

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

Special Issue: Sixty Years of Peace and Plenty; Mennonite Refugees Remember

Upcoming Celebration	2
News from the Archives.....	3
End of an Era	3
Adolf Hitler and Mennonites.....	5
The Great Trek	7
Homes away from Home	8
The Basket-Maker: Growing up as a Refugee	10
Growing Up in Turbulent Times	13
C.F. Klassen.....	14
The Repatriation Agreement.....	15
My Mother's Story.....	16
Victims of Yalta.....	19
Through Paraguay to Canada.....	20
Excerpts of Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, February 25, 1956	22
Return to Germany.....	23
Bibliography.....	25
Becoming Canadian Citizens	26
Hymns of our Mothers and Fathers	26
Eating my Father's Island.....	27
Monument in Udarnik:.....	28



A group of refugees about to leave for a new home

**Stories about: The German occupation—Great Trek and Refugee Life—
Repatriation—Immigration—New Life in Canada
Special celebration October 18, 19. See page two for more information.**

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

Editorial

Taking in refugees is an act of faith, and for the sponsors of WWII refugees, it was no different. Who knows what they've experienced? What if the political system has corrupted them? What if they have Communist/ Fascist ideas?

How will they fit into the church? They've had so little religious teachings—will they know wrong from right?

Practically, how much money will it cost? There are obligations to one's own family, children to educate, home and car payments. And what if they never become independent, if they need the sponsors for years and years—what then?

In many cases, there has been no news from these friends, relatives or acquaintances for fifteen years or more; reasons enough to doubt the wisdom of taking in these strangers.

It's a good thing Canadian Mennonites were led by faith, not doubt. Thousands opened their doors and their hearts to the refugees that arrived after WWII. And for this we, the '48ers are thankful from the bottom of our hearts. May we be as generous!



On the right, Onkel Hein and Tante Greta Boldt, who sponsored nephew Heinrich Bergen with wife Irene and baby daughter Luise.

Upcoming Celebration

Sixty years of Peace and Plenty: The Celebration. October 18 and 19, 2008. All events to take place at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 3471 Clearbrook Rd, Abbotsford, BC.

Saturday afternoon from 2 pm. Admission free! Visiting, photo and artifact exhibits, author book signings, music, drama, film: The Great Trek.

Saturday evening 6 pm. Annual Fundraising Banquet with Dr. Harry Loewen.

Sixty years of Peace and Plenty: Mennonite Refugees Remember

"Mennonite Refugees After World War II: Those Who Came West and Those Who Were Sent Back East."

In 1943 some 35,000 Mennonites left the Soviet Union, fleeing from the Red Army. When they reached Poland and Germany, they were overtaken by the Soviets and 23,000 were forcibly sent back to Russia. Only 12,000 managed to remain in Germany. With the help of MCC they found new homes in South America and Canada. Those who were sent back East after the war suffered untold hardships, but many not only survived but also kept their faith and established congregational communities. In the 1970s and '80s many Russian Mennonites came to live as "Aussiedler" (resettlers) in Germany where they thrive materially and spiritually, similar to their brothers and sisters in the West. The paper will seek to describe and compare the experiences of these groups whose 60th anniversary we are celebrating this year.

Admission to the banquet by advance tickets only. Tickets are \$20, and are available from board members or the MHSBC office.

Sunday afternoon at 2:30 pm. **Festival of Thanksgiving in Story and Song.** Free admission.

Storytellers and readers include Andreas Schroeder, Helen Lescheid, Louise Bergen Price, Elsie K. Neufeld, Robert Martens, Rob van Dyck and Connie Braun. Tribute to MCC and C.F. Klassen by Klassen's grandson Steve Klassen. Singing led by Peter and Hilda Goertzen.

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!

Directors: Ben Braun, David Giesbrecht, Ed Hildebrand, John Konrad, Robert Martens, Peter Neudorf, Helen Rose Pauls, Louise Bergen Price, Lora Sawatsky, Ben Stobbe, Richard Thiessen & John B. Toews. **Editor:** Louise Bergen Price. **Contributing editors:** Helen Rose Pauls & Robert Martens. **Archive Director:** David Giesbrecht. **Staff:** Mary Ann Quiring & Elizabeth Klassen. **Copy editing:** Hugo and Jean Friesen.

News from the Archives

by David Giesbrecht

Upcoming Event: November 15. Genealogy workshop with Henry Schapansky, Tim Janzen and others. Check our website for more details.

Major new bibliography

Lisete Isaak, a student at the University of the Fraser Valley, has recently compiled a major, annotated bibliography titled: *British Columbia Mennonite Bibliography, 1918-2008*.

While not comprehensive, this is an extensive listing of materials written by and about BC Mennonites, and includes books, theses, journal, periodical and newspaper articles as well as online reference sources.

Lisete's work will be a significant help to anyone researching aspects of the BC Mennonite story. A copy of this bibliography is available in the reference section in our Archival Center.

Request for Post WW II Refugee/Immigrant Photos

If you have any pictures of your family enroute to Canada—the ship they were on, a refugee camp they were assigned to in Europe, contact with MCC representatives, etc.—we would be pleased to receive a copy to be displayed as part of our banquet in October.

Please identify people included, date taken, or other central details being represented. You may send photos to our office, or email digitized copies to archives@mhsbc.com. MHSBC plans to create a web-location where these photos can be accessed at a later date.

Request for Gulag photographs. Ruth Derksen Siemens is still collecting photographs of the Gulag. To contribute, send photos to the archives@mhsbc.com, attention Hugo.

Book about Paraguay

Our MHSBC office has recently received a new book, called *One Body, Many Parts: The Mennonite Churches in Paraguay*, by well-known Paraguayan historian, Gerhard Ratzlaff. First published in German as *Ein Leib – viele Glieder*, it has been translated into English by Jake Balzer of Calgary.

Ratzlaff offers a very thorough study of Paraguayan Mennonites in the context of their theological distinctives. In addition to discussing Mennonite historical origins he provides a useful survey of each colony, profiling church life, denominational structures, mission work as well as Indian and Spanish speaking Mennonite churches. A significant section of the book analyzes the social contribution of Paraguayan Mennonites through health-care facilities, seniors care, daycare centers, and educational institutions.

The author concludes his study with a nostalgic retrospective as well as prospective reflections. An extensive bibliography will be helpful to anyone wishing to pursue this story. Review to follow.

End of an Era: *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Der Bote*

by Henry Neufeld

Two Mennonite German language periodicals, *Der Bote* and *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, recently ended publication due to declining readership. At a May afternoon session MHSBC paid tribute to the significant place these periodicals hold in the history of German speaking Mennonites in North America and beyond. Similar acknowledgements were held earlier in Winnipeg, St. Catharines, Leamington and Saskatoon.

The *Rundschau* has the distinction of being the longest running Mennonite periodical: 130 years when the last issue was published in January 2007. David Ewert, who for the past 17 years had written the column Fragekasten (Question box) for the paper, provided an overview of the history and purpose of the *Rundschau*.

Helen Franz, a long time reader, contributor and *Bote* Board member noted that the paper had provided inspiration, news and devotional material for 84 years until its closing in early 2008. *Der Bote* was initially published in Rosthern, Saskatchewan as *Der Mennonitische Immigrantentbote*, a weekly paper; later it became *Der Bote*, moving to Winnipeg. In 1991 it became a bi-weekly paper.

Ingrid Janzen Lamp, who worked for *Der Bote* for 44 years, the last five as editor, thanked readers for their faithful support. Retired pastor Jake Tilitzky, described *Der Bote* as “a constant companion during my pastoral years.” Tilitzky noted the gap in reporting obituaries left by the closing of these papers: “Who will bring the news of my passing, a picture, and a note about who spoke and sang at my funeral?” he asked. In 2006, *Der Bote* still had over 2300 subscribers. The last issue was published in spring 2008.

The *Rundschau*'s origin in Nebraska followed the migration of 18,000 Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to the USA and southern Manitoba between 1874 and 1880, said Ewert. John Funk operated a printing press in Elkhart, Indiana and in 1877 began publishing the *Nebraska Ansiedler*. Meanwhile, J.F. Harms, who worked with Funk, moved to Kansas to become editor of the MB paper, *Zionsbote*.

In 1908 the *Rundschau* was transferred to Scottdale, Pennsylvania, published by the Mennonite Publishing House. In 1923 it was transferred to Winnipeg to reflect the arrival of some 20,000 immigrants in Canada from Russia. Edited by Herman Neufeld, the paper was financed by shareholders and subscriptions.

In 1945, the *Rundschau* Publishing House became the Christian Press and was purchased by the Canadian MB Conference. Due to anti-German sentiment during WW II the *Rundschau*'s front and back cover pages were printed in English. By 2006 the *Rundschau*'s circulation fell to about 1500 and a special anniversary issue in January 2007 marked its end.

These two papers served the German speaking immigrant community well; they provided new arrivals with information about where Mennonite churches were located, enabling new settlers to move to places where they could find fellowship in Mennonite circles. Additionally, both papers served their faith communities by providing connections between churches in North and South America and Europe.

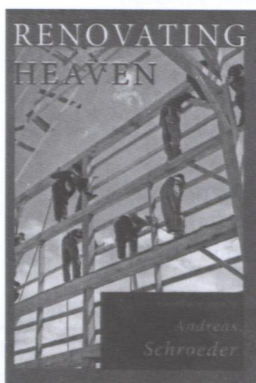
These papers provided “spiritual help to [the] readers, many of whom longed for devotional materials,” said Ewert. They tried to pass on the values of the Mennonite-Anabaptist tradition and to help new Canadians distinguish between cultural baggage and fundamental biblical truths. Both papers published sermons and devotional articles.

Obituaries, with considerable detail, were often read first in these two papers; they were of major importance. When *Der Bote* announced it was ceasing publication, they received a flood of obituaries and added extra space to report them. The afternoon also included German hymn singing led by Jake & Erna Tilitzky.



Ingrid Janzen Lamp, editor, *Der Bote*.
Photo courtesy M C Canada

* * * * *



A new book by Andreas Schroeder.

Renovating Heaven. Vancouver: Oolichan Press, 2008.

From the book cover flap:

“Hilarious, bizarre and heart-breaking by turn, this novel in triptych about Mennonite life in Canada from the 1950s to the 1970s fills in the gap between Rudy Wiebe’s *Of This Earth* (a generation older) and Miriam Toews’ *A Complicated Kindness* (a generation younger).”

Read an excerpt from Schroeder’s book on page 27.

The German Occupation

On February 17, 1943, Hitler made a flying visit to Zaporozhje where he addressed the troops and declared:

"The outcome of a battle of decisive importance depends on you! Germany's fate, present and future, will be decided a thousand kilometres from the borders of the Reich.

The entire German homeland has therefore been mobilized. Everyone, to the last man, and the last woman, is being called into service to support your battle...

If everyone of you helps me, we will—as before—succeed with the help of the almighty."

from: Kurowski, Franz. Trans by David Johnson. *Panzer Aces; German Tank Commanders in World War II*. Stackpole, 2004, p. 46. Web access June 11, 2008 at <http://books.google.ca>

Adolf Hitler and Mennonites

by Robert Martens



Adolf Hitler.

