

Roots and branches

Newsletter of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

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

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Steel Meeting House sculpture near Menno Simons monument in
Witmarsum, unveiled September 13, 2008.

Next MHSBC Event:
Blessed Assurance; an Evening of Gospel Music.
June 14, 6:30. See details page 2.

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Editorial: MHSBC Events

by Helen Rose Pauls

As well as providing an avenue for fund raising for the Archives, special events serve to connect and educate the Mennonite community. Together it is possible to explore stories from the past, celebrate our rich heritage, and enjoy being together as an extended Mennonite family.

The Sunday afternoon event in October, "Sixty years of Peace and Plenty," was so popular we decided to repeat the program at Sherbrooke Mennonite Church on January 18. (See article by Heather Pauls Murray on page 3.)

On March 13, we enjoyed hearing from businessmen Arthur Block and John Redekop speak eloquently about entrepreneurs. We viewed the film, *PETE: Moving Man-made Mountains*, about Yarrow boy Peter Friesen who became North America's pre-eminent mover of buildings, and was featured in *National Geographic* and *Guinness Book of Records*.

Our next event is *BLESSED ASSURANCE – a summer evening of gospel songs*, June 14 at 6:30 at King Road MB Church. When gospel songs first became popular in our churches, they were generally sung on Sunday evenings, considered a bit too up-beat and suspect for the more sedate Sunday morning service. For some reason, however, they received approval for *Jugend Verein* (youth group) and were sung loudly, heartily and eagerly. Favourites in my church, Arnold MB, included "Wonderful Grace of Jesus," with the wonderful male melody in the chorus. We also belted out "Standing on the Promises," "To God be the Glory," and "Do Lord!" In our early teens, we found our "voice" and learned to fit into four part harmony quite quickly.

For some reason, we sang these songs at top volume. This was called "raising the roof," and I met my husband when he turned around at a youth gospel sing at Camp Squeah, to see who was singing so intensely directly behind him.

On June 14, Evan Kreider will lead gospel singing, provide some background to gospel songs, and endeavour to explain how this music crept, despite some resistance, into our churches. Clara Thiessen is leading a double trio, the Heritage Singers, in several numbers, and "A Few Good Men", a quartet from South Langley Church, is busy preparing for this event.

Tickets are \$10.00, available at the archives 604-853-6177, or at the door.

Future events:

June 4, 6:00 p.m. MHSBC Annual General Meeting. Garden Park Tower, Rose Room. All are welcome to attend!

June 14, 6:30 p.m. **Blessed Assurance**; an evening of Gospel Singing. King Road MB. 32068 King Road, Abbotsford, B.C.
(see above article for more information)

Oct. 17, 6:00 p.m. Annual Fundraising Banquet at Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church. Topic: Paraguay
Speaker: Dr. Jacob Warkentin of Paraguay

Letters to the editor:

Working with the Doukhobours (Roots and branches, January 2009): a correction.

Thank you for publishing the write-up about us. It is good, but not knowing us, you wrote that the Soviets had given my husband a big post. That was wrong. ..It was the Germans who gave him the job of Rayons Chef (District administrator). That is why we, and all people, felt better under German rule...

I would like you to read my enclosed article. That will help you understand us better and if you want to use it, you're welcome to keep it for that purpose.

Sincerely, Frieda Paetkau Fast

Thank you for the correction, Frieda. Frieda Paetkau Fast's article is found on page 5. Ed.

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, Connie Braun, David Giesbrecht, Ed Hildebrand, John Konrad, Robert Martens, Peter Neudorf, Helen Rose Pauls, Louise Bergen Price, 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 & Elisabeth Klassen **Copy editing:** Hugo and Jean Friesen

Before the Years of Peace and Plenty

by Heather Pauls Murray

Enter the waters with courage; they will not be too deep for you.

Resonant voices wove together, singing the old songs of hope and struggle that were sung in Stalin's Russia. Moving, and heart-rending, the music lifted and circled the high ceiling of Sherbrooke Mennonite Church for an evening of memories, poems, and songs.

Sixty years ago, in 1948, many Mennonite refugees were able to seek shelter in Canada. To commemorate the hardship of persecution, and the miracle of finding peace, the Mennonite Historical Society of BC organized a special night to reflect on the trials that fell upon Mennonites in the first half of the 20th century. All throughout the event, the narration of the history of Mennonites in Russia, written by Louise Bergen Price, served as a thread that sewed the evening together into a tapestry of poetry, story and song.

It is the account of imprisonment and torment, but more than anything, it is the story of how a group of people kept their faith, their hope and their thoughts. Again and again, songs and stories pointed to the enduring and strongly-tested trust that God would comfort them and relieve them of their sorrow, like the words from a hymn we sang together:

*Then trust in God through all the days;
Fear not, for He doth hold thy hand;
Though dark thy way, still sing and praise,
Some time, some time we'll understand.*

Hymns played a large part in salving broken spirits and encouraging weary travellers expelled from their homes. It was a beautiful and humbling experience to hear the songs so earnestly sung by many of the people who came out of trouble and strife themselves.

But it wasn't only religious songs that lifted spirits. Love songs like *Lili Marleen* were popular, along with the strong words of *Die Gedanken sind frei, wer kann sie erraten*:

*I think as I please and this gives me pleasure,
My conscience decrees, this right I must treasure;
My thoughts will not cater to duke or dictator,
No man can deny – Die Gedanken sind frei!¹*

Poetry played a key role in this event – a powerful way of recapturing memories from the war, and also a means for the children of survivors to imagine what their parents and grandparents experienced. A highlight was Elsie Neufeld's

description of her mother's life at age 12, describing the grit in her mouth, the empty fields, the creaking trees and cracking lips of a family and a farm without any food. The imagery was stark, bleak, and hungry.

Stories were offered throughout, from the selection from *The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia* written and read by Connie Braun, to "A Mother's Story" by Helen Lescheid. These, and all of the stories brought history to life with unique individual accounts of what life was like for Mennonites under persecution.

The special story of C. F. Klassen's life, work, and death was shared by his grandson, Steve Klassen. C. F. Klassen was a motivated, dedicated man who went to Europe to connect refugees with relatives back in Canada. His contribution allowed many Mennonites to leave war-torn Europe to find a new life in North America.

I began to wonder what life was like for the generation that grew up in Canada, people with maybe a few years worth of memories still from Russia. The Boomers, people like my parents (I'm all the way down in Generation Y). And with a name like *Sixty Years of Peace and Plenty*, I had assumed the evening would be chock full of stories from the last 60 years in Canada.

Andreas Schroeder filled in the gap with his hilarious story about Mennonites getting used to "the English" in Canada. When a young boy runs across the neighbour's yard, pock-marking the newly sown lawn, his family fears the worst. Will the English neighbour sue them, charge them, or have them sent back to Russia?

The story brought levity and hope, and spoke of the challenges Mennonites faced integrating (or not) into the new culture. It makes one think of future generations, and how they hopefully will pass down the history of their ancestors, and also the funny stories and the joyous things in life too.

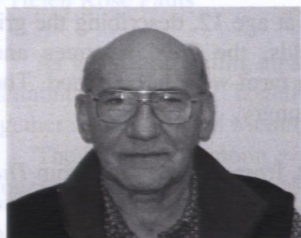
A CD of the event will soon be available. To order, send \$15 to the MHSBC with your name & address, or order from the archives at 604-853-6177. A commemorative songbook will be included free with the first 50 orders. Copies of the CD will also be available at the June 14 music event.



¹ English words by Peter Seeger

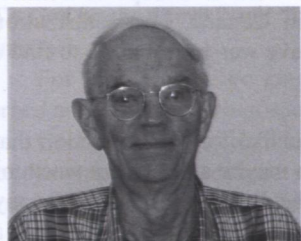
News from the Archives

by John Konrad



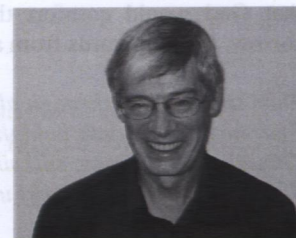
David Giesbrecht, Archive Director and board member, is on leave to undergo surgery. We will miss his leadership over the next few months. **Harry Heidebrecht** and board member **Robert Martens** will oversee administrative matters while David is away. Harry will be our liaison to the community and Robert will take care of office duties.

Erica Suderman has been diagnosed with lung cancer and is on leave pending decisions around her medical care. Erica has over the past few years led a team of volunteers on our InMagic project. This very large multi-year project involves the computerization of our archival resources. Our prayers are with Erica and her family.



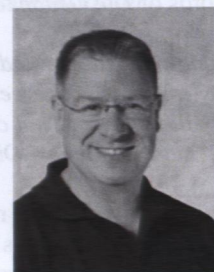
Long time board member **Edward Hildebrand** has resigned from the board effective June 4, 2009 after completing his current 3-year term. Ed has been a member of our executive, serving as Secretary in recent years. A tribute will be paid to him in our fall newsletter.

Ben Stobbe is also completing his term on the board and will not stand for re-election at this time. He is Vice-Chair of Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine (FOMCU) and will assume the role of President on an interim basis as President George Dyck is seriously ill. FOMCU is a charitable organization which operates the Mennonite Centre in Molochansk, Ukraine. This renovated property is the former *Mädchenschule* in Halbstadt, Molotschna.



Connie Letkeman Braun is the newest member of the MHSBC board. Connie was one of the organizers of the MHSBC's "Sixty Years of Peace and Plenty" event. More on Connie will follow in a future newsletter.

