, quite authoritarian: "Those who seek unity and peace will receive his instruction with joy ... simply because his teaching, based on God's holy Scripture, is the truth and there is no other truth" (103). Perhaps, as Isaak remarks, the "continued confrontation with the preachers ... blocked his creative capabilities in the later 1550s" (104).

Menno's preoccupation with Münster is quite understandable. Even to this day, four hundred years later, one can find internet sites that mock the uprising there. Helmut Isaak's brief book, though written in a style that may seem repetitious (each chapter builds on the preceding), admirably and sympathetically traces the arc of Menno's life and thought. It should become an indispensable source for understanding the troubled life

of this superb organizer. In the end, Menno gave up his hopes of transforming the entire world into a Christian collective, and decided upon the goal of a separate, suffering, and peaceful community living in Christ. The Mennonite church has been clearly marked with those ideals. And if Menno passed on the dubious practices of shunning and the ban, his vision of a loving Christian life is something to be treasured: "They show mercy and love, as much as they can. No one among them is allowed to beg. They take to heart the need of the saints. They entertain those in distress. They take the stranger into their houses. They comfort the afflicted; lend to the needy; clothe the naked; feed the hungry; do not turn their faces from the poor; do not despise their own flesh" (99).

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### **Volunteer Profile: Agatha Klassen: Teacher, Librarian, Volunteer**

by Lora Sawatsky

Last year Agatha Klassen, librarian in the Chilliwack School District from 1962 – 1985, also retired as librarian for the Mennonite Historical Society where she had volunteered for many years. She began as a secretary and her many other contributions include working on files, identifying photos, translating documents from German to English. In addition, Agatha organized the Society's lending and reference library. She has had a wealth of experience in organizing libraries, having organized all 27 elementary school libraries in the Chilliwack District. Later she worked as librarian in Chilliwack Senior Secondary School until 1985. After retiring as school librarian, she spent three semesters in St. Petersburg changing the library system from Library of Congress to Dewey Decimal.

Born in Kuban, South Russia, Agatha grew up in Coaldale, Alberta where she completed most of her high school. After she moved to Yarrow, BC, she attended Bible School for one year, and then completed her grade 12 and 13 at Normal School and later completed her BA as well as her Bachelors of Library Science at UBC. Agatha has taught school for 35 years.

In addition to her many volunteer activities, Agatha found time to record the history of Yarrow in: *Yarrow: A Portrait in Mosaic*, the first history of Yarrow to be published. While Agatha has retired as the librarian for the Mennonite Historical Society, she still volunteers her skills when documents need to be translated from German to English. She is a skilled reader and translator of the Gothic script.

We are indeed grateful to Agatha for her many years of service at the archival centre and are delighted when she visits the archival centre from time to time to assist with translating documents.

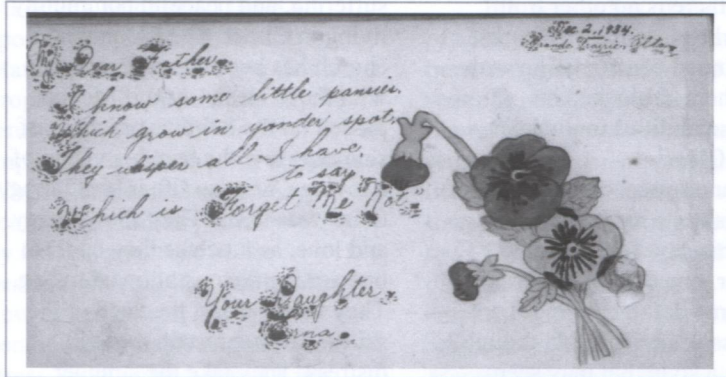




## Joy, Faith, Hope and Florals\*

a tribute to artist Erna Sawatzky Ewert

by Lora Sawatzky



"In childhood days, I often wondered where the sun went at night, having traveled through the soft, rose-tinted morning to its golden setting in the West. Many years ago my parents taught me all about the beauty of the world beneath the sun's caress. In my golden years I have not lost my childhood vision of a 'Golden Environment.' " Erna Ewert

Erna Sawatzky Ewert created an oasis of beauty when tragedy could so easily have overpowered her spirit. Erna was born May 14, 1922 in the province of Ekaterinoslav, Russia, the oldest child of Heinrich (Henry) Sawatzky and Helena Petkau Sawatzky. When Erna was one year old, her parents immigrated to Canada. After a short stay in Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, the Sawatzky family moved to a two-quarter section of lakeshore property on the outskirts of Grande Prairie, Alberta. In spite of hard work and poverty, Erna records in her paintings her fond memories of life with her family here.