The Mennonites who escaped the Soviet Union with the retreating German army during the latter years of World War II were faced with one of the untenable choices that life so often imposes upon us: Joseph Stalin or Adolf Hitler? In this case the only possible decision was survival. Mennonites fled the atrocities of the USSR, arguably greater than those of the Third Reich, under the wing of the fascist German troops. If a few, in these nightmarish conditions, fell under the sway of Hitler, it is understandable.

The choices faced by Russian Mennonites before World War I were not as extreme but harsh nonetheless. The imperial government, riding a wave of xenophobic panslavism, intermittently threatened to expropriate the lands of "German" colonists and deport their owners to Siberia. Mennonites responded, for the most part, that they were of Dutch origin, and should not be subject to anti-Germanic law. This was partly an argument of pragmatism. Over the years the Mennonite colonies had become increasingly Germanic in culture, and the Dutch tongue had long been forgotten. Nevertheless their roots indeed were generally in the northern lowlands of Europe; their connections with Germany

had never been strong; in fact many Mennonites had fled to Catherine the Great's Russia when their Polish lands were absorbed by the warlike Prussian state.

Russian Mennonites were becoming increasingly educated but their knowledge of their own and especially of Russian history was still sketchy. A debate was carried on concerning their roots among their most articulate leaders, such as PM Friesen, the brothers Peter and Heinrich Braun, and Benjamin Unruh. In the prevailing hostile political climate, the German argument was seldom made. Sympathies lay with the Boers, historically of Dutch extraction, during the war in South Africa. Individuals such as Unruh and Heinrich Braun, however, who had studied in German schools, were already deeply permeated with an admiration for Germanic culture. Schiller and Goethe were being taught in Mennonite schools in Russia.

The catastrophes of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath produced an overnight change. German troops helped train young Mennonite men to defend militarily the assaults on their colonies. Unruh's stance on Mennonite cultural roots altered gradually from the Dutch argument to the German: "Now as Christians," he wrote in a letter to BB Janz, "we believe that it was God's way with our fathers that they gained access to the German spirit" (Friesen 291). Heinrich Braun wrote that "we both desire and intend to cherish and assert our *Deutschtum* ... after the difficult experiences of the last years..." (Friesen 276). A *Studienkommission* (study commission) was formed, with Unruh among its members, to investigate possible emigration to Germany.

With the defeat of the German army this option was no longer viable, and the *Studienkommission* veered clumsily back to the Dutch origins theory. About 20,000 Mennonites managed to escape to North America. Benjamin Unruh, however, never returned to the Soviet Union, and settled in Karlsruhe, Germany in 1920, where he

taught Russian language and literature at the Karlsruhe Technische Hochschule. The Braun brothers followed him to Germany. Here these three Mennonite men, among others, were to fall under the spell of Adolf Hitler.

Jewish participation in the Bolshevik Revolution helped fuel anti-Semitism among them. A desperate hope lingered that Hitler might help restore the Mennonite homeland in Ukraine. Additionally, the principle of nonresistance, often regarded in Russia as a mere political prerogative, had been lost among a significant number of Mennonites. Meanwhile other events were pushing uprooted Mennonites into the German camp. Initially, Siberian Mennonites, having little contact with the state of Germany, considered themselves a *Völklein* (little people) having little to do with the powers of the "world." In 1929, however, about sixty to seventy Siberian Mennonite families managed somehow to flee to Moscow and acquire passports out of the country. A flood of desperate Mennonites followed them to Moscow upon hearing of their success. They were forced, when other alternatives failed, to turn to Otto Auhagen of the German embassy. He publicized their plight, the German media took up their cause – "Brothers in Need!" was the cry – and some 5700 Mennonites were rescued by Hindenburg and the German authorities. They eventually settled in Paraguay and Brazil. BH Unruh helped negotiate the effort. Over the years he argued that the German government regarded the refugees as part of the *Volk* (the ethnic German nation) and that they no longer constituted a separate *Völklein*. "That the Nazi ideology was strongest among these refugees is no accident" (Friesen 313).

Peter Braun, who died at a young age in 1933 of tuberculosis, wrote of a "Jewish-Slavic" clique (Friesen 319) that dominated the Bolshevik leadership and threatened the Mennonite *Volkstum* (peoplehood). Heinrich Schroeder, another Russian Mennonite teaching in Germany, published a book that began with a quote from Hitler and featured a photo of himself in Nazi uniform. In 1934 a pro-fascist article by Schroeder printed in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* argued for the notion of a global German culture. To his credit, BB Janz of Coaldale, Alberta responded vigorously in opposition. Meanwhile, Benjamin Unruh's support for Hitler, who he hoped was God's instrument to smash Soviet Communism, seemed to grow over the next years. By 1943 he was rewriting the history of Mennonites, minimizing their historically-established antipathy to Prussian rule in the eighteenth century, and emphasizing the "purity of the blood of these *volksdeutsche* (German people) settlers" (Friesen 325). His manuscript is now resident in the Hoover Archive of Stanford University.

Hitler's shadow extended to North America. Russian Mennonite immigrants, *Russländer*, welcomed democracy but were suspicious of its secularist and increasingly morally relativist nature. In 1923 the *Zentrale Mennonitische Immigrantenkomitee* (ZMIK: Central Mennonite Immigrants Committee) was formed to defend immigrants' rights and to advance Mennonite culture by supporting German booksellers, youth groups, and the teaching of Mennonite history. It was headed by Dietrich Epp, long-time editor of *Die Bote*. ZMIK was continuously short of funds and was finally absorbed by the Canadian Board of Colonization, but over Epp's protests, who argued that assimilation was the greatest danger threatening Mennonites in the west.

The *Deutschtum* (Germanness) movement, arguing on behalf of a common global German culture, powerfully influenced some Mennonites during the 1930s. JJ Hildebrand, a member of Mennonite Immigration Aid, went so far as to propose a separate state for Mennonites: "The government of this colony should be and stay in Mennonite hands ... with Low and High German serving as official languages and guaranteed unrestricted access to the German cultural spirit" (Urry 197). The concept was clearly unrealistic and went nowhere. Hildebrand was, however, part of a Nazi-influenced movement that emphasized such issues as German literature, aid to German refugees, and the importance of family. Poet Gerhard Friesen, in support of *Deutschtum*, actually moved to Germany in 1938. Meanwhile Mennonite newspapers were openly publishing Nazi propaganda, with Hermann Neufeldt, editor of the *Rundschau*, printing Hitler's speech to the *Reichstag* in 1939. In 1934 and 1939 he was brought before the court for publishing anti-Semitic material. BB Janz, on the other hand, was again leading the fight against the militaristic ideology of Nazism.

Mennonites were increasingly supporting strong right wing government as a perceived necessary response to communism. In the light of their experience and the ongoing holocaust in the Soviet Union, this was almost inevitable. The election of Jacob Penner as a communist alderman in Winnipeg was perhaps the exception that proved the rule. With the start of World War II and the revelations about Hitler's atrocities, however, support among Mennonites for National Socialism either fell silent or vanished. It was a dark and shameful episode in Mennonite history.

On the other hand, was it perhaps not understandable for them to take a stance against the "progressive" forces of individualism and relativism, which today are being profoundly questioned? And while BH Unruh's support for Hitler was utterly and eternally inexcusable, does the suffering of his own people go some way to explaining his stance? Somewhere along the journey, however, the Mennonite ideal of a separate and peaceful church had been partially lost to the allure of power. The "recovery of the Anabaptist vision" by Harold Bender after World War II began a sustained debate over the purportedly weakened ideals of witness and peace, and the result has been a healthy self-examination of the Mennonite past. The issue extends beyond history, however, and should begin with the awareness of power's shadow in our own hearts.

References:

Friesen, Abraham. *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I*. Winnipeg & Hillsboro: Kindred Productions, 2006.
 Urry, James. *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2006.
Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.

The Great Trek

Auntje Vejäte

by Louise Bergen Price

September 1943. As the front grew closer, occupying German forces in Mennonite villages warned the villagers to be ready and packed to leave at a moment's notice. One evening, as Tina Rempel (not her real name) sat milking old Bossie, she worried about what to take. She would take the cow, that much was certain. Otherwise how would her eight children get enough milk? And of course the *Zwieback* buns she'd roasted and stuffed in a pillow sack. Warm clothing, shoes, a book that had belonged to her husband, a few family photos. Tomorrow she'd butcher the small pig, salt the meat and pack it in lard. But how would they manage to carry it all?

A practise run would be a good idea, Tina thought, but at night so no one would see. So, several days later, she gathered her children, gave them each a package to carry, fetched the cow from the barn, and led the motley procession to the village potato field. No talking, she warned her brood. She did not want to become a laughingstock!

Of course, someone found out, and by the time they reached the field, a small crowd had gathered in the shadows to watch, glad of any diversion.

With Tante Rempel and Bossie in the lead, the seven children followed, plodding dutifully around the field. Did I say seven children? Tante Rempel, too, seemed to realize that something was drastically wrong.

"*Mei Jitt!*" she screamed. "We've forgotten Auntje!" Auntje, it turned out, was fast asleep in bed, unaware of all the commotion.

It wasn't long before orders came to leave the village. This time no one was left behind. But the story does not end here, for amidst all the sadness, fear, and uncertainty that accompanied the refugees in the next few years, whenever anyone misplaced or lost a belonging, someone was sure to say with a smile, "*Na joh, hast Auntje vejäte?*" (Have you forgotten Annie?) And I'm sure that as long as Auntje, or Tintje, or Süstje were there, the rest did not matter.



Homes away from Home: Ukraine to Canada, 1943-1948

by Selma Hooge

My husband and I don't mind hosting friends and relatives for a few nights at a time but we would find it very difficult to be gracious if we were told, by the government, to take in a family of strangers, for an indefinite length of time. Worse yet, what if we were ordered out of our home to allow refugees to move in? That's exactly what thousands of Europeans were forced to do during and after WWII. Yet among the many hosts our family was thrust upon during our five years as refugees, we seldom encountered ungracious, difficult people.

Four weeks after we began our Trek from the Molotsch under the leadership of the German SS in September 1943, we were to resettle in a village west of the Dnepr River. Half the Ukrainians were forced to move in with other Ukrainians while we Mennonites from Marienthal took possession of the vacated houses and began harvesting the local crops. That lasted only a few weeks. Then as the Russians advanced, our Trek had to move further West. We spent the winter close to the Polish border. In this village the homeowners of very small houses had to share their tiny spaces with Mennonite families. There were seven of us crowding a couple and their two children. After their initial dismay our hosts were kind to us. Among other things, they showed us how to get rid of the lice which we had accumulated along the way.

As we fled further west ahead of the retreating German army, we came into Poland. There too, the Polish home and landowners were displaced and we Mennonites moved in because we were *Volksdeutsche*, more valuable human beings than the Slavs in the eyes of Hitler's Germany. January 1945 saw us fleeing even further west to escape the approaching Communists, our countrymen. This is when thousands of our people were caught and sent back to Russia. We were among the fortunate ones to get as far as the Lueneburger Heide in the British Zone when the war ended. Our first hosts in Mueden were the only terrible ones we encountered. Fortunately for them and us, after a few months we were able to move across the street where the kindest elderly couple gave up their entire upstairs plus another room on the main floor for my sister and baby. My dad hadn't been so happy in years; he could work in the flour mill owned by our host. Two years later while languishing in Fallingbostel, waiting for permission to enter Canada, dad was able to go back to work in Mueden for some time.