On February 20, **Richard Thiessen** posted the 14,160th and final article from the print version of the Mennonite Encyclopedia onto the website of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia online. His post concludes 12 years of work by volunteers in Canada and the U.S. GAMEO will now concentrate on updating existing articles and adding new ones. Approximately 1,000 new articles have already been added. Two other items are up for consideration: making the Encyclopedia available on CD, and posting articles in other languages. (From the news release at www.gameo.org)



Easter 1942

by Frieda Paetkau Fast

When the German army occupied Ukraine in the middle of the Second World War, we finally felt safe. My husband, Stefan, was free, and did not fear the KGB anymore. (Because he'd fought in the White Army against the Bolsheviks when he was a young man, he'd been on the government's blacklist all his adult life.) Now the Germans recognized his potential as a leader, and made him *Rayons Chef* (district administrator).

Our family was asleep on this Easter Sunday morning when a sharp knock on the window woke us, and someone called for Stefan to get dressed and come outside. Since these were people Stefan worked with, I thought nothing of it, and Annie, Lora and I slept peacefully on.

Then, at nine o'clock, our kitchen started filling up with crying wailing women. They told me their husbands had been arrested by the German police. Only then did I realize what had happened to Stefan.

The police headquarters was not far from our home, so I walked over and asked to see the chief who told me that he had five signatures stating that Stefan was a traitor to the Reich, and that he was working towards an independent Ukraine. Very disturbed, I walked home.

As I crossed the street, a car stopped and honked. It was the chauffeur of Herr Hacker, a party Commissioner, who had been transferred to Verchini-Dnieprovsk. Herr Hacker's chauffeur had come to get the rest of Hacker's belongings.

Since Herr Hacker knew Stefan well, I made arrangement to go with the chauffeur the next day to Verchini-Dnieprovsk, a journey of 100 kilometres, to talk to him. I left our children with the two Ukrainian women who worked for us. It was an unbelievable trip. Every five kilometres we had a flat tire; the chauffeur patched and patched. It took a whole day to reach the city.

Herr Hacker was friendly and listened to what I had to say. We had dinner and talked. He told me that the next day we'd drive to Dnepropetrovsk and he'd talk to the General Commissar on our behalf. We arrived there at eleven the next morning, but I was not allowed to be at the meeting and had to find my way home from here. I walked until I found an office where I could get a pass to get on the train. The train was filled to overflowing with officers and soldiers and I felt very conspicuous, but I arrived safely at home.

The next morning, one of the Ukrainian women and I set out to visit our husbands. The train wouldn't stop at the station, so we had to jump. I fell too close to a cement block. Although I was bruised and my packages flew in all directions, no great damage was done. I gathered my things, and we started on the long walk to the jail.

At the gate, we wrote notes to our husbands, handed over the food and clothing packages, and waited for the receipt. What a shock when I realized that the handwriting on the receipt was not my husband's! Angrily I demanded to see the warden. The first thing the warden did was to remove my kerchief and ask how old I was. (I was twenty-four, but looked twice my age.) After we talked, he ordered his helpers to bring Stefan into the room. When Stefan saw me, he began to shake; I thought he'd collapse.

Now the warden led us from cell to cell to find the thief. When we found him, we realized that the man had eaten all the food and had tossed the clean underwear into the latrine. We could not salvage anything, but Stefan was declared a free man! Perhaps the warden had already received orders from the Commissar to free my husband. We were told that it would be better if I went home, and Stefan would follow the next day.

A few days after Stefan's return, he was reinstated to his old job. The problems had been due to jealousy of the former *Rayons Chef* who had been an ethnic German (*Volksdeutscher*); an uneducated man who could hardly write his name, but could not understand how a Russian could be chosen to fill this position.

Stefan was free now, but the other men were still in prison, so I started a campaign. After I gathered many signatures and spoke to the commanding officials, these men were also released.

My husband died in 1973. Many years have passed now since Stefan was falsely accused of working for Ukrainian independence. Now the Ukrainian flag is flying over an independent and free state, the first time this has happened in over 1,000 years.



The blue and yellow Ukrainian flag flying in Kiev

Profiles. Jacob Peter Martens: Crossing the Boundaries, a Mennonite Entrepreneur

by Mel Martens, with Robert Martens, Jim Martens and Leonard Neufeldt, and excerpted from *Windows to a Village: Life Studies of Yarrow Pioneers* (Pandora: Kitchener, 2007), 196-198. (Available from the archives.)

Jacob Peter Martens (b. Ufa, 1911, d. Abbotsford, 1984) successfully operated a number of businesses, starting with Yarrow Lumber. He lived in a time when the ethnic Mennonite community was undergoing huge changes, with some individuals clinging to tradition and others advocating assimilation. Entrepreneurs lived on the cutting edge of the transition from village to urban nation. Martens, tolerant and open-minded, and with a gift for mediation, adapted reasonably well to cultural transformation.



Jake Martens (left) with brother Herb

In the early years of Mennonite Yarrow, the needs of the community were such that local business people were accepted and respected. The 1940s saw a shift as Yarrow developed a successful business elite. Suspicion towards this group soon emerged, especially among ministers in Yarrow's churches. On the one hand, businessmen were expected to financially support numerous ventures in Yarrow; on the other, they were perceived by some influential church members as unspiritual, that is, at odds with the ideals and practices of the church. Their kind of work and the way they went about it were not seen as the kind of service that enhanced Mennonite values. For some ministers, "the only honoured professions were teaching, preaching and farming."² The

separation between church and business community developed a myth, for the most part unspoken, that one was holy and the other tainted. Businessmen were not even permitted to teach Sunday school until the 1950s. Jake Martens was naturally one of those regarded with suspicion.

In the late 1940s, the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church imposed a *Steuer* (tax or levy) on all businesses and farms owned by members as a fixed percentage on all gross profits. This levy was created at least in part as an attempt to rescue the disintegrating Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute (SMCI), a private school that was an endeavour to meld religious, social, educational, and cultural aspects in a single institution. The tax, perhaps somewhat fairer for farmers, fluctuated for entrepreneurs at the whim of some of the church hierarchy who did not understand business statements. Jake Martens was part of an informal chamber of commerce that included, among others, Dave Derksen (D&D Hardware), John Martens (Yarrow Freight and Fuel), C.C. Funk (Funk's Supermarket), Henry Goossen (Yarrow Box Factory), and Herb Martens (Martens Motors). These men took a united stand against the tax, pointing out that some businesses were in debt and that some were partly non-Mennonite owned. In fact, some enterprises might have a large gross profit but almost no net profit. Church leaders refused to listen.

Harvey Neufeldt has written that the "*Steuer* controversy is evidence of the fact that the brotherhood was beginning to fracture along economic lines."³ By mid-1948, several dozen businessmen, including Herb Martens (Jake's brother), were delinquent in their payments. Church minutes of the time are rawly revelatory of the harsh conflict that ensued: "*Bei den Geschäftsleuten steht es mit dem Zahl schlecht. Das Kom. denkt sie sollten sich erklären*" (Regarding the businessmen, payment is in bad shape. The committee [a special levy committee appointed by the church] believes that they must explain themselves.). Scripture is quoted from the pulpit: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith...." (I Timothy 6:10)⁴ Businessmen are called upon the carpet to explain themselves, to divulge their thoughts on commerce, on the church, on the Lord. A fierce quarrel breaks out between John Harder, church minister, and Henry Sukkau, a community leader. Many others argue devoutly and without success. The word, "*ausgeschlossen*," or excommunicated, appears in the minutes with some frequency.

Jacob Martens was a businessman with whom the Church Council (*Vorberat*) felt some degree of comfort. He had approached the *Steuer* controversy with typical shrewdness. When a Yarrow entrepreneur approached him and asked for an opinion on the matter, Martens, with a characteristic wave of the hand, dismissed the idea of a required amount. "I pay the church an amount that I decide upon," he said, "and leave it at that – they don't object." Quite possibly the church elders did

² Wally Neufeldt, telephone interview by author, October 6, 2005.

³ Harvey Neufeldt, "Creating the Brotherhood: Status and Control in the Yarrow Mennonite Community, 1928-1960," *Canadian Papers in Rural History* IX (1994): 232.

⁴ *Minutes of the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church, 1929-1950*, file box 992.12.1, Archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia, Abbotsford, BC, September 28, 1948. See also Sept. 29, Sept. 30, May 11, Aug. 2, Aug. 4, and Oct. 18 of 1948 (hereafter cited as Church minutes).

not know how to respond to his tactic. In any case, they did not seem to take offence. In November of 1948, he was appointed, along with four other men, to a committee instructed to work out a plan for the *Steuer* for the following year.⁵ The *Steuer* as such subsequently dwindled into obscurity, although church members were still required to pay a minimum assessment. Primarily, this may have been due to the final collapse of the Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute; its ongoing difficulties had originally engendered the idea of the special levy. One could plausibly hypothesize, however, that committee member Martens would have advised as he usually did, to “put the matter to rest.” In any case, an individualistic assimilatory ethic was winning out over communitarian values: “the *Steuer* controversy was the church’s last attempt to legislate in major community matters.”⁶

Martens eventually became secretary-treasurer for the church, the first businessman to hold a position on the Church Council, and stayed on for ten years. It was said that some treasurers had enemies – they would demand too much from members who could not afford it. Martens, however, handled donations discreetly, allowing for peaceful coexistence within the congregation. Even as a businessman who was required to practise the individualistic values of capitalism in his business dealings, he valued Yarrow’s MB church and the community as his home. “I like my church,” he said, “what is good about my church, I am part of that – what is bad about my church, I am part of that too.” The glass barrier between Martens and community, however, would never entirely vanish. As late as the 1960s, when Jake and his wife, Sarah, were requested by church leadership to become deacons, but under the condition of a two-year probation, Martens felt the snub keenly and walked away. “After all our years in Yarrow...” he remarked.⁷



Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church

The church hierarchy viewed the “outside world,” or “*Engländer*” (literally, the English), meaning mainstream Canadian society, with even more suspicion than did Mennonite businessmen. In the 1940s, many of its members’ relationships with that world were codified by the church: how one should dress, where one could eat (restaurants were frowned upon), which cultural institutions to avoid, with whom one should associate, what one should do on Sundays. This deep divide between ethnic community and mainstream society was keenly felt by individuals who moved in both worlds. Martens sometimes returned home angry about the snobbishness of “outside” businessmen who condescended to Mennonites, and his exasperation often elicited a protective, even angrier reaction from his wife. In time, however, this Mennonite upstart entrepreneur managed to gain respect within the Chilliwack business community, partly because money talks, but certainly also because of the fairness of his dealings. Shortly after World War II began, he even drove in a Chilliwack parade the final automobile purchased in the Fraser Valley before steel rationing took place. A full-page 1957 article in the *Chilliwack Progress*, detailing the rags-to-riches story of Martens’ life, was indicative of the “*Engländer*” acceptance of Mennonite businessmen and their recognition of them as a group to be reckoned with.