At a young age, Erna found ways to express her artistic interests. At the age of twelve she presented her father with her own painting as a birthday gift. Erna was a romantic at heart, and recalls painting roses in red and pinks on light cardboard using Reeves watercolours. Being pragmatic and innovative, she glued pieces of broken pop bottles to cardboard for a frame. At thirteen, using money she had saved, she ordered a Japanese-made china demitasse set for \$1.98 from the Simpson's catalogue as a gift for her mother; Erna featured this china on a background of delicate white lace in a 1996 watercolour painting.

Life for Erna became difficult after her parents died; her father in 1936 at age 42, her mother three years later at age 45. After their mother's death, the seven younger siblings were sent to live in various Mennonite homes. Erna, now seventeen, worked as a domestic for a short while, then took a job in the Grande Prairie hospital. During this time she attended evening classes in typing and shorthand. She purchased a Singer sewing machine and sewed all her clothes in preparation for studies at Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta. She attended PBI from 1943-1945.

Erna's painting, *Impressions of Family Tree Carvings* (1997), in acrylic with black ink and copper paint, depicts her memories of family togetherness on the homestead near Grande Prairie before her parents' death. She recalls the enjoyable times she and her siblings had while walking two and one half miles to and from school through the frosty woodland surrounding their homestead. "A favorite pastime on the farm was carving our names on poplar trees...[This painting] is a memoir to my beloved, friendly and God-fearing parents. They both died in their early forties leaving the artist and seven younger bewildered orphans to carve their individual futures."

Muted browns, grays, and soft greens rather than brilliant orange and yellows dominate this painting of a rustic cottage in a forest setting. The names of her parents, prominently inscribed on the trunks of trees in white and outlined in copper, depict Erna's interest in keeping her childhood heritage alive.

On a summer visit to her sister Herta in Yarrow, Erna met Abe Ewert from Vancouver who was visiting his parents. The young couple became engaged that summer and married a year later on June 16, 1945 in the basement of the unfinished Fraserview Mennonite Brethren Church in Vancouver.

In October, the newly married couple moved to Yarrow. The fact that the large Yarrow Co-op store had very little selection in women and girls' clothing had not gone unnoticed by Erna. Tired of delivering bread for McGavin's Bakery, Abe borrowed \$1000 from his father, Isaak Ewert, and the couple opened "Erna's Dress Shop" at the corner of Dyke and Central Road. "When I sold \$35.00 worth in one day out of stock worth a total of



\$750.00, I felt I was in glory,” Erna recalls. Owning a dress shop was a dream come true for her since she had a reputation for good taste in clothes and loved to dress well.

The business grew and Abe and Erna decided to sell and move the business to a new location on Central Road west of Cornelius Funks’ grocery store. Joe Klassen of Vancouver built the new store. At first, a small apartment at the back served as the Ewerts’ home; later they moved into a pink stucco house on the same lot. This store, featuring ladies’ and men’s wear, was called *Aberna’s Stylerite*, a name suggested by Anne Andres, a Yarrow resident who was awarded two pairs of pantyhose ordered from Eatons for her suggestion. In 1957, *Aberna’s Stylerite* was transformed into a grocery store, *ABERNA’S IGA Super Market*.

During these years, Erna concentrated on managing the family business together with her husband, and on raising her children while finding creative ways of participating in a community wrapped in its traditions. Erna and Abe now had two sons, Sheldon Wayne and Alan Bruce, and a young daughter, Marilyn Joy. Erna was expecting their fourth child when disaster struck. “On September 28, 1958 just when I was expecting our last child. . . a devastating fire gutted the whole interior of the market, resulting in it sitting empty and charred for four years,” Erna states.