It was in this village, in October of 1945, where CF Klassen, a Canadian MCC worker on a mission to register Mennonite refugees, found us and many of our relatives nearby, as well as Jacob Neufeld, author of *Tiefenwege*, a book which describes our Trek and flight from Ukraine. After a few months of peace and rejoicing that we were not caught by the Russians, my parents and other adults became fearful of being sent back to the "homeland." Rumours had it that the Russians could force their citizens back even though we had been made German citizens in Poland and we did not want to go back.

C.F. Klassen had left a document with my parents and other Mennonite refugees in that area. The document stated: In case of extreme danger from repatriation, go to Holland...ask for Peter Dyck, MCC.... do it secretly..." My Mom's sister Agatha and her family and others did just that. A week or so later, we and a few other families hired a truck and left in the middle of the night, hoping to cross the border into Holland at Gronau in Westphalia, as the document had instructed..



Sunday School, GCs and MBs, Oeding

However, by the time we arrived in Gronau, political wheels had been turning and the exit from Germany ground to a halt. We were among hundreds of other disappointed refugees. Homeless again.

Thanks to MCC and IRO workers, schools in the city and surrounding area were turned into temporary refugee camps. Several hundred of us spent two months in the Wilhelmsschule in Gronau. Then a group of 270 was taken to a little Catholic village of Oeding, another border town in Westphalia, in April 1946. This area had not been bombed and we were the first refugees to arrive here.

Oeding was surrounded by small farms. The farmers and some of the town's business owners came to an inn to choose their workers from among the Mennonites. Each of my three sisters went with a farmer; my brother was chosen

by a bricklayer but my parents and I (ten) stayed at the inn for two more days.

When someone finally came for us it was the hired man of a small factory owner in the village. Our hosts, Maria and August, looked us over carefully when they took us to the attic room in their two story house. This was by far the fanciest house we had ever lived in and my Mom was afraid we wouldn't be good enough for these fine people. As our hosts learned to know us, they got over their fear of "Russian" refugees and as we got to know them, we were convinced that "Catholic" also meant "Christian." According to my mom's diary, this was the experience of most of the refugees in this village.

We Mennonites in Oeding were MBs and GCs; from the Molotsch, from the Old Colony, and from Zagradowa. Most of us attended the Catholic church a few times but then it was discovered that there were preachers among us and in neighbouring villages too, and that the small *Evangelische Kirche* was seldom used. Soon all the Mennonites worshipped together regularly on Sunday mornings. Several ladies organized a Sunday school for Sunday afternoons in the little school house that the *Evangelische Kirche* owned.

All the village and farmers' children attended the Catholic school and all the Mennonite children went to the little school house. An old man was our teacher. His granddaughter was the only non-Mennonite child at this school. We had no text books and very few scribblers. A few of us were lucky enough to own a *Tafel and Griffel* (slate and slate pencil). Nevertheless, we learned German grammar, arithmetic and geography, and were introduced to the German poets.

It was in this village also where Mennonite young people had a chance to study catechism. (Communism closed all churches in the early thirties.) For my parents, and no doubt for many others, the day these young people were baptized was a very significant one. My three sisters, my brother, and a future brother-in-law were among those baptized. Even though our Catholic hosts had never heard of adult baptism, my mother wrote that "They rejoiced with us." One farmer offered his barn to be cleaned out and decorated for the event. Townspeople provided lunch. Our hosts too made the day special by providing a dinner for us and several guests. Baptisms were the one occasions when MBs and GCs had separate services.

My mother's diary is full of praise for the villagers of Oeding in general and our hosts in particular. At Christmas they showed their concern and generosity by putting on a meal and giving a gift to each refugee. While we were away at our Christmas Eve program, our hosts decorated our little table with gifts: new clothes for my parents; a little doll and a book of "Grimm's Fairy Tales" for me. I still have that book but it is showing its age.

It was in this village where we heard about the *Volendam* leaving for Paraguay with those rescued out of Berlin after safely traveling through the Russian Zone. There was great optimism and hope that soon Canada too would allow Mennonites to enter, at least those who had close relatives to sponsor them, as was the case for my mom's sister Agatha in Holland. We had no known relatives in Canada, but my dad refused to consider Paraguay as our permanent home, even if we had to wait a few years in Germany. Life in Oeding wasn't so bad. Maybe once Agatha was in Canada she could sponsor us.

The story of how we found sponsors is in *Road to Freedom*¹, "Don't Forget To Thank the Aunts." The *Rundschau* and the *Bote* were instrumental in connecting thousands of refugees with their Canadian relatives. After a few sentences by Gertrude Reimer of Yarrow, B.C. appeared in the *Rundschau*, we too finally had sponsors. We left our beloved Oeding hoping to be on our way to Canada in a few weeks. Instead, we spent another nine months in refugee camps: Buchholz and Fallingbostel. For us children, this was not a hardship; in fact, it was fun. But for my parents and older siblings it must have seemed like an eternity before we arrived in our new home, Yarrow, December 2, 1948.



GC Baptism, Oeding, October 13, 1946

¹ *Road to Freedom; Mennonites escape the Land of Suffering*, ed by Harry Loewen. Kitchener: Pandora Pr., 2000

Three unmarried Reimer sisters, their brother Nick Sr.(of Reimers Nursery) and other recruits in Yarrow opened their hearts and wallets to sponsor all twenty-three Kornelsens (my dad's clan) and personally provided a home for fifteen of us. The "aunts" were very distant relatives on a modest farm income who had never met us. Yet they fixed up their empty chicken barn at the back of their property. They made two two-room apartments, one for Tante Mariechen with six children, and one for our family. All the relatives, except one uncle, got to Canada before



Reunion of refugees in 1949 in Canada

* * * * *

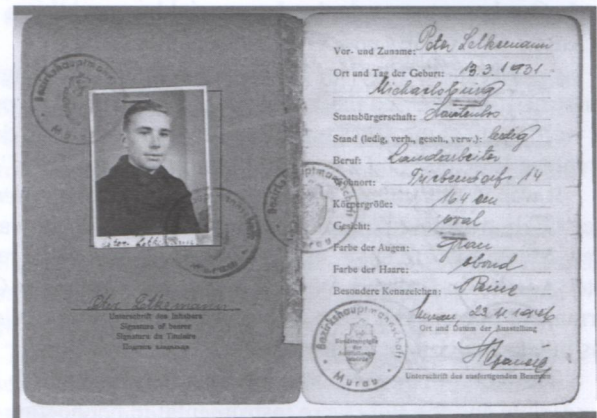
we did. My mom's greatest joy in her new home, small as it was, was to have her own stove once more and to have some privacy. It had been more than five years since we left our home in Ukraine. During those years we had seldom lived alone.

Every time I think of our refugee years and how many people had to put up with us and how much trouble the aunts went to to bring the Kornelsen clan to Canada, I am moved to gratitude and praise. God bless all those who are still doing similar acts for refugees today.

The Basket-Maker: Growing up as a Refugee

an excerpt from *Stories in Sepia* by Connie Braun²

My father delivers an old brown, accordion-style folder to me; in it are some of his personal papers, including an identity card dated November 23, 1946. This little passbook's cardboard cover is faded brown, timeworn, smooth as cloth, and split in two at the fold. Across the front, in German, English, French, and Russian it says, *Identity Card for Foreigners and Stateless Persons*. No longer stapled to the seam, the pages inside are yellow, tinged brown at their uneven edges and a round purple rubber stamp mark declares, "Murau." On the lines by each specific heading, my father is described as 164 cm. in height, oval face, gray eyes, blonde hair, 15 years old. His citizenship is "unclassified" and his profession is "agricultural labourer." The identity photo shows him with clear skin; but there is a faint shadow of peach fuzz on his upper lip, his eyebrows are thick dark lines and his face has taken on more angular proportions. So this is what the young *Korbmacher* (basket-maker) looks like.



To supplement the food provisions from the ration cards, Peter helps old Mr. Goertz, another Mennonite refugee, a basket-maker by trade. Mr. Goertz makes all of the baskets, while Peter and Mrs. Goertz take them to market or the surrounding farms to sell or trade, one basket for a pound of butter, a pound of flour and some *Speck* (smoked bacon).

² *Stories in Sepia* will be published by Ronsdale Press this fall under the new title, *The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia*.

Maria, too, is enterprising. A skillful seamstress, she sews and mends for neighbouring farmwives. She also crafts slippers that she sends along with Peter to trade. He takes the baskets and slippers, and wanders up the mountainside on weekends. Peter has even more items for sale or to trade. He sells cigarettes from British Care packages, piece by piece. This is black marketeering, so he hides the cigarettes between his baskets, pretending he has only legitimate items for sale when the police come by.

Now an entrepreneur, Peter asks Mr. Goertz to teach him how to make baskets. From the banks of the Mur River, Peter cuts only the straightest young willow shoots. When he gathers these in spring, the bark peels off easily, exposing white tendons of wood beneath. In the autumn, the bark is tougher, so Peter loosens it by boiling the branches in a large pot. Peeled willow makes lovely white baskets. Sometimes he leaves the bark on and weaves these branches into dark, sturdy work-baskets.

In Austria, people carry everything in baskets, so Peter fashions various types in different shapes and sizes; peeled ones for wash-worn laundry or marketing, small ones to carry lunch. Sometimes he dyes the willow different colours. To hold potatoes or crisp apples at harvest time, or a *Holzkorb* (basket to hold wood), the baskets are unpeeled, smaller, round, like a pail with a handle. The largest baskets are used to carry hay.

The tender willows are pliable before they are dried, so Peter can bend them without breaking them. His fingers are stained green as spring manure. He decides first whether the basket will be round or oblong at the base; and to begin, he fashions a "pad" – three sticks, split, all the halves set side-by-side. Then three more sticks, split, and set side-by-side, spaced apart and laid over-top. He uses willow reed, separated into strands, to bind these sticks together. And taking more strips of willow, or "ribs" he calls them, he lays them out, like sun rays, radiating from the pad at the centre. He bends the ribs upward to create the basket's frame, keeping this in place by tying twine around the top. Now he's ready to weave the supple willow through this framework.

He first weaves to a height of three or four inches. Then he takes a small wedge of wood and a light mallet, and taps the reeds down to compress them. He weaves to a height of three more inches, taps down. By now he can untie the twine and weave tightly for a smaller basket, or loosely for a larger one. When the height, or depth, is right, he selects two strong strips, cuts them into appropriate lengths and loops them through the rim. Winding these strands, smooth as rope, he threads them back into the rim for the handle; one at each end.

The farmers seldom travel the distance to town from their farms, and their wives hardly ever make the round trip down to Ranten or Katsch, and never to Murau. The robust women are always interested in the baskets Peter brings, and Maria's slippers are practical for the cold plank floors.

Peter can mimic the lilting Austrian dialect, but he is not from these mountains and when the locals enquire, he tells them about Russia and about the war, well-told tales that cause even the men to pause from their chores and lean against the fencepost to listen. By the time he is finished, they buy or trade, and seal their transaction with a slice of black bread topped with smoked bacon and a swallow of home-made schnapps that snatches Peter's breath away. Once a month he returns to the same farms and when the *Bauerinnen* (farmwives) see him trudge the path to their yard with his stack of baskets they greet him cheerily, "*Jetzt kommt der Korbmacher!*" (Here comes the basket-maker)

I still have one of my father's baskets made of unpeeled strands of willow. It is now sixty years old, darkened with age, though still sturdy. He made this one when he arrived in Canada, one of the last because he found other ways to make a living. Yet this basket brings to mind the boy with silver-blue eyes like sunshine behind the morning alpine mist, who walked the ten kilometre circumference around Murau with his stack of baskets.