In Memory of Pete Friesen

Pete Friesen, the subject of the film shown at MHSBC’s March 13 event, died February 11, 2009 in Lynden, Washington, where he lived with his wife, Edith. He was 86.

Over the years, Friesen moved about 5,000 buildings, among them many heritage buildings and lighthouses.

Copies of the movie *Pete: Moving Man Made Mountains* (shown at MHSBC’s March 13 event) are for sale at the archive office.



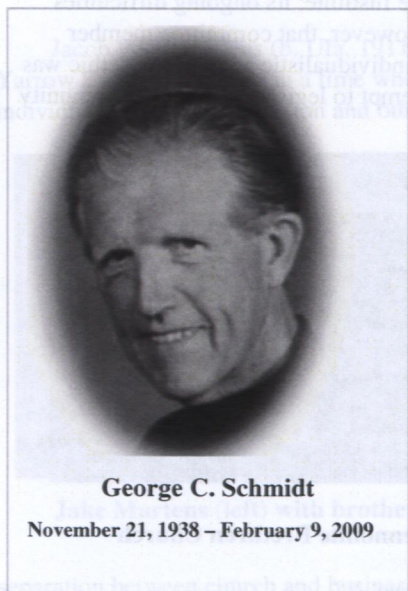
⁵ Church minutes, November 2, 1948.

⁶ H. Neufeldt, “Creating the Brotherhood,” 232.

⁷ Sarah Enns Martens, conversation with Robert Martens, Abbotsford, BC, November 5, 2005.

Schmidt, George Cornelius: Pilgrim, Saint and Earthen Vessel

an excerpt from his life story, by George C. Schmidt with assistance from Elsie K. Neufeld



George C. Schmidt

November 21, 1938 – February 9, 2009

He was perhaps two or three when men in Nazi uniforms appeared in the grain field where young Georg (George) Cornelius tagged along, bare-footed, with his father. The men handed Max Schmidt a notice, and not long after Father was gone – conscripted into the German *Wehrmacht*, too young to be exempt from service in a special section of the *Luftwaffe*, but too old to be sent to the Front as a foot soldier. Charlotte Schmidt was on her own to look after both farm and children with the help of a Russian maid, Polish farmhand and her mother-in-law. George recalled a lonely childhood, filled with hours of imaginative play, his best friends, the farm animals his only company. Older sister, Lieselotte, his first playmate, required complete care after a bout of meningitis.

On January 22, 1945, the family was ordered to evacuate the farm, and to head westward with the retreating Germans. Mother gathered her clan and prayed for God's protection before they set off.

George felt secure in the company of his mother, their workers, and neighbours travelling just ahead. He even felt a sense of adventure as he walked with his mother beside the wagon filled with a few belongings, a bit of food, his invalid Oma, his beloved Lieselotte, and two younger siblings – Erica, 3; and Manfred, 1.

By day's end, three terrible things had happened: they were separated from their travel companions, Lieselotte unexpectedly, though mercifully, died; and their wagon broke down. With help, they were able to make their way into the nearest town, Pestlin.

Then another tragedy: the worker made off with their horses, wagon, and all their belongings. They were stranded, at the mercy of the Russians who quickly appeared and took charge, kind to German children, but brutal towards women. Mother advocated and practiced forgiveness. Somehow, they survived.

In May they received permission to return to their farm, 35 kilometres away. The walk took several days, and what they found was this: farm animals gone, home burnt to the ground, and a barely habitable chicken coop. The carnage of charred tanks, bazookas and weaponry became George's playground. At the same time he took on man-sized chores: helping with harvest, fetching milk, and more.

Neighbours helped them re-establish, but there was more trauma: his mother was thrashed by a Polish man for gathering wood, and Russian soldiers harassed them. On one occasion the family was beaten, tied up, and trapped in the chicken coop, the exit nailed shut.

The next morning George climbed up the chicken ladder, dropped into the chicken run, and pried open the door. On another occasion he witnessed the same soldiers gleefully shoot his beloved storks. "Spring after spring those storks returned, a sign of hope and new life. The last constant on the farm was gone," he recalled.

More losses followed. A Polish family arrived with official papers to occupy the farm. Mother's kind attitude towards the "new owners" resulted in permission to stay on the farm until other accommodations were found. After a brief stay in Bornitz, the town in which George's three months of schooling had been interrupted by guerrilla activity in nearby forests, the family was forcibly transported to a "transition" camp [concentration camp is more accurate]. It was 1947, the war had ended, but now George and his fatherless family experienced "ethnic cleansing." As Germans in Russian occupied territory, they were the enemy. The food in the camp was barely enough.

After ten weeks, they were transported to Zwickau, near the Czech border. Here, the meagre meals they'd had in the camp suddenly seemed generous.

Foraging became a preoccupation; anything edible was brought home: other people's leftovers, rotten potato peels found in garbage; roots and weeds. But even if there was something in the pot, there wasn't always something to put *under* the pot; wood was as scarce as food. Mother's weight dropped from 143 to 70 pounds, and in later life, George's heart condition was attributed to starvation.

Mother continued to pray – for father’s safety, for food, for rescue. Meals began with Grace, and ended with the Lord’s Prayer: “...And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...” The mealtime prayers and Bible stories she shared were Mother’s only articulation of her faith; otherwise she lived it. It was her embodiment of Christ’s teachings, in particular her commitment to pacifism, that caused George’s soul to hunger for the same depth of faith. But with his stomach screaming for food, he found it difficult to believe in God’s love and care.

Father, meanwhile, had been released from an American prisoner-of-war camp, searched for and located his family. Through clever planning he rescued them, and they crossed from the Russian-occupied East into Western Germany. They lived the next four years in Klein Eilstorf, Germany. George attended Middle School and learned a perfect English. “I felt like a hero,” he said, as he reminisced about showing off his English in the village square! Later, this was a bit of a burden as he couldn’t quell the urge to correct others’ incorrect English!

Post-war Germany was not especially hospitable to refugees (*Flüchtlinge*), German or not, so with the help of MCC, the family immigrated to the United States.



George, who had been smitten by Westerns while in Klein Eilstorf, imagined they were heading for the Wild, Wild West. That vision vanished on the second day at sea; after that, George was so seasick he wished for death.

George’s first breakfast in America tasted like baled hay. He’d never eaten Shredded Wheat before, and what’s this? You cover it with milk? But Canton, Ohio was another matter, for here, among these gentle people who “loved us to the Lord,” George finally felt at home.

Beech Mennonite Church embraced the family, too, and this is where George chose to be baptized, though in hindsight, it wasn’t a holy experience – George and his friends giggled as the water, sprinkled onto their heads, dripped off their noses. And being assigned to wash an elderly person’s feet at communion was also no epiphany!

George loved school, loved learning, and was academically astute, completing four years in three. He enjoyed Latin, and developed a passion for history, especially American history. He memorized the names of presidents and Indian chiefs, though later had to revise his understanding of the war of 1812! Here he also learned to play basketball and hockey, and oh, it was exhilarating. He had good friends in school, church and at home where he chummed around with Walter, the son of their host family. When evangelist George Brunk set up his tent down the road, and rainy weather set in, George and Walter set off on farm tractors and, for a small fee, pulled repentant sinners out of the mud!

In 1954 the family moved again, to Greendale, British Columbia. Only years later did George understand that his parents’ motive to move was primarily spiritual: they longed to worship in their mother tongue, German. And in 1954, some Fraser Valley Mennonite churches still conducted services in German. At 16, George’s thoughts were elsewhere. His preference was to stay in Ohio where all his friends were. And, influenced by books and American perceptions of Canada, why would anyone want to move to a land of ice and snow. And how, he wondered, could cows thrive in ice-caves?

Community events

Rudy Wiebe will be the featured author at the second annual “**Many Strands**” Writers’ Conference taking place in Abbotsford at the MEI Middle School on May 29 & 30 – Friday evening and all day Saturday. For more information visit www.manystrands.ca or call 604 854 3387

This year’s **Harrison Festival of the Arts Literary Café** will feature readings by Mennonite writers Elsie K. Neufeld, Andreas Schroeder, Len Neufeldt, and music by the Nelson Boschman Trio. Monday, July 13 at 7:30. Tickets \$12, available from www.harrisonfestival.com or call 604 796-3664.

Mennonites and Rulers: Prince William of Orange and the Dutch Anabaptists

by Louise Bergen Price

William of Nassau (1533-1584) became a prince of the Holy Roman Empire during the Reformation at the height of persecution against the Anabaptists. Born in Germany of Lutheran parents, William had inherited a large territory, including sizeable areas of the Netherlands and the principality of Orange (in France) when he was just eleven years old. There was a stipulation: William would be sent to the imperial court in Brussels for an education, and he would be raised as a Catholic.

William's parents agreed, and William adapted well to his new conditions. In 1555, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V's successor, Philip II, appointed William as Viceroy (Stadhouder) of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht. By 1559, William had become one of the most powerful noblemen in the Netherlands, seemingly loyal to his emperor, and to the Catholic Church. Persecutions of Anabaptists continued.