In the difficult time following the fire, the Ewerts found comfort in the birth of Brenda Lee Faith. The next daughter, Erna chuckles, would have been named Hope, meaning, ‘Hope that’s all.’ Remembering this time, Erna has called one of her paintings, *Joy, Faith, Hope and Florals*. Delicate Clematis petals in darker red and pink are painted using acrylic and ink on a serigraph background.

A new store, *Aberna’s Supermarket*, opened in 1962. In 1971 the Ewerts sold their business and moved to Abbotsford. It was after this move that Erna had the courage to begin another career in art. At first she took private lessons in oil painting, then enrolled in the fine arts in Fraser Valley College (now University College of the Fraser Valley). She completed the diploma program in 1983, but continued further studies until 1990. In addition, Erna studied with many noted artists at various times and participated in numerous solo, juried group and travelling exhibitions. She has received many awards and honourable mentions for her paintings.

Erna tells stories with her paintings. “More and more I want to paint things that have to do with my heritage and where I grew up – for my family so they know what it was like in the good old days,” she states. In her art she focuses on beauty rather than tragedy – her way of coming to terms with disappointments and disasters. Erna experiences an abundance of joy in God’s creation – a joy which characterizes her paintings, and spills over to the many people she meets and befriends. Her contagious laughter, her optimistic spirit, her willingness to tell her story and her compulsion to share her faith, inspire those who know her

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**A Glad Design by Erna Ewert**

This tribute to Erna Ewert is based on a full-length life story that will appear in *Windows to a Village* (see below)

### Book Launch

The Yarrow Research Committee is pleased to announce the publication of *Windows to a Village*, a volume of biographies of Yarrow residents. The book is edited by Harvey Neufeld, Maryann Jantzen and Robert Martens, and is published by Pandora Press.

All those interested are invited to attend book launches held in the following venues:

Tuesday, October 9, 7 pm at the Chilliwack Museum  
Wednesday, October 10, 3 pm at the Yarrow Library  
Thursday, October 11, 7 pm at Garden Park Tower, Abbotsford.



## Tante Tina: A Heart for the Poor and Needy

by John Dick



For more than twenty years, Tina (Martens) Friesen sews stitch by stitch, one blanket after another for families all over the world suffering war, hunger and poverty.

Tina was born in 1924 in Alexanderfeld, Russia. When she was six years old, her parents emigrated to Paraguay with their five children (one child had died in Russia.) After a long passage by ship and then ox cart, the family arrived in Fernheim where they settled. Here, Tina grew up on the family farm which produced cotton, beans and nuts. Life was not easy due to the extreme heat and hard work.

In 1969, Tina married Jacob Friesen. Ten years later, she and her husband immigrated to Canada to join other family members who had moved there previously.

### A Quilt is a Blanket with a Heartbeat

by Helen Rose Pauls

When Katie Reimer heard that her old school chum, Agnes Sawatsky, was alive and well and living in the Chilliwack hopyards, she was overjoyed. Katie had long mourned her childhood friend who she thought had perished in Stalin's gulag. From her childhood, Katie remembered how Agnes had had the courage to hitch up the horses and wagon and ride down the village street on Sunday afternoons, or how she had walked across the bridge railing when no one was looking. They had shared the same school bench, until Katie's family had left for a new life in Canada and Agnes' family had stayed behind, eventually being sent to Siberia.

Now, twenty-four years later, Agnes, her husband and two children had arrived in Canada and were just across the Vedder River. Katie could not wait to see her. She arranged for her husband to pick up Agnes' family in

After living for a year in Vancouver, they moved to Abbotsford and attended Clearbrook MB, where Tina joined the ladies' sewing circle.

In 1986, after her husband retired, Tina devoted her time to sewing blankets for MCC. Her desire is to help people living under harsh conditions and to do something for God simultaneously. Each year, for the past twenty years, Tina and the seven women who make up the 'Maranatha' ladies group, have sewn 1,500 blankets. Moreover, Tina sews another 500 blankets and covers each year on her own!