Katsch, Obersteiermark

Among the yellowed papers in the folder, I come across a statement, dated January 11, 1948, declaring that the Family Letkemann has lived at Triebendorf 14 since February 21, 1946. They called it *Der Aibel*. The four-plex house was located on a smaller cattle estate owned by Fuerst Von Schwarzenburg. With his son and godson, the Duke lived in Schloss Obermurau, the Schwarzenburg Castle in Murau, during the spring and summer months, otherwise they lived in South Africa. They also owned a weekend cottage and another estate between this one and Murau. That other estate used machinery, but at Aibel, all the labour was done by hand.

Jakob and Maria occupy one side of the main floor, while other estate workers live across the hall. The estate manager, Herr Leipold, lives upstairs with his children Herbert and Gretel. Herr Leipold's niece, Mitzi, lives with

them, too. He molests her. The foreman, Zep, lives with his daughter on the main floor. She smokes, dates British soldiers, and leaves her clogs on the planks in the foyer. She thinks it's cute to run and jump into them, but see what happens when Peter nails her clogs to the floor.

Peter works in the fields like a man, but his wages equate to what the women receive – twenty-seven cents an hour. At least, he tells himself, he's not herding cows. During the warm spring and summer days, he cuts section after section of high grass with a scythe, raking it into piles with tools fashioned from branches, and stacking this into hay mounds that dot the hillside like dozing fairytale trolls. In the winter, he works in the forest, his narrow shoulders and slim forearms burning from the relentless push-pull of the two-man hand saw.

"We worked for ration cards, although I could have made more money black marketeering," Father muses. "But I still went to the farmer's market on Sunday; and I usually made something for my efforts."

Besides selling baskets, Peter starts another enterprise. He has learned how to manufacture cigarettes with the help of a Hungarian refugee working on the estate. Together they grow and cut tobacco plants, sort the aromatic leaves, sprinkle them with sugared water, then dry them. The Hungarian shows Peter how to roll them. Peter collects empty boxes of the *Englische Feingeschnitt*, the British brand, from the Care packages, and he places his cruder home-grown brand inside. He rolls a cigarette for Zep's daughter, too – tobacco at each end with chicken manure in the middle.

By trading and selling, Peter earns extra money for the family to travel by train back and forth to the British Consul in Graz, where they must undergo numerous medical examinations for tuberculosis and glaucoma, and fill out endless forms.

A Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker in Austria instructs Jakob how to apply for immigration. One must have a sponsor in Canada willing to pay for the trip and provide the family with a place to live.

A Letter from Austria

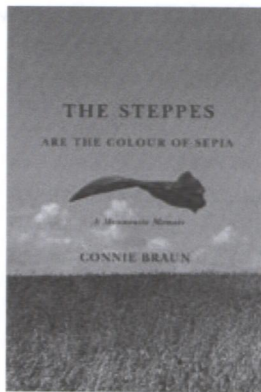
While Peter sells his wares on Sundays, his father, Jakob, spends the afternoons writing. Jakob acts as a representative for the Mennonite Central Committee, compiling a list of those from the Soviet Union living in Austria's occupied zones so that the MCC can assist them. By August 1947, Jakob will have collected over three hundred names.

Presently his stomach is bothering him; it pinches sharply so he thinks it might be an ulcer. He is fifty-seven years old when he begins to write an account of his life as an itinerant pastor in Siberia and Ukraine under the Communist regime. Jakob also writes to Mennonite publications that circulate in Canada in an effort to contact relatives who might sponsor them to Canada. His cousin Liese and her husband, Heinrich Loewen, who live on Boundary Road in Yarrow, British Columbia, along with Jakob's nephew, also named Jakob Letkemann, in Steinbach, Manitoba, have agreed to sponsor them. The departure is set for May, 1948.

In a *Mennonitische Rundschau* letter to C.F. Klassen, Jakob expresses appreciation for the publication, which provides news from Canada and is a medium for communicating with relatives living there. In closing, Jakob addresses the readership, reminding them of their *Geschwister* (brothers and sisters) facing unbearable circumstances in "Communist Russia," from where God has been banished.

At the time these letters were written, during the emigration process, medical check-ups revealed that Jakob did not have an ulcer; he was diagnosed with cancer of the stomach. The nearby towns were inadequately equipped to perform the necessary surgery, so Jakob was sent beyond the mountain passes to a hospital in Salzburg.

Jakob Letkeman died of cancer on March 12, 1948. C.F.Klassen wrote the obituary for Der Bote, "Brother Letkemann's Flüchtlingszeit is over. He is home." (Der Bote, April 21, 1948) Because of Jakob's death, his family had to reapply to Canadian Immigration. They left Europe for Canada in September 1948.



Memoir by Connie Braun

The Steppes are the Colour of Septia; a Mennonite Memoir.
Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2008.

"In a memoir that is historically faithful to documents, letters, old photographs and personal testimony, Braun offers a lyrical second-generation witness to her family members and to all other Canadians who have suffered displacement in history's disasters, and whose obscure stories must be told. In doing so, she honours the spirit of resilience embodied by the refugees who have created and transformed Canadian society." (<http://www.ronsdalepress.com/catalogue/sepiasteppes.html>)

* * * * *

Growing Up in Turbulent Times, Waldemar Janzen, CMU Press, 2007
reviewed by Helen Rose Pauls

When Waldemar Janzen retired from teaching, he decided to write his life story as an "experienced story" rather than a researched history as his sub-title says: "Memoirs of Soviet Oppression, Refugee Life in Germany, and Immigrant Adjustment to Canada."

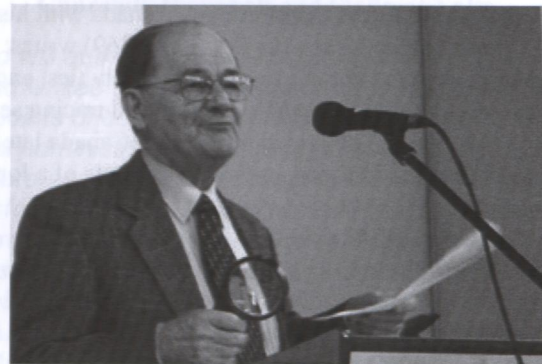
His timelines are similar to so many who escaped the Soviet Union during WW II: from Ukraine to Prussia to Germany to Canada, and the section headings reflect this: "Childhood in Ukraine"; "West Prussia and Mecklenburg"; "Bavaria and Wurtemberg"; "Early years in Canada."

Janzen's story puts flesh to so many of the themes from this era that we are familiar with: loss of home and freedom, arrest and imprisonment of fathers, strong and stoic mothers, deprivation, flight. Too young to be fully aware of the weight of oppression and injustice, he remembers a tasty treat during the famine years: salted bread dunked into sunflower oil. He also remembers happiness, anticipation and the thrill of travel, which must have been arduous and frightening for the adults. He recalls a trip from Moscow to the Crimea: "I sensed distance and yearning, feeling that through these ribbons of rail I was linked to what seemed the farthest ends of the earth. It is a feeling that has followed me into later years and other lands throughout my life."

In the Ukraine during the German occupation and at the tender age of ten, Waldemar became aware that Jewish children were being poisoned. Having been raised with countless stories of revolution, anarchy, arrests and death, he was not traumatized by this knowledge, but accepted it as a normal part of life. "A world where such things happened was the only world I knew."

Through the trials of the German occupation, the train journey west to Prussia, and a truck crossing into safer German territory, and later, having to bribe Russian guards with an alarm clock to avoid repatriation, Waldemar remains alert and optimistic, recalling also beautiful mountains, the majestic Marienburg fortress, the trees in spring. He especially enjoyed the school years in Bavaria, the hikes and outings in nature, the friendships and loyalties. In contrast, the early years in Canada were full of loneliness and homesickness for this carefree time with many friends. The adjustment was not easy.

Although most post-war immigrants concentrated on getting established economically, Waldemar spent seven years studying in Waterloo. He funded his studies with summer jobs at a bank and as a warden in various mental institutions. Eventually he graduated from the Mennonite Seminary in Chicago in 1956, and accepted a position at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College, from which he retired 46 years later.



Waldemar Janzen at November book launch. Photo courtesy CMU

I found this memoir very interesting to read for its honesty in recounting a wartime childhood. Those who grew up in this period will especially relate to his memories, and this book will be of great interest to his colleagues, family and friends. It is the story of a boy reaching manhood during perilous times, while retaining his sense of optimism and wonder.

* * * * *

C.F. Klassen

by Selma Hooge

In October, 1945 while we were refugees living in a small village in the Lueneburger Heide, my mother, Anna Kornelsen, wrote in her diary, "Peter Becker came in a rush to get my husband for a meeting with a man from Amerika, C.F. Klassen."

Years later we learned that when C.F. Klassen toured our area he had already looked up and registered hundreds of other Mennonite refugees in camps in Denmark and in many towns and cities in the American and British zones of a destroyed Germany. MCC had sent him on this mission to find these displaced Mennonites from Russia who would need to find permanent homes in other countries. He was to spend six weeks in Europe but it took eighteen weeks before he returned to Canada with his lists of names and needs.

Frank Epp in *Mennonite Exodus* (p.369) writes: "Seven thousand refugees were registered and identified complete with date and place of birth, family ties, and relatives abroad. Through the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Der Bote*, and through the MCC and Board tracing service, relatives were being located."

Soon after C.F. Klassen returned to Canada late 1945 he began traveling again to report to the churches, boards and individuals. Following are a few excerpts of a long report written by B. Schellenberg in the January 9, 1946 *Rundschau*:

Bro. C.F. Klassen has had a successful trip and was protected in many dangers thanks to the many prayers on his behalf. Even though the rations were very sparse he always had enough to eat. He experienced many difficulties on this trip. Often it seemed impossible for him to find a seat in the airplanes, but somehow he always managed. God answered prayers. Bro. C.F. Klassen thanks the Lord that the MCC Executive and the C.P.R. made this trip possible. He found many refugees and he helped restore their courage to go on....

There were deeply moving scenes during his interaction with the refugees who wept in gratitude when they heard that the brothers in America remembered them and wanted to help. These refugees had heard that the German speaking people in the U.S.A. and Canada were kept in concentration camps. It seemed like a miracle to them that some of their family members could still be alive. Bro. C.F. Klassen felt it was a special grace that he had met so many of the families who immigrated to Canada earlier (1920s). He could tell those refugees that he had met their relatives...

So he made lists of the refugees which would have to be processed for Canada....Whether these refugees would be permitted to enter Canada was always their question. The answer was: we do not know as yet but we will do our utmost to make this possible. (Mennonite Exodus, page 424.)

For nine years, C.F. helped thousands of World War II Mennonite refugees find new homes in Canada. For months at a time, he was separated from his own family. He once wrote to J.J. Thiessen, "I am often very lonely. Especially when I am on the road, the separation from my family becomes unbearable."

The Mennonite community was shocked and bereaved when CF died quite suddenly of a heart attack while on a visit to a church in Gronau, Westphalia, May 8, 1954. His grave is in Leutesdorf, Germany.