By the 1560s, William, having married Anna of Saxony who had powerful Lutheran connections, began to champion a policy of religious compromise. In spite of the efforts of William and other noblemen, Emperor Philip II refused to moderate his stance; rather, he reinforced the religious persecutions Charles V had initiated. This, and other repressive measures, brought a wave of rebellion to the Netherlands as angry mobs rampaged through cathedrals, smashing Catholic images, altars, windows, and a group of armed nobles began military uprisings.

In 1567, Philip II sent the hated Duke of Alba to the Netherlands to restore order, and William fled to Germany where he assembled an invasion army. William's first attempts met with failure, but by 1572 dissatisfaction with the Spanish rule had intensified to the point where the provinces of Holland and Zeeland revolted and elected William as their Viceroy. Years of civil war followed, and in spite of William's tolerant stance on religion, there were "religious cleansing, mutual atrocities, and massacres of nuns, monks, and priests."⁸ Anabaptists were also still persecuted; the famous incident with Dirk Willems occurred in 1569 in Asperen.



Dirk Willems rescuing his pursuer

In 1574, a group of wealthy Anabaptists visited William in his military camp at Roermond with a gift of 750,000 guilders, a very sizeable sum. There were no strings attached; William was to use the money as he saw fit. They expressed a hope, though, that William would remember them once he won victory over the Holy Roman Empire.⁹ On April 23 of the same year, Reytse Aysesz, executed at Leeuwarden, would be the last Anabaptist to be martyred in the northern Netherlands. Persecutions and martyrdom continued in the south for another 23 years; the total number of Anabaptists who gave their lives in the combined Netherlands may have reached 2,500.¹⁰

With the Union of Utrecht in 1579 came a declaration of religious tolerance, and persecution of the Anabaptists ended in the United Provinces (the approximate area of the modern Netherlands.) In spite of objection from the Reformed Church (Calvinists) against the Mennonites, William upheld his earlier promise to the Mennonites that they had the right to forgo the oath and to practise non-resistance. During military call-ups, while other citizens had to appear with arms, Anabaptist men were asked to show up with "shovels and baskets."¹¹ The attitude

⁸ <http://www.homecomers.org/mirror/intro.htm> Retrieved 11 March 2009.

⁹ Loewen, Jacob A. and Wesley J. Prieb. *Only the Sword of the Spirit*. Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1997, 40.

¹⁰ van der Zijpp, Nanne and C. F. Brüsewitz. "Netherlands." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987. Retrieved 26 February 2009.

¹¹ Loewen, op. cit., 41.

of Dutch Mennonites to William of Orange would foreshadow the attitude of Russian Mennonites towards the Tsars: Dutch Mennonites were "[g]ood friends of the fatherland, thankful for the ground upon which they lived and for the protection they received – this they had always wanted to be, even when their principles forbade active participation in the conflict with national enemies."¹²

William of Orange died in 1584, the first ruler ever to be assassinated by a handgun. According to official records, his last words were, "My God, have pity on my soul; my God, have pity on this poor people."¹³ In the years that followed, he would become known as the "Father of the Netherlands."

William's son, Maurice of Nassau, who succeeded him, upheld his father's tolerant views. During the "Golden Years" that followed, Mennonites were active in founding and operating the Dutch East Indies Trading Company. Many Mennonites also became prominent in literature, the arts, and in government positions. By 1660, Mennonites had become so prosperous that van Bragt, a Dutch pastor, thought fit to remind his fellow Anabaptists of their spiritual heritage and thus prevent them from "sinking back into the complacency their spiritual forefathers had left."¹⁴ His book, *Martyrs Mirror*, was based on earlier accounts of Anabaptist martyrdom.

In the Wider Context

The sixteenth century brought sweeping changes to every aspect of life. Explorers travelled to previously unknown continents, printing presses made scriptures accessible to all those who were literate, and numerous reformers challenged the absolute rule of the Catholic Church. This century was also a time of political instability, war, unrest, and continuing religious persecutions. Here are some dates of interest:

- Late 1490s Menno Simons born. Journeys of Columbus, Cabot (Newfoundland), Vespucci
- 1503 da Vinci begins work on Mona Lisa
- 1506 at least 2,000 Jews massacred in a Lisbon riot
- 1512 Copernicus states that the sun is the centre of the solar system
- 1517 Luther's 95 Theses, beginning of Protestant Reformation in Germany
- 1519 Cortez begins conquest of Mexico for Charles V
- 1524-25 Peasant's War in Germany takes 100,000 lives
- 1531 Church of England breaks away from Catholic church
- 1531 Menno Simons, a Catholic priest in Pingjum, learns about Anabaptism
- 1533 John Calvin becomes a Protestant
- 1534-35 Münster Rebellion, an attempt to set up an Anabaptist theocracy in Münster, Westphalia
- 1535 Cartier sails up the St. Lawrence to Hochelaga
- 1535 Decree of Charles V against the Anabaptists (see below)
- 1536 Menno Simons rejects the Catholic church and becomes an Anabaptist
- 1547 Ivan IV (the Terrible) becomes Tsar of All Russia
- 1557 Spain becomes first sovereign nation in history to declare bankruptcy
- 1558 Elizabeth I proclaimed Queen of England and Ireland
- 1560 Catholic Reformation (known by Protestants as Counter-Reformation)
- 1568 Mercator projection map
- 1572 Slaughter of thousands of Huguenots (French Calvinists)
- 1577-1580 Sir Francis Drake circles the world
- 1583 Galileo identifies the constant swing of the pendulum, leads to development of reliable time-keeping

¹² van der Zijpp, Nanne and C. F. Brüsewitz, op, cit.

¹³ "William the Silent." *Wikipedia*. 20 Feb 2009, 16:34 UTC.

¹⁴ McGonnis, Michael. Introduction to online version of *Martyrs Mirror*. <http://www.homecomers.org/mirror/intro.htm> Retrieved 11 March 2009.

Excerpts from the Decree of Charles V against the Anabaptists, 1535 from *Martyrs Mirror*

And since it has come to our knowledge, that notwithstanding our aforesaid decrees, many and various sectarians, even some who call themselves Anabaptists, have proceeded, and still daily proceed, to spread, sow, and secretly preach their aforesaid abuses and errors, in order to allure a great number of men and women to their false doctrine and reprobate sect, to seduce them and to rebaptize some, to the great reproach and disregard of the sacrament of holy baptism, and of our edicts, statutes and ordinances; therefore we, intending to guard against and remedy this, summon and command you, that, immediately upon receipt of this, you cause it to be proclaimed within every place and border of your dominions, that all those, or such as shall be found, polluted by the accursed sect of the Anabaptist, of whatever rank or condition they may be, their chief leaders, adherents, and abettors, shall incur the loss of life and property, and be brought to the most extreme punishment, without delay; namely, those who remain obstinate and continue in their evil belief and purpose, or who have seduced to their sect and rebaptized any; also those who have been called prophets, apostles or bishops - these shall be punished with fire. All other persons who have been rebaptized, or who secretly and with premeditation have harboured any of the aforesaid Anabaptists, and who renounce their evil purpose and belief, and are truly sorry and penitent for it, shall be executed with the sword, and the women be buried in a pit.¹⁵

The decree goes on to state that those harbouring Anabaptists, or not reporting any knowledge of the sect, will be punished by confiscation of property. Citizens were also to refrain from "asking for mercy, forgiveness, or reconciliation for the aforesaid Anabaptists, or from presenting any petitions for this purpose, on pain of summary punishment."

Another View of Anabaptists: Thomas Nashe

by Robert Martens



Jan van Leiden, by Aldegrever

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Thomas Nashe, a contemporary of Shakespeare, was born in 1567 and died in his early to mid-thirties, perhaps a victim of the plague. Throughout his brief life, Nashe's outspokenness got him into trouble with the law. He was accused of sedition by his enemies and spent some time in debtor's prison. In *The Unfortunate Traveller*, which might be considered one of the first novels ever written, Nashe relates the European journeys of prankster Jack Wilton, who eventually recoils from the brutality of the continent and retreats to the relative tranquility of his native England. Along the way, Wilton witnesses the revolt of the Anabaptists at Münster in the 1530s. The uprising, which was savagely repressed by an alliance of Lutherans and Catholics, had sent shivers of fear throughout "civilized" Europe and prompted (or provided an excuse for) the fierce persecution of dissidents, labeled as heretics. These events were still fresh in the European mind a half-century later, when Nashe wrote about them satirically in *The Unfortunate Traveller*. Nashe describes the battle in vivid Elizabethan prose, but rather smugly. The excerpts on the following page provide a glimpse into how Europeans of that time might have remembered the violence of the Anabaptist uprising at Münster.

¹⁵Van Bracht, Thieleman J. *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenceless Christians*. Translated by Joseph F. Sohm. 26 Feb. 2009. <http://www.homecomers.org/mirror/>

From *The Unfortunate Traveller* by Thomas Nashe.

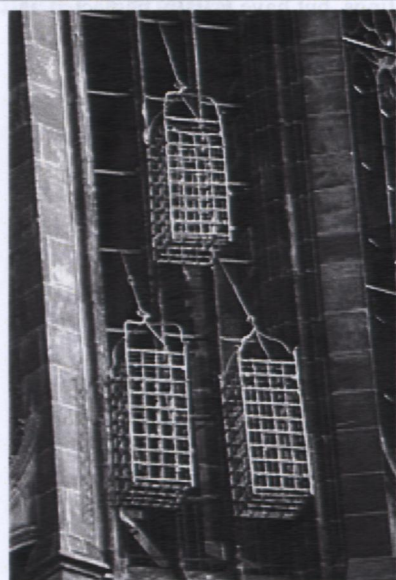
...I flew me over to Münster in Germany, which an Anabaptistical brother named John Leiden kept at that instant against the Emperor and the Duke of Saxony.... And prettily well had these Münsterians held out, for they kept the Emperor and the Duke of Saxony play for the space of a year, and longer would have done but that Dame Famine came amongst them, whereupon they were forced by messengers to agree upon a day of fight, when, according to their Anabaptistical error, they might all be new christened in their own blood....