In 1999, Tina was introduced to a young German volunteer working with MCC in Clearbrook, who was picking up some blankets Tina had sewn. Soon there was an ongoing connection between Tina and the German volunteers in the area. She invites them to dinner, bakes cakes for them, and fixes their clothes. The volunteers help with making blankets or do other chores. This summer, Tina travelled to Germany to visit the volunteers she'd befriended in Canada.

Tina is now 83 years old, but is still highly motivated to keep making blankets and help people in need. How long will she keep doing this? "As long as I am in good health!" she says

*John (Johann) Dick's family comes from Kirgizstan and is now settled in Germany. John has spent the past 6 months in Canada studying English where he has learned to know and appreciate 'Tante Tina.'*

the Model T and bring them back to Yarrow for Sunday lunch while she busily prepared a huge meal for these survivors of famine, prison, war, flight, and refugee camps.

A joyous reunion, a sumptuous meal and a too-short visit led to many more Sunday noon feasts together as Katie's family shared her bountiful table with guests who finally could eat until they were full. Katie's husband took Agnes along to Vancouver to the Old Church thrift store to purchase clothes to remake for the children when he went to the big city to get steel for his blacksmithing shop. And Katie gave Agnes a quilt, artfully made with strips of useable fabric from the less-worn parts of old woolen suit pants and skirts, to ease the chill in the uninsulated hop yard shack; a gift from those who had very little, to those who had even less.



## Edgar and Ligia Rivera: A new kind of Mennonite history

by Robert Martens

Guatemala's history is one of the bloodiest of the nations of Latin America. In 1954, president Jacobo Arbenz was overthrown by the CIA in collusion with local landowners, the Guatemalan military, and the Catholic Church. A spiral into seemingly uncontrollable violence began. Coup followed coup, and the late 1960s saw the emergence of rightist paramilitary organizations, otherwise known as death squads. In response, a guerrilla movement entered the country from Mexico, and a long civil war ensued. More than 450 Mayan villages were destroyed and over one million people displaced, most of the brutality being committed by the US trained Guatemalan army and by state sponsored death squads. In 1992 the Nobel Peace Prize was won by Rigoberta Menchú for her work in bringing to light the killings of Guatemala's indigenous people. Finally in 1996 the 35-year war ended with a peace accord between the government and guerrilla forces.

It was within this turmoil that Edgar and Ligia Rivera, currently members of Cedar Valley Church in Mission, grew up. Both were born in Guatemala City into families of moderate income. At the age of four, says Edgar, "I decided I will not be poor." He recalls that, while attending a Catholic elementary school, he saw guerrillas with guns running upon the walls. As children, Ligia and Edgar often heard the sound of bombings, and sometimes "hid under the bed." Ligia, also raised as a Catholic, first met Edgar at the age of fifteen. She had attended school with Edgar's sister for three years, but did not meet her future husband until she was invited to a birthday party for his grandmother. The two dated for four years and nine months before they married. Edgar attended university (a "blessing," he

remarks) while Ligia studied to be a beautician at a technical institute.

In 1982 a coup brought the nominally Protestant Efraín Ríos Montt to power, and his government escalated the scorched-earth warfare in the countryside, coupled with disappearances and torture. Edgar had been involved in social work with orphanages and the youth movement. He had also gone to military school, and had helped in the campaign of a national youth leader who was a good friend. In the prevailing context, all this was enough to make him a target of the authorities. Edgar was kidnapped by the intelligence service and held for seven days. During this time he was handcuffed, blindfolded with masking tape, and severely tortured. "Everyone was praying for him," says Ligia. Edgar responds, "When I was kidnapped, I met God."

On the seventh day, a man hit Edgar with a pistol and said, "You are going to die tonight." Edgar, however, experienced spiritual epiphany: "I felt a hand lifting me, and I knew I would not die." Sure enough, that night he was dumped at the side of a road. Edgar wasted no time. Sadly parting from his wife and three children (a fourth would later be born in Canada) he fled for his life to Honduras. There he experienced a conversion, primarily as a consequence of reading. After three months, Edgar managed to move to the US. Before he left, however, Ligia came to Honduras with the children. Then the family parted once more. "I didn't know," says Edgar, "if we would meet again." In Chicago he was met by a friend, and began work as a janitor. Ligia joined him there half a year later. (The children stayed behind temporarily with friends.) Within three months Edgar was a



supervisor, and within three years he was working for Minolta; Ligia was a skilled labourer in a factory. The Riveras lived in Chicago for seven years and prospered, despite the fact that they were "illegal aliens." They longed, however, for a permanent and secure home.