His [C.F. Klassen's] name became a harbinger of hope for thousands as they passed through West Germany, with the word so often on his lips "Gott kann" (God can). When all human efforts failed, he pointed people to a God who always cares for orphans and the homeless. Though he often spoke to military and government officials regarding his peoples' plight, he brought compassionate care and understanding to each one he met, especially those in the refugee camps. By Herb and Maureen Klassen. from <http://www.mbhistory.org/profiles/klassen.en.html>

The Repatriation Agreement Between the Soviet Union and the United States, Yalta, February 11, 1945.
(similar agreements also were signed between USSR, Great Britain and France)

Article 1

All Soviet citizens liberated by the forces operating under United States command and all United States citizens liberated by the forces operating under Soviet command will, without delay after their liberation, be separated from enemy prisoners of war and will be maintained separately from them in camps or points of concentration until they have been handed over to the Soviet or United States authorities, as the case may be, at places agreed upon between those authorities. . . .



Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at Yalta,

Article 2

The contracting parties shall ensure that their military authorities shall without delay inform the competent authorities of the other party regarding citizens of the other contracting party found by them, and will at the same time take the necessary steps to implement the provisions of this agreement. Soviet and United States repatriation representatives will have the right of immediate access into the camps and points of concentration where their citizens are located and they will have the right to appoint the internal administration and set up the internal discipline and management in accordance with the military procedure and laws of their country.

Facilities will be given for the despatch [sic] or transfer of officers of their own nationality to camps or points of concentration where liberated members of the respective forces are located and there are insufficient officers. The outside protection of and access to and from the camps or points of concentration will be established in accordance with the instructions of the military commander in whose zone they are located, and the military commander shall also appoint a commandant, who shall have the final responsibility for the overall administration and discipline of the camp or point concerned.

The removal of camps as well as the transfer from one camp to another of liberated citizens will be effected by agreement with the competent Soviet or United States authorities. The removal of camps and transfer of liberated citizens may, in exceptional circumstances, also be effected without preliminary agreement provided the competent authorities are immediately notified of such removal or transfer with a statement of the reasons. Hostile propaganda directed against the contracting parties or against any of the United Nations will not be permitted.

Article 3

The competent United States and Soviet authorities will supply liberated citizens with adequate food, clothing, housing and medical attention both in camps or at points of concentration and en route, and with transport until they are handed over to the Soviet or United States authorities at places agreed upon between those authorities. The standards of such food, clothing, housing and medical attention shall, subject to the provisions of Article 8, be fixed on a basis for privates, non-commissioned officers and officers. The basis fixed for civilians shall as far as possible be the same as that fixed for privates.. . .

Text from : <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/soviet/sov007.htm>

My Mother's Story

by Al Pauls

Elizabeth Pauls was born into what is for us a large family. Six boys and three girls were born to Heinrich Janzen, a farmer and preacher, and his wife Maria (born Bartel). Two of the boys died as babies, and a four year old girl died during the famine in Ukraine. Mom was the oldest of the siblings who survived early childhood.

The challenges of life began early. After the collectivization of agriculture by the Soviet régime some Mennonite families began emigrating from the USSR. During the late 1920s this led to a large number of families selling what they could of their property and goods, moving to Moscow, and petitioning the government in person for emigration visas. My grandfather, too, took his family to Moscow, after selling the family assets. However, after several months during which the family lived in crowded apartments, the government gave notice that no more visas would be granted. Fearing banishment to Siberia, my grandfather took his family back to his home area, found a place to live, and resumed daily life. Mom was about eight years old at the time.

The period after the return to Ukraine was also the time when the damages of the collectivization program were the most severe. Combined with a drought that lasted several years, and the redirection of grain from the agricultural south to the industrial north, Ukraine suffered under a two year famine that killed millions. Mom remembers her mother making soup from potato peelings and whatever edible vegetation was available. Starvation loomed as a reality.

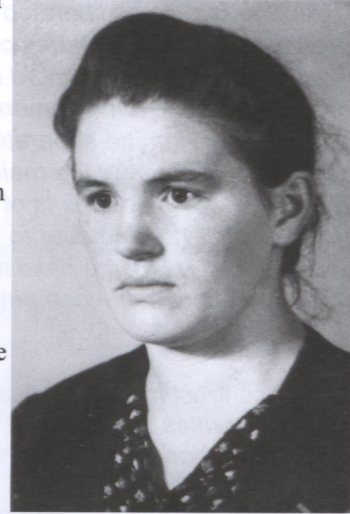
Mom was able to attend school for only 4 years. She would dearly have liked to pursue a career as medical doctor. However, her position in the family and the expectations of her father meant that she had to help support the family by working in the *kolkhoz* (collective farm), milking cows and working in the vegetable fields. As the oldest daughter, housework was another important area of work for her. When Mom's mother died in 1939, Mom was 18 years old. At this point she also took care of her younger siblings, the youngest being just about a year old.

When she was about 20 Mom met a tall, handsome man, Heinrich Pauls (he was nine years older), at a wedding. She was small and pretty. Although he was from another village they found occasions to meet, and love had its way with them. It was a love that was to grow and last through nearly 40 years, including a separation of nearly 21 years.

Dad was the manager of a flour mill. He had a meticulous knowledge of the mill, having precise drawings of all the parts and places, including nuts and bolts. When the war started and the Soviet Union drafted its young men, Dad was spared because he was indispensable for the continued operation of the flour mill. Later when the Germans invaded Ukraine and drafted ethnic German youths, he was still exempted.

In 1943 the Soviet military was able to push the German forces back toward Germany. As the front moved closer toward the Mennonite areas the ethnic Germans and Mennonites of the region realized that reoccupation by the Soviets would likely result in extreme consequences for them. Their fears were confirmed later when the Soviet government demolished many of the villages and sent the remaining people off to labour camps or Siberian exile. Well in advance, Mom and Dad prepared for evacuation by constructing a horse-drawn wagon that could provide protection from the weather. They also prepared supplies to take along. On October 19, 1943 they were notified that it was time to leave. At this time Mom was about two months pregnant. A group of three families left together, following other refugees that had left the day before. They trekked for a week. At one point they avoided serious problems on a bridge spanning a deep river. Dad decided, on approaching the bridge, to be cautious. He went onto the bridge on foot and found the bridge had a large hole. Had the three wagons been on the bridge they would not have been able to turn the horse and wagons around. Being on the bridge was also dangerous, as on two consecutive nights the villages where they stayed were bombed by Russian planes.

After a week of travelling on foot with their wagons Mom and Dad and other families were put aboard a train going west. Their trip into Poland was interrupted several times by Soviet aerial bombing and train stoppages



to check the tracks. They were taken as far as Lodz, in central Poland, where they were deloused and then given temporary quarters. The trip so far had taken over a month. They stayed in Lodz for about 2 months. The advance of the Russian forces forced them to move west to Kruschwitz (near Poznan). Mom and Dad stayed there for about a year, during which time I was born. Dad found work in some odd jobs and in a mill.

In September of 1944 Dad was pressed into German military service. Mom received several letters from him, but after she was forced to move again in January they lost touch, and she did not hear from him again for about 12 years. At this time Mom was pregnant with her second child.

She was now about 4 months pregnant and travelling alone in midwinter with a baby. At first she was able to travel by train – the first day on an open car. On the second day a German officer noticed her condition and the baby, and made room for her in a closed car. Later she had to continue on foot. She had a baby carriage and a small suitcase. She was forced to scrounge and beg for food along the way. She sometimes spoke of that with some anxiety – worried that she may have been stealing. She reached a place near Stettin and was able to stay in an old castle for some time.

Shortly after her arrival, the Soviet army moved in and occupied the castle. The victorious soldiers were given a period of liberty. The room where Mom was quartered housed 7 women, all with young children, and some elderly parents – 21 people in all. One night Mom woke up and was startled see a Russian soldier standing over her. She started screaming, the other adults joined in – along with the children – and the soldier fled. In other parts of the building women had been raped by the Soviet soldiers, so the women in the room decided that if a soldier touched any one of them or the children, they would all scream together. It seems that no one in that room was molested. Mom also mentioned a Soviet officer who, upon hearing of the rapes, took control of his soldiers and put a stop to it. The castle also housed a home for the aged with some medical staff. Here my sister Anne was born.

In June Mom was again forced to leave. Her situation now was even more desperate. She had a baby lying in the baby carriage and a toddler lying across the top of the carriage; some essentials were loaded wherever they could be attached. At one point the carriage lost a wheel and landed in a ditch. She could not find the clip that held the wheel in place. At this point she just sat there and cried, realizing her helpless situation. All she could do was to pray and tell God of her reliance on Him. She had no way of attaching the wheel, and could see no way of continuing. After some time she noticed a person standing up on the road. He told her to look at the bottom of the baby carriage. When she did, she found a package of wheel clips required to hold the wheels in place. She had no knowledge of how the clips got there. To Mom this event has been a powerful demonstration of God's caring for her.

Despite being able to continue on her way this was a terrible time for her. She would go from village to village and request lodging, but since there were thousands of refugees on the roads, permission was repeatedly refused. Finally, at a little town called Friedland in northern East Germany Mom decided she would go no further. She went to the town's housing office and was directed by staff to several homes, but all the owners had just received relatives and would not take Mom in. Finally, a very kindly official went with her to an elderly couple, and when the lady refused to put us up in their house, the official read her a letter from the local Soviet government empowering him to evict them if they would not provide us with shelter. Angrily, she let us move in. After about a week of tense interactions the lady recognized that Mom was not an ignorant Russian peasant girl, but rather quite capable of being very helpful to her and her sick husband. Thereafter the lady, whom we came to call "Oma," came to rely on Mom, and later, when after 4 years we were about to leave, she cried inconsolably over her loss.

During our 4 years in Friedland Mom worked for various farmers with field work, and helped clear up the postwar rubble of the town. While Mom was working Oma would take care of us, and later we went to a daycare for part of the day.

I believe that Mom was fortunate not to have been sent back to Russia, as many people were. Only once was she interviewed by Russian officials, but they never bothered us. However, when the Berlin blockade started in 1948, Mom realized that unless she made a move she might never be able to join other family members. She had found her father living in southern West Germany and was in correspondence with Dad's sister, who lived near Munich. Ironically Dad had been in the Dachau prisoner of war camp just outside of Munich until he was sent back to Russia (to Magadan in far eastern Siberia) shortly after the war. So Mom was in northern East Germany and Dad was in southern West Germany, neither knowing of the other's whereabouts.

While in Friedland Mom had been able to save some money so that when the opportunity arose she would

be able move to again. In 1948, her father emigrated to Canada; she now had a place to go. The planes that brought supplies to Berlin as part of the program to break the Berlin Blockade returned empty to West Germany – except for refugees that used the opportunity to flee to the West. We were able to get to Berlin; and Mom believed that we may have been on the last plane that enabled refugees to leave in this way.

We were successful in getting to West Germany and were taken to the Mennonite refugee camp at Gronau near the border with the Netherlands. We stayed there for a number of months while a passenger ship was readied to take a full load of refugees to North America. A short stay at another camp was needed to enable final processing of the necessary papers required for emigration. Mom's dad provided sponsorship for us.