Very devout asses they were, for all they were so dunstically [like fools] set forth, and such as thought they knew as much of God's mind as richer men. Why, inspiration was their ordinary familiar [familiar spirit], and buzzed in their ears like a bee in a box every hour what news from heaven, hell and the land of whipper-ginnie [purgatory].... They would vaunt there was not a pea's difference betwixt them and the apostles: they were as poor as they, of as base trades as they, and no more inspired than they, and with God there is no respect of persons. Only herein may seem some little diversity to lurk: that Peter wore a sword, and they count it flat hell-fire for any man to wear a dagger.... It was not lawful, said they, for any man to draw the sword but the magistrate; and in fidelity ... Jack Leiden, their magistrate, had the image or likeness of a piece of a rusty sword, like a lusty lad, by his side....

Peace, peace there in the belfry: service begins. Upon their knees before they join [join battle] falls John Leiden and his fraternity very devoutly. They pray, they howl, they expostulate with God to grant them victory, and use such unspeakable

vehemence a man would think them the only well-bent men under heaven....

Christ would have no followers but such as forsake all and follow him, such as forsake all their own desires, such as abandon all expectations of reward in this world, such as neglected and contemned their lives, their wives and children in comparison of him, and were content to take up their cross and follow him.



Baskets on the tower of the Lambertikirche in Münster where corpses of Anabaptists were exhibited. de.wikipedia.org

These Anabaptists had not yet forsook all and followed Christ. They had not forsook their own desires of revenge and innovation. They had not abandoned their expectation of the spoil of their enemies. They regarded their lives. They looked after their wives and children. They took not up their crosses of humility and followed him, but would cross him, upbraid him and set him at nought if he assured not by some sign their prayers and supplications.... Lo, according to the

sum of their impudent supplications, a sign in the heavens appeared, the glorious sign of the rainbow....

Whereupon, assuring themselves of victory ... with shouts and clamours they presently ran headlong on their well-deserved confusion.

Pitiful and lamentable was their unpitied and well-performed slaughter. To see even a bear, which is the most cruellest of all beasts, too too bloodily overmatched and deformedly rent in pieces by an unconscionable number of curs [dogs], it would move compassion against kind, and make those that, beholding him at the stake yet uncoped with [seeing the bear at the stake not yet attacked], wished him a suitable death to his ugly shape, now to re-call their hard-hearted wishes and moan him suffering as a mild beast, in comparison of the foul-mouthed mastiffs, his butchers. Even such comparison did those overmatched ungracious Münsterians obtain of many indifferent eyes, who now thought them, suffering, to be sheep brought innocent to the shambles, whenas before they deemed them as a number of wolves in arms against the shepherds....

This tale must at one time or other give up the ghost, and as good now as stay longer.... What is there more as touching this tragedy that you would be resolved of? Say quickly, for now is my pen on foot again. How John Leiden died, is that it? He died like a dog: he was hanged and the halter paid for. For his companions, do they trouble you? I can tell you, they troubled some men before, for they were all killed and none escaped; no, not so much as one to tell the tale of the rainbow. Hear what it is to be Anabaptists, to be Puritans, to be villains. You may be counted illuminate botchers [enlightened reformers] for a while, but your end will be 'Good people, pray for us.'

Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Press, 1972, pp. 277-286.

Photo: [http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lambertikirche_\(M%C3%BCnster\)&oldid=57573945](http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lambertikirche_(M%C3%BCnster)&oldid=57573945)

Anabaptism and Eastern Orthodox: Common Ground?

by Andrew Klager as interviewed by Robert Martens

When Andrew Klager attended Columbia Bible College, he was intrigued by Anabaptism and its emphasis on social justice. At the same time, a teacher at the College inspired a fascination in the ancient church and especially Eastern Orthodoxy. Anabaptism and Eastern Orthodoxy – could they possibly have anything in common?

Andrew Klager thinks so. I met with him recently in his favourite coffee shop hangout, where he likes to do his research with laptop, green woollen cap, and multiple mugs of caffeine. After a BA in Biblical Studies at Columbia and an Master of Arts at McMaster University, Andrew is just months away from completing his PhD in Ecclesiastical History at the University of Glasgow. Why Glasgow? “It was a matter of finding a supervisor who agrees with me,” he jokes. His Masters thesis was on the writings of one of the three great Cappadocian church fathers, Gregory of Nyssa. His doctoral dissertation evaluates the possible reliance of Anabaptist theologian, Balthasar Hubmaier, on the



Balthasar Hubmaier.
(Wikipedia)

church fathers, and specifically on the Greek fathers that are foundational to Eastern Orthodox life and thought. Perhaps the fact that Andrew’s denominational background was “all

over the place” has helped him connect such seemingly disparate movements as Anabaptism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

This is a new and virtually untouched branch of research. Scholars of Anabaptist history, says Andrew, have frequently examined movements not explicitly mentioned in Anabaptist writings, but have usually neglected an investigation of the teachings of the church fathers, who *are* explicitly mentioned: “They should have been looking at that.” In doing just that, Andrew is “trying to fill the void.”

Thomas Finger, a Mennonite teaching at Oakton Community College in Illinois, is “the only one doing anything on this,” says Andrew. Finger’s analysis is based on the concept of “divinization,” or, as expressed by Anabaptist leaders such as Dirk Phillips and Menno Simons, *Vergottung*. The Orthodox notion of salvation, according to Andrew, is “a struggle within who you are,” a life-long process. The Anabaptist teaching was similar: “salvation is becoming what you believe, who Christ is.” Unlike the Magisterial Reformers such as Luther and Calvin, with their emphasis on the total depravity of humankind and “salvation as a one-time deal,” both Orthodox and Anabaptist emphasize “restoring the image of God” within, the “divinization,” in that sense, of the human soul.

There is a historical link, says Andrew, between Anabaptism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Eastern patristic scholars were entering Italy in the 1400s, and translations of their works followed. The fall to invading Turks in 1453 of Constantinople, centre of the Byzantine Empire and of Orthodoxy, may have accelerated these currents. It is a matter, says Andrew, of tracing these eastern texts, “when they were translated, and they kept moving up, were even better received in the north.” The Magisterial Reformers were

generally contemptuous of the eastern writings, but many Anabaptists, according to Andrew, were deeply influenced by them. Melchior Hoffman, for example, evangelized in eastern Europe, even beyond the boundaries of the Holy Roman Empire, and may have picked up Orthodox ideas in his travels.

Humanism, Andrew points out, was a key mediator between Anabaptism and Eastern Orthodox ideas, particularly as they are represented in the Greek fathers. In contrast to Luther, who preferred the western tradition (especially Augustine) to the eastern, and preached the bondage of the will, the great humanists such as Erasmus were suspicious of blind faith in authority, and taught the freedom of the will. Anabaptists incorporated these humanist values in their doctrines of adult baptism and the voluntary church community. Balthasar Hubmaier, early Anabaptist leader, met Erasmus in 1522, and the Anabaptist’s fascination with humanism, says Andrew, “doesn’t wane, gets stronger and stronger throughout his life.” Free choice, for Hubmaier, was not “grace imposed on us.”

Originally, Andrew Klager’s intention was to research a number of Anabaptist leaders, but due to the overwhelming amount of material decided to concentrate on Balthasar Hubmaier, the only doctor of theology among them. Hubmaier was one of a minority of early Anabaptists who did not renounce the use of the sword – and perhaps for that reason is Andrew’s “least favourite Anabaptist” – but was also a brilliant scholar interested in the ideas of the east. Johann Eck, Hubmaier’s mentor, and Johann Faber, a fellow student, both wrote books on the “religion of Russia.” Hubmaier himself ended his life in Nikolsburg, deep in eastern Europe, where he published writings praising the “Moscovites and Russians.” He did not

use the term “divinization,” but “his life and works point to that,” says Andrew. Also, Hubmaier did use the distinctly Orthodox term, *theotokos*, to describe Mary as the Mother of God, or God-bearer. Hubmaier wrote extensively on the freedom of the will, and rejected Augustine’s doctrine of total depravity, preferring the teachings of the Greek Orthodox church fathers. He also

detested the “rational acrobatics” of the scholars, “growing thorn bushes on top of what is at the root of it,” as Andrew describes it. Hubmaier “wants the source, the Scripture.”

Andrew Klager is a member of an Antiochian Orthodox community, and is “hoping [his] whole life will be Anabaptist and Orthodox.” When I speculated that there might be some

kind of connection between the influence of Eastern Orthodoxy on Anabaptism and the return of Mennonites to Russia in 1789, Andrew remarked that he hoped someday to study the life of Mennonites under the czars. We said goodbye, and he returned to his passions of research and coffee.

Vondel and Suderman: Mennonite (?) Writers

by Robert Martens



Joost von den Vondel, portrait by
:Cornelis de Visscher. Wikipedia

In the fall 2005 issue of *Rhubarb*, the Mennonite literary magazine published in Winnipeg, Andreas Schroeder remarked, “From 1536 until roughly 1920, the Mennonites hadn’t managed to produce a single writer worthy of the name.” Two years later, also in *Rhubarb*, Margaret Loewen Reimer issued a rebuttal of “this astonishing fiction,” listing some Mennonite writers who achieved fame well before 1920. Preeminent in her list were Joost van den Vondel of Holland and Hermann Sudermann of Germany. These two men certainly had Mennonite connections – but how “Mennonite” were they in reality? Can they justifiably be called “Mennonite writers?”

Of the two, Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) remains by far the better known. Amsterdam’s monumental Vondelpark is named after him, and until 1990 his portrait graced the Dutch five guilder note. He is frequently called “the Dutch Shakespeare” for the brilliance of his poetic dramas. From a very young age he was obsessed with a desire to write.