In Guatemala, Edgar had attended church only to appease Ligia, so when she arrived in Chicago, "I didn't believe," she says, "that he was a Christian, but he was very different and very happy." "Ligia," Edgar responds, "was not a believer when she arrived in Chicago... She was my first convert." The Riveras had little or no knowledge of the Mennonite church at this point, despite the fact that the *Iglesia Menonita de Guatemala*, the Guatemala Mennonite Church, had a presence there since the early 1970s. Indeed a seminary named *Semilla* (seed), with the aid of North American Mennonite churches, was established in Guatemala in the 1980s. According to its website, the seminary "draws inspiration from the experience of the early Anabaptists who also attempted to develop church communities and live their faith in a context of social and economic injustice." The Riveras had their first contact with Mennonites in Chicago, and were immediately intrigued by the Mennonite/Anabaptist heritage.

They were referred for help with immigration to the Mennonite congregation of Reba Place and the Underground Railroad, an



organization that specialized in immigrant aid. "I had a lot of hate in my heart," says Edgar, "Hate had kept me alive." He had been accustomed to carrying a machete, but when he attended Reba Place, it "was a shock" to have it preached that we should love our enemies. "Being peacemakers has helped my healing process immensely." Many years later, he still bears the marks of the handcuffs on his wrists from the kidnapping experience. "I'm being romantic," he says, but "when the marks disappear, I'll be ready to return to Guatemala." As for post traumatic stress disorder from the torture, he hasn't been deeply affected. "I feel blessed that I was not mutilated... I have nothing to say to God but thank you." Ligia, on the other hand, says she never felt the hatred that Edgar did, but during the kidnapping, "I really believed he was coming home."

The Riveras were further referred to MCC as refugee claimants. Due primarily to political considerations, it was impossible for them to apply for refugee status in the United States, and the couple chose to emigrate to Canada. The Canadian immigration authorities presented the couple with three choices: Montreal, Toronto, or

Vancouver. In a library the Riveras watched a video of Vancouver, which showed boats sailing in serene weather, and they made what seemed an obvious choice. They were tired, Ligia says, of the cold winters. They were now again a family, having been reunited in 1987 with their children whom they had been forced to leave behind temporarily with relatives in Guatemala. It took three years to get the proper papers to qualify as permanent residents of Canada. The Riveras left Chicago on June 28, 1989 and arrived in Mission on July 6 at 11:30 am. Ligia's first thought was, "Wow, this is paradise."

They have happily lived in Mission ever since. Edgar resumed work for a time for Minolta and subsequently found employment as product manager in the railroad industry. Ligia has worked as a seamstress, and now is a full-time preschool teacher at Cedar Valley. Edgar has also served as outreach representative for Mennonite Church BC, and continues to be involved in church evangelism. "I don't have a blind faith," he says, "I have a solid faith." The Riveras' refugee experience might strike a chord with some of the older members of the Mennonite church

who were driven from their Russian birthplace. Edgar fights back a tear as he expresses a profoundly spiritual revelation: "Wherever I am, that's home."

What is the Riveras' vision for the Mennonite community? The term, "Anabaptist," says Edgar, is "related very much with help, the brother, the sister, anybody." He quotes a visiting Latin American Mennonite speaker for whom he served as translator: "We got together, and decided to get back to our roots, and our roots are the peace position." He talks about larger congregations which become "too comfortable" – "why should I sit next to a stranger?" But the Mennonite church, remarks Edgar, is "opening to the whole community – for survival.... If we continue as we are, we will disappear." On the other hand, "We are a gifted church.... We are peacemakers," not only in war, but "in the home, with families, with drug addicts." And besides, "We have another gift, music." Sometimes, Edgar says, "We try to get Pentecostal" and become involved in some "junk" in the interests of outreach. But "We are not Pentecostals.... There are tremendous values we can offer to the community.... I am an optimist."