We arrived in Halifax in February of 1950. From there we took the train to Clearbrook where we moved into my grandfather's little farmhouse. We lived with him for about two years, sharing the house with him and his two youngest children, Mary and George. Later another family of 4 moved in – also refugee relatives. Mom found work cooking in the kitchen at the cadet training facilities at the Abbotsford Airport, as well as painting and gyproc-filling houses.

In 1952 she found a benefactor who loaned her the money to buy a property and she was able purchase a cabin from the Herman Doerksen family. Mom had the cabin moved to our property on Dahlstrom Road. Within a short time Mom had paid off the personal loan and we were in our own home in a secure and peaceful community.

Mom was baptized and joined the Clearbrook MB Church. This was her spiritual home and the centre of her social life for about 50 years. She loved the people here, appreciated the support given her, and contributed to her church community what she could.

For Mom the next few years were a time of establishing herself and her family in the community, and also anxiously using the church and MCC resources to search for Dad's whereabouts. Finally, in 1956, Mom received a letter from an acquaintance living in Paraguay, who wrote of receiving information from a contact in Ukraine who had been informed that Dad was still alive and living somewhere in Siberia. I remember the time as being extremely stressful for Mom. Without more information about his situation she imagined all kinds of possibilities. From the experiences of others, including a close friend, she knew that some men who were in Siberia, and had not known their spouse's whereabouts, had remarried or lived with other women. But as was typical of her character, she steadfastly believed that they would be able to reunite at some point. And she was overjoyed when we received our first letter directly from him in 1957. Her trust and faith were rewarded as their mutual faithfulness was confirmed.

Mom spent 7 years repeatedly petitioning the Soviet government to grant an exit visa to Dad. Finally, in 1965, Dad was able to emigrate to Canada. My sister and I were there when he arrived.

I will always remember that day. We drove to Vancouver to pick him up at the airport. It was a mainly sunny day and the few clouds were highlighted by a brilliant light that seemed somewhat surreal. Mom did not speak. Over twenty years of separation were finally over! At the airport we were able to go to a rooftop terrace to watch as planes arrived and unloaded their passengers. The distance and the light made it difficult to recognize people at a distance. Mom was quite agitated as people began walking down the steps from the plane. I think it was Anne who spotted Dad first. After Mom saw him she seemed to turn into a young girl as she cried out, "Hein! Hein!" For me, that moment gave me an inkling of what love between a man and a woman could be – the faithfulness, patience, and hope beyond despair.

Mom and Dad were given 15 more beautiful years together. They shared a love for travel, and so they journeyed to the Prairies to visit friend and relatives, to Hawaii, to Germany and twice to South Africa, where my sister, Anne, had moved. They were able to attend her wedding, and later spent 4 months in South Africa after Anne and Rene's 3 boys had been born.

In October of 1980 Dad died after a two year struggle with cancer. After Dad died Mom sold her home and moved into an apartment. She continued to work at Columbia Bible Institute until she herself was struck by cancer



in 1984. Two series of radiation and chemotherapy treatments resulted in her going into remission for about 10 years. Then, after experiencing increasing bowel discomfort and pain, she was found to have a large tumour pressing against her colon. Although the tumour itself was very slow growing she had to undergo a colostomy to restore functioning.

The earlier treatments for cancer had a long term effect on her health. Mom more frequently became dizzy, sometimes collapsing into unconsciousness. She injured herself several times, including fracturing her skull and her shoulder. We finally persuaded her that she deserved some care now herself. Mom moved into Hallmark Assisted Living Home for several months and then into her final earthly residence at Tabor Home.

As the cancer spread, and it became clear that any treatment would make her feel worse without a promise of relief from the spread of the cancer, we came to terms with the fact that we would soon lose Mom. She refused to try chemotherapy again and began to recognize and to hope for her final release from pain and struggle. Toward the end the painkilling regimen of morphine enabled her to be comfortable but at the expense of her being able to respond to people around her. On Sunday, March 3, 2002, Mom breathed her last.

Mom lived in turbulent times. The difficulties, dangers and challenges that she experienced were encountered with resiliency, courage and strength. Her experiences forged a character that enabled her to overcome her challenges and become an inspiration for those of us who knew and loved her.

Victims of Yalta

by Louise Bergen Price

The Peter and Susanna Bergen family was one of many thousands separated because of the terms of the Yalta agreement. While Peter Bergen was interned in a Russian prisoner-of-war camp, his wife Susanna and their children were "repatriated" to Irkutsk, Siberia where they worked in the forest, cutting trees. They were not allowed to leave their area of banishment until 1956.

Peter Bergen came to Canada after he was released into the west in 1951. Over the years, he sent numerous packages to his family (the women's dresses in the photos were likely sewn from material that he sent.) Each year, he applied to Russian authorities for exit visas for his wife and children; each year he was rejected. To symbolize the hoped-for reunion, he asked his family to send a photograph, and had his own photo inserted by an Abbotsford photographer. Peter died in 1969 without seeing his family again. Susanna died in 1982 in Alma Ata; their children have emigrated to Germany.



Many of those who were repatriated died in horrific conditions. "History has been written and the blame has been put at any number of deserving feet. Yet through it all, one aspect of Yalta has been given little attention by scholarly and popular writers alike. The subject is the planned, pre-ordained murder of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in the months and years after World War II. The victims of Yalta died at the hands of Stalin and his surrogates, but only with the cooperation and active participation of the Western Allies: the United States and Great Britain." (<http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/yugoslav-hist1.htm>)

It soon became apparent to the Allies that many refugees about to be "repatriated" were terrified at the thought of being forced to return to their land of birth, and would do almost anything to avoid going "home." By August 1946, the Americans decided not return displaced persons who feared religious, racial or political persecution. This did not prevent Soviets from entering the American zones and trying to persuade refugees to return. Soviet repatriation missions were officially expelled from American, British and French zones in 1949, 1950 and 1951. (Epp. *Mennonite Exodus*, p. 367)

Through Paraguay to Canada: Jakob and Erna Fast Barwich

by Robert Martens

Erna Fast and Jakob Barwich, unacquainted with each other at the time, were passengers on the same ship, *Volendam 2*, with escorts Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, when they sailed as refugees to Paraguay after World War II. Erna was born in 1938 in a village near the border of Poland and the Soviet Union, and was of Mennonite Brethren extraction. Stalin's holocaust was in full stride: her father was "disappeared" into the gulag, and her mother briefly imprisoned. The German invasion into the USSR hence came as a relief. "The Germans were our friends," says Erna. Mennonite children would visit the German barracks for candy, and Erna's sister landed a job there for a time. When the German army was forced to retreat, however, Erna, her oldest sister and brother "chose" to become refugees rather than face Soviet reprisals, and boarded a train headed west. She remembers travel on an open train car, fields littered with corpses, plane escorts, and finally a series of refugee camps. In the Buchholz camp the family tragedy intensified: her brother was drowned. The family would have chosen to emigrate to Canada, but her mother didn't pass the health test, and Erna was considered too young. Paraguay, however, was accepting Mennonite refugees, hoping to settle them in the "green hell" of its backlands, and it was here that Erna and Jakob would find their new homes.

Jakob was born in 1930 in Beresowka, near Ufa, in 1930, but his old lineage was Danziger. Out of the desperation of poverty, his grandparents had emigrated from post World War I Germany into the Soviet Union, where Jakob's father Johann met and married Anna Voth. It was soon obvious that their move into the USSR was a horrible mistake, and Jakob's grandparents, and later his parents, used their German passports to return to the west. At the age of three, Jakob was playing in the grainfields of his grandparents' farm, when the long blades of the harvester mutilated him severely,

slicing off a leg and several fingers. Not expecting the mangled child to live, his family placed him on the kitchen table and waited for him to die. Jake miraculously survived, however, and a local orthopedist ingeniously crafted him the necessary prosthetics. "The wonder has not ended," writes Jakob, "...many countries I have seen, and often, where others could not go, I went right on" (22).

His family was living in Stolp (now Slupsk, Poland) in eastern Germany when it was overrun by the Russian army. The atrocities began. Adults, and even children, were deported to labour camps, crops were seized, and the rape of women was unceasing. Amidst these horrors, the Barwich family was reunited with Jakob's father, who had been conscripted into the Soviet army. And Jakob's childhood accident now allowed a flight to the west: in the eyes of the authorities, his disability made him expendable and he was granted permission to emigrate. Throngs of refugees, the Barwich family among them, were loaded onto a train like a herd of cattle. Many died enroute. In West Germany, Jakob spent some time behind the barbed wire of refugee camps, until the *Arbeitsamt* (work authority) assigned him to a leather shop where he learned his trade. But although he had relatives in Germany, Jakob was looking for a homeland. He sailed on the *Volendam 2* in the late 1940s for Paraguay.

Mennonite immigrants achieved what seemed nearly impossible, carving colonies out of the Paraguayan wilderness. Of the 1948 wave of refugees, Erna belonged to the forty percent of households headed by single



Jakob's father Johann, a pacifist who served in the German army as a cook.



Erna Fast and her mother

mothers, as fathers had so frequently been sent to the Soviet gulag, and her family's life was excruciatingly difficult in the beginning. Mennonites had to learn the hard way that Russian agricultural methods were not transferable to the "green hell." The Fast family cleared the land bit by bit and engaged in subsistence farming. At one point her mother traded a clock for a cow; "at least," says Erna, "I got my milk."

Meanwhile, as there was a great need for saddle and harness in Paraguay, Jakob made a decent living in the leather trade and soon married Käthe Fast, Erna's oldest sister. Their honeymoon was an enrollment in Bible school.

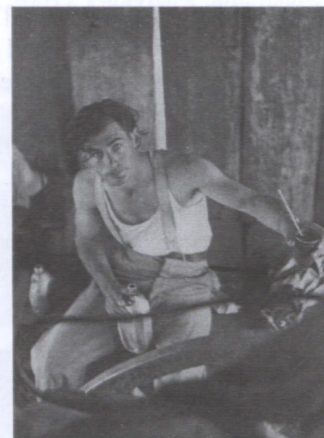
But Jakob was still looking for a better life than was possible in Paraguay, where Mennonites frequently felt like strangers in an alien land. Canada was opening its doors to immigration, especially of relatives, and, as Erna says, "a chain reaction began." Jakob's parents had preceded him to Canada, and in 1957 he followed them to Toronto and then British Columbia, despite being forced to pay his new government a hefty disability fee. Jakob lived in Vancouver and worked briefly for Midway Shoes of Abbotsford. One day he hitched a ride to Yarrow and attended an MB Conference session at the sanctuary there. Ironically he understood almost nothing; his mother tongue was German, and church meetings had just made the switch from German to English. A Yarrow resident befriended Jakob and connected him with someone who was selling a local shoe shop. After much agonizing, a private loan was arranged and Jakob moved his family into the dwelling at the rear of the shop.

Nonetheless he wondered how he could make a living until one day a soldier walked in with a pair of boots for repair. Jakob did the job, and the returning soldier pronounced the work "A1." The soldier reappeared with a truck and dozens of boots, and thereafter Jakob, a pacifist cobbler, was guaranteed a steady business.