Vondel was born to Mennonite parents but did not join their Flemish congregation, choosing rather to identify himself with the Waterlanders, who were relatively tolerant and open to the arts. In 1620, however, he took leave from his congregation because, some said, he was suffering from deep depression, and thereafter drifted away from the Mennonite church. Indeed in 1641 Vondel shocked the nation with his conversion to Catholicism. The Netherlands were at the time under the strict control of the Calvinist state religion, and the reasons for Vondel’s unpopular and difficult decision remain unclear. The most plausible, perhaps, is the death of his wife and his love for a Catholic lady.

Vondel operated a silk business for some years until the enterprise failed, and in old age worked as a clerk in Amsterdam’s city small loans bank. He died isolated and embittered.

Vondel’s most famous work, *Lucifer*, written in his sixties, was banned by the civic authorities after its second stage performance and denounced as impious, godless and

arrogant. Ironically, however, the play was a huge success when it was published as text. *Lucifer* depicts the fall of the angels with a vividness and crackling energy that do indeed recall Shakespeare, and perhaps the censoring by the authorities was due to the all-too-human nature of the rebel faction. God is consistently described in pious terms, and often beautifully: “For what He is – unique, age-old Only the Godhead is aware – The stream-bed of Eternity!” (Vondel 19) But the moral and upright angels somehow seem less interesting than the rebels: the latter are torn between love of God and a profound desire for independence. Lucifer’s words in fact recall those of Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, leading to speculation that the English poet may have plagiarized: “Better be first in some kingdom lower-lying / Than second – if that – in this Realm of Radiance!” (Vondel 22)

Ultimately, however, Vondel attributes the angels’ rebellion to a lust for power. The nascent devils are enraged by Gabriel’s announcement that Humankind, gifted with reason and freedom, will be elevated higher than the angels. “A commoner is he who wears the crown....” “This earthworm, sliding from its hunk of clay...” (Vondel 22). God’s intended miracle of love, the exaltation of human beings, results in a bloody, fratricidal battle and the fall of Lucifer’s minions into hell. Vondel was a freethinker, a promoter of

tolerance, and a tenacious contender for human rights. His depiction of the devils and their contempt for Adam, the “sixth-day son” (Vondel 20), the commoner raised to prominence, may reflect his Anabaptist values. Lucifer’s angels might well represent the world’s corrupt order threatened by a new and rising ethic of equality. Vondel is remembering his heritage of the “radical reformation.”



Painting of Sudermann by
Max Slevogt. (Wikipedia.)

Hermann Sudermann (1857-1928) presents us with a completely different scenario. He was born in Prussia where his father, a member of the Elbing-Ellerwald Mennonite congregation, was expelled from his church after he married a Lutheran. The small brewery owned by Hermann’s parents was apparently not very profitable, but Hermann managed to study at Königsberg University and eventually launch a career as a journalist. His first novel, *Frau Sorge* (mistress sorrow), described an unhappy and gloomy youth, but it was his dramas that were to bring him

fame. In 1893 he achieved a huge success with *Heimat* (home, or native place), translated into English as *Magda*; the chief role was played by the leading actresses of the time, including Sarah Bernhardt, and Sudermann was compared with Ibsen. Sudermann married the novelist Clara Lauckner but was not particularly happy with her. He died of a stroke and subsequent lung infection.

As he aged, Sudermann developed into a German patriot and romanticizer of ethnicity and homeland, but a reading of *Heimat* suggests he was far different in his youth. The conventional German home is described as suffocating: “*Ein jeder hat vor dem andern Angst, weil jeder von der guten Meinung des andern abhängt*” (Sudermann 6). (Each is fearful of the other, because each depends on the good opinion of the other.) The plot of the play develops with great energy, bite and cynicism, as Magda, a daughter who some years ago fled home after becoming pregnant, returns to the provincial town of her parents. Magda, through suffering and a fierce desire for freedom, has achieved fame as an opera singer and abandoned the insular morality of the *Heimat*. “*Ich bin – mir treu geblieben ... in dem, was – für mich – das Gute war*” (Sudermann 67). (I have been true to what the good is – for me.) Magda is a proto-feminist who has chosen, despite the sadness it might entail, career over the conventional family, and advises her sister “to shake off all this nonsense of opinion and dignity”: “*diesen ganzen Plunder von Rücksicht und Würde dir abzuschütteln*” (Sudermann 60).

Magda’s life, as described in Sudermann’s skilled and naturalistic but sometimes overly melodramatic dialogue, is not a particularly happy one – she remarks rather wistfully that she has no *Heimat* outside of an endless string of hotel rooms – but for her it is a fulfilled one. Her existence is also one of constant struggle, of wielding personal power: “*So bin ich durch die Welt gekommen. – Biegen oder brechen ... ich bieg’ mich nicht*” (Sudermann 59). (That’s how I’ve survived the world – bend or break ... and I will not bend.) Sudermann is advocating the new modernistic world of radical individualism, so different from the more communal Mennonite ethic of his past, but at the same time is expressing a loneliness and nostalgia for that very past.

Joost van den Vondel seems to uphold the revolutionary Anabaptist principles of the tradition from which he broke, while Hermann Sudermann seems to critique (at least in his younger days) the traditionalist Mennonite culture that Anabaptism had become. So can Sudermann and Vondel be described as “Mennonite writers?” In part? and through a glass darkly? Could certain individuals raised in the Mennonite tradition continue to bear the values of their past, unconsciously or otherwise, even while making a distinct break with that past? And could some be gripped by their Mennonite tradition even, perhaps especially, while they rebel so vigorously against it? Difficult questions to answer, when the meaning of “Mennonite” continuously reshapes and re-envisions itself within the forces of history.

Mennonite Encyclopedia. Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959.

Sudermann, Hermann. *Heimat*. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1909.

Vondel, Joost van den. *Lucifer*. Trans., Noel Clark. Bath, Eng.: Absolute Press, 1990. Wikipedia.

What is a Mennonite?

Abrided by John Konrad from the GAMEO article "Mennonite (The Name)"¹⁶

Mennonite is ambiguous for several basic reasons. First, the Mennonite tradition embraces an inherent tension between sectarian separation from the world and missionary responsibility to the world. Some of the many Mennonite subdivisions emphasize one or the other of these two, while other Mennonite groups seek a synthesis. *Mennonite* sometimes identifies in the public mind those strictly separatist groups known for their rejection of modern culture including, for some, modern technology. These are the most visible Mennonites, and hence they influence the public reading of *Mennonite* out of all proportion to their numbers. In fact, sociologists frequently look to them as archetypal sectarians. By contrast, *Mennonite* also identifies, more objectively, a number of denominations identified less by their separatism than their active involvement worldwide alongside many other Christian denominations in education, publishing, mission and service. Almost innumerable institutions and organizations labeled *Mennonite* pursue this agenda. The vast majority of Mennonites are of this less separatist and more activist persuasion, yet the former create the more identifiable public image.

Mennonite is ambiguous, secondly, because it has both ethnic and religious connotations. The quest to nurture their vision of the true church in peace and quiet, and to separate themselves from a hostile and evil world, encouraged Mennonites over the centuries to pursue a strategy of relative ideological and geographical withdrawal. Assisted by endogamy (marriage within the group) and other mechanisms of boundary maintenance, the Mennonites over time developed a sense of being a unique people—even an ethnic group. Indeed, the sociologist E. K. Francis¹⁷ developed his seminal definition of ethnicity on the basis of a study of the Mennonites in Russia and southern Manitoba. The fact that frequent migrations, undertaken either voluntarily or under pressure, had robbed them of a national identity further assisted this process of creating a Mennonite ethnicity. Although their ethnicity is premised not on racial or national but on religious distinctives, that *Mennonite* has both religious and ethnic meanings cannot be denied.

Mennonite ethnicity is, however, not uniform. In the past Mennonites divided essentially into two ethnic groupings—the Swiss/South German/Pennsylvania and the Dutch/North German/Russian—each with various sub-groupings. Prior to the 20th century, accordingly, at least two ethnic traditions of Mennonite language, customs, dress, food, art, etc. are identifiable. For various historical reasons, however, the Dutch tradition became the more ethnic while the Swiss remained the more sectarian. But the processes of acculturation, especially in the 20th century, are rapidly transforming both traditional Mennonite ethnicities and sectarianism. Furthermore as a product of Mennonite missions, numerous other ethnicities now also share the name *Mennonite*, with the result that *Mennonite* is becoming variously ethnic while acculturation processes and adaptation to mainstream global culture simultaneously result in a new homogenization.

If *Mennonite*, at least in some areas, refers to an ethnic group entered by birth, as well as a religious community entered by adult decision, who is a Mennonite? The confusion is related to the rite of becoming a member in a Mennonite church. While it is clear that one becomes a Mennonite upon baptism into a Mennonite church as an adult, the children born into Mennonite homes tend also to be considered Mennonite until they are baptized. Frequently, even if they do not choose to be baptized they continue to be considered or to consider themselves to be Mennonite. Emphasis upon the Christian family and on Christian nurture encourages a more inclusive definition of *Mennonite* than the strong emphasis on adult voluntarism might imply. This same issue arises in those countries where Mennonites have "missionized" and added numerous other ethnicities to the Mennonite household. Is a child or grandchild of a Mennonite community in India, who is herself only nominally Christian, considered to be a Mennonite, particularly if this person has been acculturated into the uniqueness of the Indian Mennonite subculture and become distanced from other Indian cultures in the process? This so-called "second generation" reality is the third factor complicating the meaning of *Mennonite*, even though it is hardly unique to Mennonites.