### Anna German, Mennonite Superstar?

by Louise Bergen Price

Occasionally, a singer captures the hearts of an entire nation. Anna German, the 'Polish Nightingale,' one of the most loved singers not only in her home country, but the entire Soviet Union, was so popular that Lucia Thijssen describes her as an 'East-European Lady Di.' Tickets to her concerts sold out hours after being released. She was photographed with cosmonauts; an asteroid was named after her. When she died in 1982, millions mourned.

Yet despite this popularity, Anna's past was shrouded in

mystery—all that was known was that this 'blonde angel' had come to Poland with her grandmother and mother from Uzbekistan in 1946. Now, twenty-five years after her death, more details begin to emerge.

Over the years, Anna German has been claimed as 'one of our own' by the Poles, the Russians, the Dutch, and the *Russlanddeutsche*. But what is Anna German's background; who are her ancestors?

I first became intrigued by Anna's story in 2001 through an article from the Dutch paper, NRC.



In "Nachtigal van de Koude Oorlog"<sup>4</sup>, Lucia Thijssen interviewed Anna's 91 year-old mother and unfolded an all too common and tragic story.

<sup>4</sup> NRC, 12 Sept, 2001



Anna German's mother, Irma Martens, was born in 1909 in Wohldemfuerst, Kuban, to Anna Friesen Martens and David Martens. In 1922, David Martens was 'disappeared,' and Anna Martens fled with her seven children to the vicinity of Urgench, Uzbekistan.

Mennonites had lived in Uzbekistan since the Klaas Epp migration to Central Asia in the late nineteenth century, and had established the village of Ak Metchet near the ancient city of Khiva, south of Urgench.

It was here that Anna Martens' daughter, Irma, working as a German teacher, met Eugene Hoerman<sup>5</sup> (in Russian, Yevgeni German). Yevgeni's father, Fridrich, was pastor of a 'baptist'<sup>6</sup> church in Solotarewka, a small town near the Volga. In 1929 he was arrested as a *Kulak* and sentenced to five years hard labour, but died of starvation in a work camp in the Urals in 1931. Son Yevgeni, meanwhile, fled east towards China to the relative safety of Uzbekistan where he met and married Irma Martens.

But Stalin's long arm soon reached Uzbekistan and into Irma and Yevgeni's home. Little Anna Viktoria German, born in on February 14, 1936, did not grow up knowing her father, for in 1938 he was arrested in the Stalinist purges and later executed as a spy. Both of Yevgeni's brothers and one sister were also arrested and sentenced to prison terms; the sister and one brother survived. Irma's five brothers fared worse—also arrested

in the Great Terror, no word of their fate was ever known.

With most of the family gone, Anna grew up with the two women who would figure large in the rest of her life, her grandmother Anna Martens, and her Mother Irma.



In 1945, Irma German fled west with her mother and nine-year-old daughter. Their trek ended in Warsaw, Poland, where Irma found work as a Russian teacher while her mother ran the household and Anna attended school.

While studying at the Geological Institute of Wroclaw University, Anna joined the theatre 'Kalambar', the first step in her musical career. In 1964, she won an award at the Festival of Polish songs and soon she was a star, not only in Poland, but in the entire Soviet Union. The Moscow times reported: 'For millions of Soviet citizens she was a Polish star who sang melodic Russian love songs while other singers praised of the glory of Communism.'<sup>7</sup>

When Ann was seriously injured in a car accident in 1969 while touring in Italy, Soviet newspapers headlines called it as a 'Catastrophe' It was three years before she made her return to the stage. She went on to perform in Cannes, as well as in Germany, Belgium, USA, Canada, and Australia. Toward the end of her life, she composed a number of religious songs.

In 1980 she was diagnosed with cancer. She died on August 26, 1982, only 46 years old, leaving behind an husband and young son.

Anna's fans have not forgotten her. Her recording continue to sell and, more recently, video clips of her concerts have been posted on the internet site, YouTube. They show a lovely, slender woman who moves with poise, her voice fluid and graceful as her body.

Irma Martens outlived her daughter by many years. Together with Anna's husband, she managed the sale of Anna's cassettes and music. In Irma's home, smiling photos of Anna graced the walls; each day, Anna voice sang from the cassette player.