Erna, on the other hand, emigrated to Canada in 1961 against her wishes and only for her family's sake. She was in nurse's training in Paraguay, and "didn't go gladly." Learning a new language in Canada was traumatic for a woman rendered painfully shy by all the uprootings in her life. Two months after her arrival in Yarrow, further tragedy struck. Käthe was killed in an Easter Sunday accident when a flatbed truck driven by three young joyriders rolled backwards into the car Jakob was driving. Jakob walked towards the boys in the truck, "wanting to smash, but then I was released. I didn't become a killer" (105). He was devastated but found new comfort in his marriage, on December 31 of the same year, with Erna. His shop became a central part of Yarrow life, becoming a gathering place for a vibrant and talkative group of Mennonite men.

And Erna, who had always found school "exhilarating and terrifying," doggedly overcame her low self esteem

by learning English and achieving her Grade 12 certificate. She landed a job at Tabor Home, the retirement facility in Abbotsford, tutored ESL in Chilliwack, and participated in Literacy BC, including appearances on radio and TV. Together, Erna and Jakob raised a family of six boys, engaged in poultry farming, and eventually travelled back to Paraguay, as well as to Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall. These two remarkable individuals survived with resilience a series of traumas that might have destroyed others. "The fact that Mennonites have learned to work and pray together," writes Jakob, "made things possible" (69). Certainly true, but Jakob and Erna Fast Barwich seem to possess a particular incandescence of lives hard won.



Drinking terere



Jake, Frank, Herbert, Vernon, Helmut, baby Ken, Erna, Henry

References: Jakob and Erna Fast Barwich, Interviews.

Chilliwack Times, June 1, 1993, 15.

Jakob Barwich, *Milestones and Memories*, Victoria: Printorium BookWorks, 2004.

The Iron Gate Opens

When, after the death of Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev relaxed the censorship laws, and opened the doors of the "Iron Curtain" the implications for recent Mennonite refugee immigrants were enormous. Immediately, periodicals such as *Der Bote* and *Die Rundschau* were flooded with letters as Canadian Mennonites began searching for missing family members and relatives. To the great joy and astonishment, they found that many of those repatriated to Siberia had survived. After twelve long years of silence, letters began to flow, and with the letters, hopes that the USSR's borders would soon open. "I could describe so much," Elizabeth Bergen writes to her son Hein in Canada, "but let's hope that we can soon talk face to face." The following year she is still hopeful: "I am like a bird; travel where I please. I think you'd take me into your home for a few months, wouldn't you? And how dearly I'd love to see all your children."

In spite of high expectations, by 1962 only 39 Russian Mennonite families had been reunited (Epp. *Mennonite Exodus*, p. 471). Large scale reunification would not take place until the mid 1980s. For many, it would be too late.

Excerpts of Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, February 25, 1956, at the Twentieth Party Congress³

We have to consider seriously and analyze correctly [the crimes of the Stalin era] in order that we may preclude any possibility of a repetition in any form whatever of what took place during the life of Stalin, who absolutely did not tolerate collegiality in leadership and in work, and who practiced brutal violence, not only toward everything which opposed him, but also toward that which seemed to his capricious and despotic character, contrary to his concepts.

Stalin acted not through persuasion, explanation, and patient cooperation with people, but by imposing his concepts and demanding absolute submission to his opinion. Whoever opposed this concept or tried to prove his viewpoint, and the correctness of his position, was doomed to removal from the leading collective and to subsequent moral and physical annihilation. This was especially true during the period following the XVIIth Party Congress (1934)....

Stalin originated the concept enemy of the people. This term automatically rendered it unnecessary that the ideological errors of a man or men engaged in a controversy be proven; this term made possible the usage of the most cruel repression, violating all norms of revolutionary legality, against anyone who in any way disagreed with Stalin, against those who were only suspected of hostile intent, against those who had bad reputations. This concept, enemy of the people, actually eliminated the possibility of any kind of ideological fight or the making of one's views known on this or that issue, even those of a practical character.... The only proof of guilt used, against all norms of current legal science, was the confession of the accused himself; and, as subsequent probing proved, confessions were acquired through physical pressures against the accused...

It is clear that here Stalin showed in a whole series of cases his intolerance, his brutality and his abuse of power. Instead of proving his political correctness and mobilizing the masses, he often chose the path of repression and physical annihilation, not only against actual enemies, but also against individuals who had not committed any crimes against the Party and the Soviet government....



This text is part of the [Internet Modern History Sourcebook](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/krushchev-secret.html). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts. This entry: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/krushchev-secret.html>. Photo from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikita_Khrushchev

³ It is important to note that this speech was intended for party members, not the general public.

Return to Germany: Churches of Russian-German resettlers

Book Review: John N. Klassen, Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Entwicklung und Theologie (Nürnberg, Bonn: VTR / VKW, 2007). Paperback, 444 pages. reviewed by Harry Loewen.

This book, *Russian-German Churches in the Federal Republic of Germany*: originally a doctoral dissertation at the University of South Africa, is the first scholarly study of Russian-German "Free Church" (Freikirchen) groups, including Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals and Mennonites.

It was the German chancellors Konrad Adenauer and Willy Brandt who came to agreements with the Russians according to which Germans of the Soviet Union would be able to resettle in Germany, their original homeland. For Klassen, who himself left the Soviet Union after the Second World War, writing this book must have been a labour of love. Beside his heavy work load as a teacher and pastor among the resettlers (*Aussiedler*), he worked for years researching the life and religious practices of his countrymen.

The book is divided into four major parts with several subsections. Part 1, the historical part, deals with German farmers and craftsmen leaving their homeland in the 18th and 19th centuries at the invitation of Empress Catherine II (the Great). In the new country the settlers built their communities, farms and businesses and were able to practice their faith freely. They were also exempt from serving in the Russian military, which was especially appreciated by the pacifist Mennonites. Because of their privileged position in Russia, the German settlers loved the German-born empress and all subsequent Russian tsars.

The First World War (1914-18) and the subsequent Communist Revolution of 1917 changed the life of the Russian Germans dramatically: almost all lost their property to the state as well as their freedom to practice their religion. Entire communities were uprooted and their religious leaders were exiled and many were shot. Yet during their life in the Gulag, the Soviet-German believers continued to worship privately in their homes, passed their faith on to their children, established house churches, and even sought to evangelize their neighbors. Thus when the opportunity presented itself to leave Russia for Germany, many left, for the Germans, in spite of their being Soviet citizens, were often decried as "fascists."

Part 2 deals with the Russian-German people leaving the Soviet Union for Germany between the 1960s and 2000. While the author deals fairly equally with Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Mennonites and some other religious groups, in this review I am focusing more on the Baptists and Mennonites, who more than then any other group have formed their own congregations, separate from the native German churches. The Baptist-Mennonite *Aussiedler* (resettlers) in Germany numbered by the end of 2007 about 87,000 persons. This number does not include the native Germans in the resettler congregations, nor the approximately 9,000 resettler believers in German congregations. In 1998 there were 370 *Aussiedler* congregations, which rose to more than 500 congregations by 2007.

When the Baptists and Mennonites first arrived in Germany, the native Germans hoped they would join their congregations and help them to revive their own church life. This generally did not happen, whereas many Catholic and Protestant *Umsiedler* joined the German churches. The cultural and religious differences between some of the new groups and those of the native German people appeared to be too great. The newcomers did not feel comfortable with the religious and ethical practices of the German communities. The German churches with their openness to modern culture and liberal practices, such as dress, television, the theatre, and the use of alcohol, seemed too "worldly" to the more conservative newcomers.

Part 3, the largest part of the book (pp. 149-363), deals with the growth and development of the *Aussiedler* congregations. Whereas the native German churches show little growth numerically, the *Aussiedler* congregations



have increased substantially in membership and have developed an active church life, developing solid teaching programmes for their children and young people. The larger congregations among them such as Bielefeld, Neuwied, Espelkamp, and Frankenthal, to name but a few, boast memberships of well over 600 believers each. They also carry on active missions and evangelism programmes, seeking to bring the Gospel to native Germans. While their initial success was minimal, in time the "outreach" to native Germans showed more positive results. By the end of 1998 there were 2,140 native believers in the *Aussiedler* congregations.

Part 4 consists of numerous graphs, maps, tables, statistics, a list of new congregations established after 1998, an extensive bibliography and a useful index. For serious historians and sociologists of immigrant groups this part is a goldmine of information.

In the rest of the review I can only refer to and comment briefly on some aspects of the life and faith of the *Aussiedler*, particularly the Mennonites and Baptists. To understand the *Aussiedler* and their ways, the author explains, often by mere implication, that the newcomers began their life of faith in the former Soviet Union under considerable pressure, including severe persecution. In atheistic Russia it was illegal to worship freely and to pass their faith on to their children. To pass their religious faith on to their neighbors was forbidden and punished. The leaders were exiled to inhospitable places, hard labour camps, and given long prison terms. Mennonites and other groups were driven from their homes in the Ukraine and the Volga regions to northern areas, beyond the Ural Mountains and to Siberia.

The exiles had to learn to survive both physically and as faith communities. After the death of Stalin in 1953 the harsh rules were slightly relaxed. Around 1956, German-speaking believers began to search for their loved ones and then gather in different areas of the Soviet Union. As they were not allowed to return to their former homes, they organized congregational communities in former penal centres such as Karaganda in Kazakhstan. It is from these areas that most of the *Aussiedler* came to Germany.

Considering their background of suffering and their struggle to survive religiously, it is understandable that the *Aussiedler* congregations are different in their cultural and spiritual outlook from the native German citizens. In Russia they had to struggle, often to their death, to retain their faith and young people; now in Germany they again struggle against what they consider "the world" with its harmful influences. The native German Mennonite churches are considered too liberal and a threat to their faith and way of life. While they are open to integration and to being good German citizens, the *Aussiedler* don't wish to become assimilated into the German religious and cultural environment.

The *Aussiedler* Mennonites consider themselves the heirs to the Anabaptist heritage. Like the early Anabaptists, they seek to live by the letter and spirit of the Bible in all things, including life style, separation from the world and politics, non-swearing of oaths, refusal to serve in the military, and a zeal for evangelism and missions. They seek to follow their spiritual forebears, the 16th-century "Swiss Brethren" and the 19th-century "Mennonite Brethren."

What is the future for the *Aussiedler*? The newcomers are grateful to Germany for the opportunity to live in a land of freedom and plenty. But at least for the foreseeable future, according to the book, there is no indication that the majority will join the German churches. Klassen quotes Hans von Niessen, a leader among the newcomers, to the effect that the resettlers are suspicious of the Germans' openness to ecumenism, feminism and worldliness. A believer who has come to Germany, according to Niessen, will hardly find anything in the old churches he would want to identify with (p. 354).

John Klassen is to be commended for treating the resettlers' story both objectively and sympathetically. As this book is an academic study, it is not easy reading. However, whoever wishes to know the *Aussiedler* in Germany, can't do any better than to study this important book. The book should be placed in all Mennonite institutions and libraries. In Canada, the book can be purchased from the Mennonite Historical Society of BC.