¹⁶Bender, Harold S. and Rodney J. Sawatsky. "Mennonite (The Name)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Retrieved 09 March 2009
<<http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M4673ME.html>>

¹⁷EK Francis was a sociologist who researched and wrote on the 1870s Mennonites in Manitoba. He is significant because he is an outsider to us who in some way reflects how enlightened outsiders might have seen this particular group of immigrants. (JK)

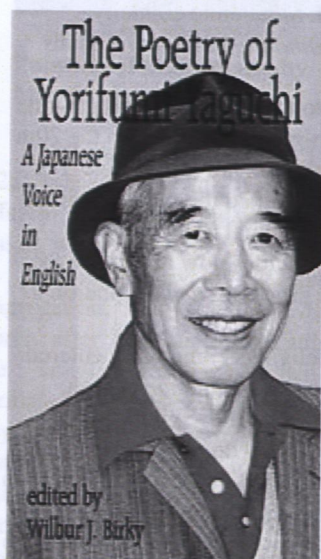
Further reasons could be cited for the ambiguity of the term *Mennonite*, e.g., the variety of theological, political, and cultural perspectives found under the Mennonite banner. The Mennonite community worldwide embraces the entire spectrum from liberal to conservative, left to right, iconoclasts to supporters of the conventional. Furthermore, as already noted, the word *Mennonite* is used in so many different ways: as an adjective, as a noun, as an adverb, and even as a verb – it is now seemingly possible to "Mennonite your way," i.e., stay with other Mennonites while travelling.

What then does *Mennonite* mean? *Mennonite* clearly refers to an identifiable Christian tradition which embraces a variety of Christian communities around the world. Greater specificity however, is difficult because the term has changed over time and continues to change. *Mennonite* is becoming more inclusive than exclusive, and more dynamic than static. The one commonality providing definition is history (tradition). To be Mennonite is not so much to share a creed or a liturgy but a story – the story of the Mennonite experience over nearly five centuries of history. This story is premised upon an incarnational theology, upon the quest to become a people, the body of Christ by God's grace rooted in the life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus, in a world frequently alien or even hostile to this Way. It is frequently a story of failure, yet also of faithfulness. To be a Mennonite then means to identify with a particular Christian community with a particular story, remembering what has been in the beginning and over time, and shaping what might yet be to the glory of God.

Being Mennonite in Japan: Interview with Poet and Pastor, Yorifumi Yaguchi

by Robert Martens

I met Mennonite pastor and poet, Yorifumi Yaguchi, at a Bluffton College Mennonite writers conference. He possesses a quiet charisma that is hard to describe. Mr. Yaguchi survived World War II as a boy, was attracted to the Mennonite faith, and studied at Goshen College. The Japanese Mennonite church is not a large one, but Yorifumi Yaguchi represents one aspect of the global face that a formerly ethnic group has become. (Robert Martens)



Could you describe your childhood. Was it a happy one?

I spent a happy childhood especially before the war. It was peaceful. I was born in the suburb of Ishinomaki city in Miyagi prefecture, which is in the northern part of Japan. Basho, the Haiku master of the 17th century, briefly visited this city, which is mentioned in his book of haiku-essay.

Our house was surrounded by pear trees. I could hear the sound of waves of the Pacific Ocean. When I was in the first grade of elementary school, we moved to a nearby town called Yamoto, where there was a navy air base. I lived there till I graduated from the college.

You learned different approaches to life from your father and grandfather. Could you elaborate on that?

Father was a town clerk, while mother was a midwife. Father's family name is Furukawa which means "an old river." Mother's family name is Yaguchi, which means "an arrow mouth." Mother's father was a Buddhist priest. He wanted my father to marry my mother and become a priest. Father consented and took the name Yaguchi. But he died at the age of 42 before becoming one. Then the town office employed mother as a health visitor. Thus she brought up her three children; I have a big brother and a little sister. Grandfather was very kind to me and wanted me to become

his novice. He liked to take me along when he visited the believers and prayed for them. I think I was six or seven years old at that time.

Your mother had an interest in the Christian faith. How did that influence you?

Mother studied in a Christian nursing school in Tokyo, which is now called St. Luke's Nursing College. I often wonder how a young girl in a very small farming village decided to study there and how her Buddhist father allowed her to go there. During her student years, she attended a Protestant church. This may be one of the reasons why she did not oppose my conversion.

The wonderful poet TS Eliot also influenced you towards Christianity. How did his writings affect you, and how did you move from Shinto and Buddhism towards Christianity?

"The Waste Land" and "The Four Quartets" are the ones which influenced me a lot. I was amazed by

the world and the technique of "The Waste Land." But when he seemed to suggest somewhere that Christendom was the best, I couldn't agree. One of the reasons why I moved from Shinto and Buddhism to Christianity was that they were not critical of militarism. Shinto was transformed into the national religion and enthusiastically supported Japan to fight. Buddhism did not criticize the warring government.

Could you tell us something about your experiences during World War II?

I was a nationalist as a young boy as every body was. I wanted to become a soldier and fight against Americans. Those who attacked Pearl Harbor and who were killed there were my heroes. We were all brainwashed. I wanted to be killed in the war and dedicated as a war god in Yasukuni Shrine, the National Shinto Shrine for the war dead. But toward the end of the war, our navy air base was attacked by American airplanes almost everyday. The bombs fell on our town. We fled and sometimes hid in the coal mine in a mountain. It was a bitter experience. And when the war ended, all our beliefs were shattered and we were at a spiritual loss. And then, American soldiers came to our town and occupied it. There were some good soldiers as well as some bad ones. Lots of prostitutes came for those Americans. There were lots of crimes.

Where did you receive your education? How did you happen to come to Goshen Biblical Seminary? I studied at a Christian college in Sendai. It was called North Japan College. I think its English name now is North Japan Gakuin University. It is related to the United Church of Japan. There I met a few excellent American professors of English literature.

Why and how were you drawn to the Mennonite faith? Was the peace principle an important part of that evolution?

I met a Mennonite missionary, Ralph Buckwalter, in Kushiro, Hokkaido, where I was teaching in a high school. I was introduced to the peace position of the Mennonite church and was drawn to its faith. If the Mennonite faith had nothing to do with "peace," I don't think I would have been drawn to it. The Japanese religions were militant during the war; so, when I found there was a peace church, I was filled with joy and hope, though most Christian denominations were militaristic. Later, I was asked to be an interpreter of Howard Charles, professor of Goshen Seminary, visiting Hokkaido as a Bible teacher. I accepted it and worked for him for one year. It was a strenuous year but I learned a lot from him. Through him, I went to Goshen to study the Bible.

What was your experience like in North America? How does Japanese society compare to the North American?

When I first went to the States, there was the Mennonite World Conference in Kitchener, Ontario. I attended it. And after that I visited Amish Mennonite Churches in Ontario (now they are perhaps called Western Ontario Mennonite Churches) to express my thanks for their contribution for me to study at the seminary. It was, as I understand, H. S. Bender who asked them to do so.

The people of these churches were extremely generous and I was moved by them very much. And the people in Goshen were very friendly and I could study hard. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Gardner also helped me financially. I met several good friends in the seminary, including Paul Longacre, Eugene Stoltzfus, etc. I was influenced

deeply by the lectures and the challenges at the seminary. Besides these, I met John Fisher, professor of English at Goshen College, and Rudy Wiebe, writing and teaching there English.

I felt that people in North America were more free than the Japanese in expressing their opinions. And in general, most students seemed to study more studiously than many Japanese students. And most professors seemed to teach more studiously than most Japanese professors. Of course, I sometimes met some prejudice. Some people called me "Jap." But I didn't care, because most people there were kind.

Why is writing poetry so important to you? Because I believe my poetry writing is a gift from God. Poetry writing and reading are my ways of admiring God and serving Him.

One might say that you write eloquently about polar experiences, such as: silence/protest; nature/politics; war/peace. One might also detect a Buddhist influence in your writing, in the pauses, the silences, the zen-like phrases. How would you respond to these interpretations?

Yes, I like to write about polar experiences. I think the pauses and the silences are important for me. They are often used in Haiku, and I have been interested in writing Haiku. I think Haiku and zen are related. And I believe God will speak through pauses and silences, too. They are part of the Japanese literary tradition. Some people call my phrases zen-like. And as a matter of fact, I sometimes find zen-like phrases and expressions in the New Testament: "I die every day!" "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body"; "the heaven was opened," etc.

How would you describe the Mennonite community in Japan and around the world? What are your hopes for it? What would concern you about it?

The Mennonite community in Japan is not growing in number, but they are trying to follow Christ. I am hoping that we will all raise our voices in making peace. I am glad that the number of the Mennonites is increasing in the world.

Could you describe your current life. Are you still pastoring? Are you teaching? Do you frequently write poetry? Finally, could you tell us about your forthcoming autobiography?

Yes, I am still pastoring. The one which I pastor is a small church called the House Church of Forest in the centre of Sapporo city. And I teach a course or two on poetry in the university. I am occasionally asked to read my poems and to speak, especially by groups of peace activists.

Last week I gave two readings; one at a peace activists' group, and the other at a meeting of Hokkaido poets. I have been a plaintiff of a court trial against the government's dispatch of the self defence forces to Iraq. We plaintiffs think it is against article 9 of the constitution, which forbids Japan to engage in any warfare in solving international conflict.

I am also the chief of the plaintiff group against the national computer network system. We think this system is against the right of privacy. (The government gives each person a certain ID number. They can collect all the private information by this system. We who want our ID number to be eliminated from this system have been appealing to the court.)

Yes, I frequently write poetry. I try to write on anything I encounter in my daily life, including social and political problems.

My autobiography naturally starts with my childhood and deals with grandfather's influences, my conversion, schooling in Japan and the States, social activities, church life, friends including poets, some problems of Japanese Christians, my view on the Mennonite faith, etc. poverty egoism, etc. I also want to

deal with problems of nationalism and the dark power behind governments.

In conclusion, a poet must be free to express the innermost. Have you anything you would like to say from the heart?

I always want to express my deep feeling. I want to deal with human problems; hatred, enmity, war, and big weapon-making companies. But above all I want to focus on human love and God's love in Christ; hope.