In spite of her many years in Poland, Irma Martens did not feel at home—her foreign accent proclaimed her a stranger. In her 2001 interview with Lucia Thijssen, she spoke of her happy childhood on the steppes of Kuban and recited an old Mennonite poem:

*Soon Farjoa kjemt nich mea tridj  
Uck nich de jung Joare  
Wo, äwa woone lange Bridj  
Met woon Jespaun kaun eena tridj  
en siene Jugend foare.<sup>8</sup>*

*Such a springtime will not return  
Neither will the days of youth.  
Over which long bridge  
And with which team of horses  
Can one return to those days?*

Irma died January 30, 2007, and is buried in a Warsaw cemetery near the grave of her daughter. A tribute to her states that she loved literature, music and languages.

Anna German lives on in the hearts of thousands all over the world who have loved her for years, and in the hearts of many others who have just come to know her.

<sup>5</sup> According to Willi Vogt's 'Erfolgreiche Mennoniten', German's great-grandfather married an Eleanore Janzen; their son Fridrich joined the Mennonite church. <http://chortitza.heim.at/BPfrom.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.gulag.memorial.de/index.html>. 'Baptist' here may be synonymous to Mennonite, since this site states that Fridrich grew up in a baptist farmer's family.

<sup>7</sup> <http://ornis-press.de/pub.php?id=183> (translated from the German by LBP)

<sup>8</sup> NRC, 12 Sept 2001. (Low German spelling changed from Dutch phonetics.)



## Fraser Valley Gleaners: *producing nutrition from waste*

by Selma Hooge



Witnessing the wasteful ways of many Canadians, especially waste of food, is very painful to some of us. Maybe it's because we have experienced hunger or we have heard our parents talk about the *Hungaschnot* (famine) when millions of Ukrainians and Russians starved to death. Older Canadians remember the great Depression during the 30s when people in this country went hungry.

As Christians we also know that Jesus taught his disciples not to waste. Therefore, many of us heartily endorse the trend toward recycling, reusing and not abusing our country's wealth and resources. That's why the Fraser Valley Gleaners (FVG) seems like such a great idea.

In Bible times gleaners were the poor who went into the fields after the harvest to gather grain for personal use. Volunteers from the FVG sometimes go out into the fields too, to glean broccoli, celery, apples and much more, not because the harvest is finished but because farmers can't sell for profit what they've grown. More often, however, a volunteer truck driver

will go to a farm or packing house to pick up 1,000-pound bins full of donated culls such as tomatoes, potatoes and peppers. Lucerne donates frozen veggies when the "best before" date has expired. Onions have come from Walla Walla, Washington.

At the FVG plant on Winson Rd. in south Abbotsford (near the Sumas border), all the gleaned produce is chopped, sliced and prepared for dehydration. In one eight hour cycle, 1,200 pounds of produce will be dried to 10% moisture. Dehydrated food lasts indefinitely and is light weight for shipping. (remember "jereischte Tweiback" and "jedraejdet Oaft?" *roasted buns and dried fruit*) There may be as many as twelve ingredients, including crushed legumes, plus salt, in the finished product which is sealed in a plastic bag and labeled, "In Christ's Name" with instructions how to make the soup; only water is necessary to make a tasty meal. The apples that are dehydrated are packaged separately for a delicious snack.

The main aim of the FVG is to provide a nutritious product for sending to starving people in poor countries, at the same time preventing as much waste as possible here. One package of mix makes one hundred soup servings.

For shipping to other countries, 70 bags are packed into a drum; 80 drums fit into a 20 foot container. Churches or other charitable organizations then take on the cost of shipping, and also oversee distribution. The facility Gleaners use belongs to MCC and in return, MCC receives 30% of what the Gleaners produce for distribution in countries of their

choice. Other distributors include organizations like *Seeds of Hope*, *Canadian Food for the Hungry*, and dozens more. Countries all over the world have received shipments: Guatemala, Bosnia, Ukraine, Mexico, to name a few. The FVG brochure says, "We require the distributors to give us feedback and pictures from every shipment so that we can relay this to our supporters."