Professor Harry Loewen lives in Kelowna, B.C.
(April 2008)

Bibliography: Books about or by World War II Displaced Persons
compiled by Selma Hooge

Available at MHS of BC

1. *Ambassador to His People* by Herb and Maureen Klassen. The story of C.F. Klassen.
2. *Between Worlds* by Harry Loewen. Dr. Loewen's autobiography.
3. *A Family Torn Apart* by Justina Neufeld.
4. *Footprints of Compassion* edited by Helen Lescheid, the story of MCC BC.
5. *From Servant to Master; an autobiography* by Peter Sawatzky, translated by his brother Jake.
6. *Growing Up in Turbulent Times* by Waldemar Janzen (see book review this issue.)
7. *Journey into Freedom* by Edith Elisabeth Friesen. Raduga Pr. 2003.
8. *Lead Kindly Light* by Helen Lescheid. Helen tells her mother Neta Loewen's story in the first person.
9. *Living With Conviction* by Siegfried Bartel. "German Army Captain Turns to Cultivating Peace."
10. *Mennonite Historical Atlas* by Schroeder/Huebert.
11. *The Road to Freedom* edited by Dr. Harry Loewen. Stories of WWII refugees. Pandora, 2000.
12. *The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia* by Connie Braun. (See excerpt page 10.)

Books out of Print but can be borrowed from the library (or check the MCC thrift store)

1. *Beyond the Border: Maria's miraculous Pilgrimage* by Maria Foth. Welch, 1981.
2. *First Mennonite Villages in Russia. Edited by N.J. Kroeker. SP D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1981.*
3. *Henry's Red Sea* by Barbara Smucker. The Berlin "miracle" for children.
4. *Into the Unknown* by Katie Friesen. Derksen Printers, S-P, 1986.
5. *Journey to Freedom* by Agatha Klassen.
6. *Journey to Freedom; the story of Jakob and Maria Redekop* by Mary Bergen. S-P, Abbotsford,
7. *Mennonite Exodus* by Frank Epp. CMRIC, 1962. One of a few history books which includes the resettlement of the World War II refugees.
8. *Up From the Rubble* by Peter and Elfrieda Dyck. MCC workers during and after the war.
9. *Under the Still Standing Sun* by Dora Dueck. A novel set in a Paraguay settlement. Good reading.

German books

1. *Es wurde wieder ruhig* by Peter (Isaak) Derksen. Mennonite Heritage Centre, 1989.
2. *Das Ende von Chortitza* by Gerhard Fast. S-P. Regier's Printing, 1973.
3. *Höhen und tiefen. Maria Winter-Loewen. Derksen Printers, 1974.*
4. *Lieder aus der Not.* A collection of poems by Maria Foth who too was a refugee.
5. *Die Russland Mennoniten* by Horst Gerlach.
6. *Tiefenwege* by Jacob Neufeld. About the Great Trek; translation into English in process.

Becoming Canadian Citizens

For refugees from soviet or fascist regimes, the rights and privileges we now take for granted must have seemed incredible. This is a copy of a document found among the papers of Maria Peters, likely from the mid-50s.

SOME OF THE RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES OF A CANADIAN / *Rechte und Privilegien eines Kanadischen Bürgers*

1. The right of free speech. *Redefreiheit.*
2. The right of free assembly. *Versammlungsfreiheit.*
3. The protection of laws made by the people themselves. *Schutz der Gesetze, von den Bürgern selbst gemacht.*
4. The protection of law courts which are free from party control. *Schutz des Gesetzes im Gericht, frei von Partei-Kontrolle.*
5. Protection from oppression and injustice, even if one belongs to a minority. *Schutz vor Unterdrückung, auch wenn man im Lande zu einer Minderheit gehört.*
6. The right to vote as one desires. *Man darf wählen, wie man glaubt dass es recht ist.*
7. The right to move from place to place in Canada. *Bewegungsfreiheit.*
8. The right to leave Canada if one so desires. *Jeder hat das Recht, Canada zu verlassen, wenn er es wünscht.*
9. The right to enjoy all legal privileges, regardless of race, creed or class. *Jeder Bürger hat das Recht, alle legalen Privilegien zu genießen, abgesehen von Glaube, Rasse oder Gesellschaftsklasse.*
10. The right to worship as one desires and to have one's own political opinions. *Religionsfreiheit und das Recht seine eigene politischen Ansichten zu haben.*

Hymns of our mothers and fathers: Take Thou my Hands O Father

by Louise Bergen Price

Julie von Hausmann, a Baltic-German poet, 1826-1901, was a shy woman who made her living as a teacher and governess. She was often ill, and in sleepless nights crafted her deepest thoughts and struggles into poems. These she only shared with those closest to her, but through a friend some of her poems arrived at the door of Pastor Gustav Knakof of Berlin, who offered to have them published. Von Hausmann agreed, but only if she could remain anonymous. In 1862, the first edition of *Maiblumen: Lieder einer Stillen im Lande* was published. The poem, "So nimm denn meine Hände" was set to music by Friedrich Silcher and was soon widely distributed.

It was a song that Mennonites quickly adopted, and often sang to comfort those leaving as well as those remaining. It was sung by those about to be arrested and carted away in the Black Raven. Today, it often accompanies former refugees on their last journey home.



Reference: "Julie von Hausmann." http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie_von_Hausmann

EATING MY FATHER'S ISLAND

by Andreas Schroeder

Letters like the one my father received on September 8, 1953, always caused consternation in our family.

For one thing, the address was typed, not hand-written. For another, the return address—BALLISTER, CLARKE, MARSHALL & ROBSON—was printed in gilt-colored ink. Only “the English” sent letters like that.

Our own mail, hand-scrawled and air-mailed to Agassiz from Mennonite villages in West Prussia, always arrived at rigidly pre-determined times - birthdays, weddings and anniversaries - and always contained the same things: a single-page report, an updated family snap, a bible verse and a pious exhortation. Letters from the English usually contained very formally typed documents with lots of heretofores and whereases and notwithstanding. Such letters almost always meant trouble.

That evening after milking, Father and I took the letter over to Onkel Jacob Sawatsky. Everybody always took their English letters to Onkel Jacob Sawatsky. Onkel Jacob was a short, fat man with a disproportionately large nose and a receding chin, both of which he'd tried to camouflage with a goatee and spectacles. He was rumored to be on a first-name basis with John Diefenbaker.

Onkel Jacob was publically ostracized but privately admired for his perplexing ability to make sense of heretofores and notwithstanding. His farm was a mess—just a sham of a farm, really—with broken machinery and cast-off junk cluttering the yard in a very un-Mennonite manner. His daughters danced around on his nose, everybody knew that, and his wife spent most of her life in bed. Their garden was always choked with weeds, and their herd records were in total disarray. In fact, most people visited the Sawatskys just to feel better about their own neat farms—and, since they just happened to have them in their pockets, to have their English letters unpuzzled.

Onkel Jacob took Father and me to his “office”—a tiny windowless room off the kitchen that had once been a pantry, barely big enough for Father to sit and me to stand. The long pause that followed, as he gravely examined Father's letter, was probably the main thing Onkel Jacob lived for—those few moments when his social betters in Agassiz' Mennonite community were obliged to acknowledge, however tacitly, his brief supremacy. Then he laid the letter on his desk with the appropriate gravity.

“So you entered a contest,” he stated flatly, though not quite neutrally. Coming from any other relative this statement would have been unequivocally accusing. Entering a contest, a worldly contest, an *English* contest, had to be considered, for a Mennonite, very poor form. Not one of the Seven Deadly Sins, not enough to be mentioned from the pulpit on Sunday morning, but nevertheless an undeniable instance of flawed moral judgment.

Father's face reddened. “I had to get Margarete's sewing machine fixed,” he protested.

Even at my age—seven years and ten months—I knew that father's embarrassment was really due to the fact that he'd been unable to fix the machine himself.

“And then he wanted me to fill out a...some sort of...paper for a contest,” Father grumped. “Something about an island - I can never understand the English when they jabber so fast. I wanted nothing to do with it, so he said he'd fill it out for me. What did he want with me and a contest, for heaven's sake? I'd already paid him for the repairs.”

We all shrugged automatically, in unison. Who could understand the English? We were Fraser Valley farmers, war refugees from West Prussia, working ourselves to the bone to pay off our passage and the mortgage on the farm. The idea of an island was so incongruous, so absurd and utterly frivolous, it might as well have come from another planet.

Onkel Jacob frowned and refolded the letter like an Elder presenting the clincher in a scriptural dispute. “Well, but now you have the business,” he said in a way that clearly meant: That's what comes from such foolishness. “What has happened now, with this “Island In The Sun” contest, is that they've had a draw, and the entry they drew was yours. You've won a prize - First Prize, this letter says.”

“And First Prize, in this contest, was an island.”

(“Eating my Father's Island” is an excerpt from: *Renovating Heaven; Novel in Triptych*. More on page 4.)

Monument in Udarnik: Ukrainians pay tribute

by Ben and Linda Stobbe

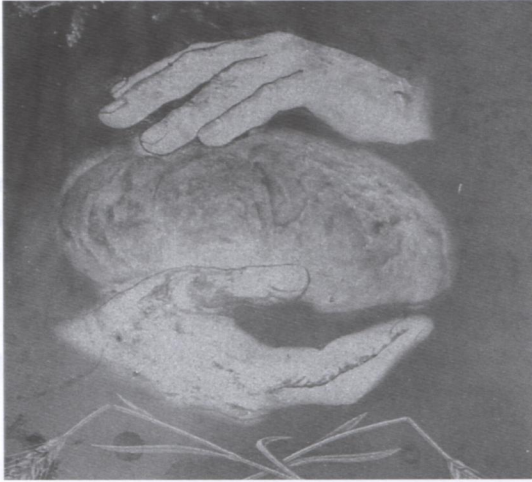


Image on monument: a hand taking away a loaf of bread.

In a country where for years people were actively discouraged from stepping out and demonstrating leadership, it is refreshing and still somewhat rare, to discover Ukrainians who want to take initiative and do things for their community. Nickolai, the school principal in Udarnik, and Anatoli, the history teacher, are such refreshing finds.

When we visited the school in this former Mennonite village of Neukirch, they kept talking about building a monument to remember the people of the seven Mennonite villages of South-Eastern Molochna, who suffered under Soviet repression, particularly the times of famine--the holodomor.

Nickolai and Anatoli are fascinated that people who had businesses, schools, and prosperous farms once lived here. Now, some of these desperately poor, dried out villages have had no running water for 25 years. They are astounded when they review the pictures of their villages found in books like Rudy Friesen's *Building on the Past*. The windmill at Alexanderkrone, and the silos at Lichtfelde, stand like sentinels guarding the past. Their school has converted a room into a museum displaying Mennonite artifacts such as a cradle, spinning wheel, table, waffle maker and butter churn.

However, they were not only fascinated with what Mennonites accomplished but what they went through. After hearing stories of the suffering and separation of Mennonites from their land, Nickolai and Anatoli came to us with a proposal that a monument be erected at the school to remember these people who had suffered under Soviet repression. They feel that this time of suffering, particularly during the 1932/33 famine under Stalin, brings together Mennonite and Ukrainian people. With our input and very limited financial support, under \$500, they designed and installed the monument.

The monument lies on the ground almost like a tombstone. The tombstone is surrounded by seven old Mennonite grinding stones, representing each village. The image on the monument consists of a hand taking away a loaf of bread and beneath that, a broken stalk of wheat. Inscribed on the granite stone in Ukrainian, English and Russian are the words:



"To the inhabitants of the villages Alexanderkrone, Friedensruh, Kleefeld, Lichtfelde, Prangenau, Neukirch, Steinfeld who fell in the wars, holodomor, repression and deportation."

Here are people who have not forgotten what our parents and grandparents went through. If they remember us, should we not remember them?