To Follow Christ

To become a Christian
is to renounce ancestor worship
or *Jizosama**

There are Christians who in later years
return to ancestral religion
I think of Suzukisan who was a Christian

but late in life painted only Buddhist pictures
or Satosan who was buried in Buddhist fashion
and is offered incense every morning

I too in recent days have been momentarily charmed
by the Buddha's serene face
rather than the suffering Christ's

But it was gods and buddhas who
once stirred up
militarist passions in me

It is the Christ, the Prince of Peace
whom I continue to follow
who was killed but did not kill

**Popular roadside deity, guardian of children.*

Yorifumi Yaguchi. *The Poetry of Yorifumi Yaguchi*. Good Books:
Intercourse, PA, 2006, p. 15, 131.

Flood in the Fraser Valley: 1948 and 2009

by Helen Rose Pauls



Greendale First Mennonite

Anyone who was living in the Fraser Valley in 1948 will have a flood story or two to tell. When we moved to Greendale in the eighties, the old timers spoke of “before the flood” and “after the flood.” Some of the Greendale residents who felt the impact of high water in January 2009 may well do the same.

In May of 1948, as temperatures soared, spring run-off from the rapid melt of huge snow packs all over the province swelled the Fraser River. Combined with high tides, which impeded the river's flow into the ocean, it was a recipe for disaster. The dykes had been taken for granted for years, and those living on lands reclaimed from Sumas Lake had become complacent. Maintenance had been ignored. Many dykes were covered with blackberry brambles and tree saplings two decades old.



On Browne Road & Vedder River: Raymond Wiens & Elmer Wiens with Katie and Luetta Wiens in the Ford

On the long weekend of May 24, while BC residents sunned themselves on the holiday, the fight against the torrent began as the water rose “slowly, silently, relentlessly.”

Although flooding occurred all along the Fraser River, the areas hardest hit were Agassiz, Nicomen Island, Greendale, Matsqui and Pitt Meadows.

Agassiz was affected first. The evacuation of women and children began on May 25 as men gathered to strengthen the dykes. A 200 person tent city near the graveyard, the highest point in the town, was quickly erected, with space for cattle as well. Food and bedding were parachuted in. Six hundred people were transported by train to the city where they were billeted at the Vancouver Hotel.

Citizens of Nicomen Island were ordered from their homes on May 26 as the roaring Fraser River breached the dam.

Then Matsqui Prairie was inundated, affecting 1,500 people and 11,000 cattle. On May 28, the dyke on the Alouette River gave way, and 7,000 acres were flooded in Pitt Meadows.

On June 1, the Cannor dyke in Greendale burst, and 8,000 fertile acres went under water. BC Premier Johnson surveyed the damage, then flew to Ottawa to register the flood as a national disaster. The Canadian army, navy and air force were called into service; Colonel Snow was put in charge of operations. Twelve hundred active army personnel were involved, as well as 1,400 reservists. Two hundred men were sworn in as constables with absolute powers of requisition and maintenance of order.

The Red Cross, using church halls as workplaces, oversaw the food kitchens and medical stations; 7,500 volunteers signed on with them. Families unable to board with relatives elsewhere were relocated to cabins at Cultus Lake, the Kent hop yards, or Abbotsford Airport. Altogether, 16,000 people in the Fraser Valley fled before the flood.



Yarrow women prepare food in church basement

Yarrow was to be evacuated but local leaders were convinced that they would be spared and the community indeed would wait out the flood unscathed. The *Vancouver Sun* stated that Yarrow was "depending on God's help." The church kitchen became a feeding station for crews working on the Vedder dykes, and many Mennonite women were involved making sandwiches.

My father remembered that, while logging on Vedder Mountain, an unbelievable sight caught his attention from his perch 120 feet aboveground on a spar tree. An undulating moving grey wall of water was spreading relentlessly over the Greendale area. Clinging to the tree, he shouted to the loggers below, many of whom had homes there. Logging was quickly forgotten as men rushed to the aid of families

and neighbours, later working around the clock to ensure that the west side of the dyke alongside Sumas Prairie did not break.

In places, the floodwaters in Greendale reached fourteen feet. Prize winning roses at Eddies Nurseries were all under water. A local reports that he paddled his canoe over his land and could have reached up and touched the telephone wires. Another recalls how the cannery loading dock became a dock for rescue vessels, many of them rental motorboats from Cultus Lake. One woman ran back to get clothes off her line, almost missing her transport. Some folks were rescued through second storey windows. Roofs were chopped open in order to pull people to safety.

With the help of the army and numerous volunteers, the Cultus Lake Pavilion dance hall was turned into a huge bunk room for Greendale women and children. Women took turns making meals for them all, including the men who slept in the church nearby. One husband quipped to his wife as he arrived at the dance hall for breakfast, "And just what were you up to all night?" MHS board member Ben Braun remembers that, as a six-year-old evacuee, he came to in the arms of a Red Cross nurse. He had been so proud to be assigned a top bunk, but had fallen to the floor in his sleep.

By the time the floodwaters receded, 30,000 volunteers – farmers, villagers, and townspeople – had worked alongside the army, navy and RCAF, bringing order out of chaos. The BC Emergency Flood Fund collected two million dollars from industrial firms, large corporations, and rich and poor alike to help cover rebuilding expenses. Total costs came to twenty million, and involved government aid as well.



Rescue by boat

There was no going back to homes and farms until the floodwater completely receded and health authorities had inspected the premises. Those returning found rusted stoves, soaked cupboards and furniture, and useless, stagnant pools where gardens had once flourished. Ben Braun's house did not float away because the electrical wires held it in place. Their five hundred hens drowned.

Altogether, two thousand homes all over the valley were condemned. Tipped over outhouses, floating manure piles and animal carcasses were a source of contamination, and typhoid inoculations became mandatory. Hundreds of miles of dyke had to be replaced. The agriculture minister, in the absence of crops that year, organized feed supplies for the winter. The berry industry, which provided a cash crop for Mennonites all over the Valley, lay in ruins. Poles from berry patches floated on water, still connected by the wires that once held the plants in firm rows.

Many Mennonite refugees from Europe arrived during this time to join their sponsors, and were shocked by the fact that they had moved from one calamity to another.

In January of 2009, Greendale residents got just a taste of the flood of 1948. On January 8, after days of relentless rain on frozen ground, the ditches backed up, the pumps that drain the farmland of Greendale into the Vedder Canal could not keep up, and the water began to rise. Homes built after the last flood had followed flood plain rules: "no basements, all buildings above the crown of the road." They became islands in a shallow lake. Were it not for the orderly row of mailboxes as a guide, cars would have slid into ditches as asphalt disappeared under the water. Those in older houses watched helplessly as sump pumps became useless and water rose, soaking carpets and destroying gyproc.

On January 9, local MLA John Les declared a "state of emergency" in Chilliwack, and Mayor Sharon Gaetz called a meeting at Greendale MB Church. News of the meeting swirled through the community and the church was packed at 4 p.m. "I used to be a pastor," said the mayor, "but this is a terrible way to fill a church!" She encouraged folks to move in with friends



Greendale Flood 2009

and relatives and wait. Roads were closed to all but local traffic. The rains abated the next day, and as the huge pumps on the Vedder Canal caught up, the water silently drained away.

When Mennonite Disaster Service, with its toolshed on wheels, and Samaritan's Purse Disaster Response Unit rolled into town and parked on the same churchyard, 110 individuals volunteered to help clean up 57 properties. "You have changed my life," said one resident. "You are a godsend," said another.

After the 1948 flood, it was commonly said that "If everyone could go through a flood, they would learn true neighbourliness." Apparently that maxim still holds.



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Ben and Linda's Ukraine: The Ukrainian Bench

by Ben and Linda Stobbe, from their blogspot <http://lindaandben.blogspot.com/>

The opening sentence of Lucy Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* describes Mrs. Rachel Lynde sitting at her window, "keeping a sharp eye on everything that passed." In Corrections lingo Mrs. Lynde sat at the "Control Centre," a name describing Purpose and Place where inmates can be observed in their goings-on. In many Ukrainian villages you also have these mini-observation stations, mostly beside the gate which gives you entrance into their yards. We are talking of the Ukrainian bench—a most functional, simple, wooden structure, serving as the place of observation and comment.

The bench appears to serve many purposes. When we come into a new village, our interpreter asks directions from someone sitting at the bench. Often we approach the old ladies (it appears that about 95% of benches are used by women) and ask if they remember anything about the German colonists who used to live in their village. They will point to another house with another bench. The bench is where stories are exchanged, gossip provided, issues clarified, advice given, and tears shed.

On Seniors' Luncheon days at the Mennonite Centre, the benches are often occupied from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. On other days of the week, sometimes solitary people come and just sit and reflect. Often when we leave in the evening



when it is already dusk, the benches are still being used. At least our benches at the Mennonite Centre have backs—many don't. Most appear to have served for generations. Stories of war, death, new life, promises, tragedies, are told and retold. They are primarily occupied by older people who don't get out too far but who want to see what's going on. We have noticed one old lady on our street who stands by the hour, leaning on her fence, watching people. She needs to watch.

The seniors in the Seniors' House which has been operated by the Kutuzovka Church for two years are relocating to the back rooms of the Church. One of the complaints of the seniors regarding this move is that they will be taken away from their busy street and placed in a quiet, private area where they can't observe people—they want to see who is coming and going. One of the proposed solutions is to have children playing upstairs in the Sunday School rooms just so the seniors can hear activity.

The most interesting request we got this week was from a Ukrainian builder who plans to restore a former Mennonite home at the boundary between Halbstadt and Muntau. He wanted pictures of the interior of Mennonite homes so that he could restore it accurately. He said he has always been fascinated by the homes of the "German colonists" and he got quite excited when we spoke of the plans to translate Rudy Friesen's "Building on the Past" into Ukrainian. This is the third place that we know of in Molotchna, where Ukrainians are actively saving or restoring a Mennonite building. We feel there is growing interest in this area and even though they want to have authentic Mennonite buildings they will probably still make provision for a bench near the front gate.