Supporters are the volunteers who work at the plant, the board members, drivers, donors, and those who pray. The main fund raiser is an annual banquet. Volunteers and members also take every opportunity to publicize the work of Gleaners at special church events and charitable functions.



Between 30 to 40 volunteers arrive each weekday morning when the bulk of the washing, chopping and cutting is done. Groups of students, Care Groups and others come evenings to help. Often, Carl Goosen, the manager and the only salaried person, has to work overtime. He says it is getting hard to find persons who are committed to work those odd hours, like 2:00 a.m. when drying trays need changing.

Fortunately, there are usually several couples who have come from other parts of the province or Canada to donate one or two



months to the Gleaners. They live in their own motor homes or trailers on site.

To learn more about the Fraser Valley Gleaners, phone Carl at 604-870-9272 or check the web [www.fvgleaners.org](http://www.fvgleaners.org), e-mail

[info@fvgleaners.org](mailto:info@fvgleaners.org) A current need is a new source of the drums for shipping.

### Summer Borscht...Sorrel and Such

by Helen Rose Pauls

On the first warm days of early spring, the first green shoots of sorrel or *Saurump* were eagerly awaited by farm families very tired of 'cooking from the flour sack.' Each garden had at least one flourishing *Saurump* plant and children dared each other to chew a mouthful of the sharp, sour green leaves. Together with stinging nettle and rhubarb, sorrel enriched winter-bland diets not only with flavor, but with badly needed vitamins and minerals.

We usually tasted it first in *Sommeborscht* made with a ham bone stock, tiny potatoes stolen from the edges of new plants, sliced onion greens, with the limp chopped sorrel leaves swimming in the mix. Some cooks beat eggs into fresh cream and added this during the last few minutes. This mixture tended to look like a dog's breakfast but tasted heavenly. The aroma alone brought the men in from the barns and fields, and loud slurping added gusto to the table conversation. Later in the summer, beet tops were used in *Sommeborscht* as well as sorrel, but sorrel had a better flavour.

Although my mother did not use sorrel for Platz, those who did not have rhubarb in early spring may have tried it in desperation. I have heard that it is quite good. I have included the recipe below as well as two versions of the soup.

#### Sorrel Soup with Hambone

2 quarts soup stock [boil ham bone for an hour and cut off meat to put into the soup]  
½ cup chopped onion greens  
several sprigs of dill and parsley  
2 cups diced potatoes  
salt and pepper to taste

Boil for ½ an hour.

Add 2 cups chopped sorrel and 1 cup cream at the end and cook for another 2 minutes. (Optional: whirl 2 eggs in the blender with the cream.)

#### Sorrel soup with Chicken Stock

To 5 cups chicken stock, add 2 tablespoons butter, 3 cups chopped sorrel, ½ cup chopped onion greens, ½ cup cream and 3 beaten eggs. Cook for 5 minutes. Delicious!

#### Platz with Sorrel

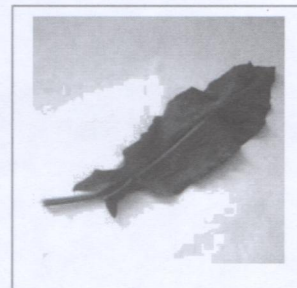
Mix 2 ½ cups flour, 1 cup sugar, ½ cup butter, 2 tsp. Baking Powder, 1 tsp. vanilla.

Reserve a cup of these crumbs for topping.

To the remainder, mix in 2 cups milk, 2 beaten eggs. Pour into 9 by 12 greased pan and top with a thick layer of finely chopped sorrel. Sprinkle ½ cup sugar [or more] onto the sorrel and cover with reserved crumbs.

Bake at 350 F. for 40 minutes. Good hot with whipped cream.

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### Memory, History, Thanksgiving: A Time to Celebrate

In 1946, 3765 Mennonite refugees arrived in Canada, the largest number of post-WWII Mennonite 'DPs' to arrive between 1947 and 1952. Next fall we will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of this escape to freedom.

A special committee, under the umbrella of MHSBC's Events Committee, is at work planning this event, which will take place in conjunction with the annual fundraising banquet.

At left, a group of Mennonites leaves Austria enroute to Canada.





Memoirs of the Old Homestead

by Erna Ewert