

Roots and Branches

Periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC

*“What we have heard and known
we will tell the next generation.”*
Psalm 78



Heinz Klassen, Coast Mountains (Harrison Mills), watercolour, pen and ink on paper

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Editorial - By Louise Bergen Price

Through their distinctive focus on values, cooperatives have proven themselves a resilient and viable business model that can prosper even during difficult times. This success has helped prevent many families and communities from sliding into poverty. (United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon)

Since the United Nations has proclaimed 2012 as the International Year of Co-operatives, it seems fitting to review how this movement has played out in BC Mennonite history, particularly in the Fraser Valley, where Mennonites have been active in the co-operative movement for quite some time.

Although Mennonites have long had a tradition of mutual aid, described by Winfield and Redekop as rising out of religious and values and functioning as “a type of brotherhood economics,” this type of cooperation has typically been “more spontaneous and informal in organization than the . . . organized cooperative movement.” If Mennonites in Canada were apprehensive about the co-operative movement at first¹, it wasn’t long before they became enthusiastic, joining together in farmers’ associations and forming credit unions.

Although the Soviet collective system had elements that seemed similar to those of co-operatives, there was one glaring difference: the first tenet of the co-operative movement is that membership

must be voluntary. “A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise” (ica.coop). In this issue, the article “From Co-op to *Kolkhoz*” and the book review of *Among the Ashes* highlight this difference.

By the 1950s, there were at least three growers’ co-operatives in the Fraser Valley started and run by Mennonites: Abbotsford Growers Co-operative Union, East Chilliwack Agricultural Co-op, and Yarrow Growers’ Co-operative Union. Of these, only Abbotsford Growers, with 120 members, is still in existence. Robert Martens’ article on the Yarrow Co-op provides insight into why this co-operative was formed and what led to its demise.

Credit unions started by Mennonites have fared better. In 1954, when banks were unwilling to lend to farmers, twenty-two charter members, all Mennonites, formed the East Chilliwack Credit Union. By 1980, ECCU was one of the 25 largest credit unions in Canada. The Clearbrook District Mennonite Savings Credit Union (later the Clearbrook Credit Union) was launched in 1958. By 1982, it had assets of more than \$50 million. In 1983, these two credit unions merged to form First Heritage, a parent of Envision Financial. Envision Financial, now a division of First West Credit Union, BC’s third largest credit union, currently has 21 branches and 16 insurance offices, and plays a major role in the financial life of the province.

Mennonite-generated co-operatives are currently active in a number of other fields, including health care and social housing. In addition, MCC and MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) both encourage the growth of co-operatives in developing countries.

Reflecting on the future of Mennonite use of cooperative models in North America and beyond, Calvin W. Redekop writes, “What has already been learned is that strict Western capitalistic patterns



will not work in most non-North American settings. ... The promotion of domestic and international cooperative economic institutions among Mennonites in the future is a part of the larger issue of whether Mennonites are going to retrieve [their] 'communal ethics'; the jury is still out on this critical issue" (Winfield & Redekop).

Works Cited: <http://www.ica.coop/coop/principles.html>

J. Winfield and Calvin W. Redekop. "Cooperatives." GAMEO online.

¹ The reasons for opposition to cooperatives were primarily two. First from a religious angle, church members were urged to refrain from joining cooperatives because it was feared that to join such an organization would mean becoming unequally yoked with unbelievers The second basic objection sometimes offered was that cooperatives seemed to be a threat to such basic tenets of capitalism as freedom of individual enterprise and the profit motive. However, those who were attracted to the cooperative movement saw in this economic method an ethical ideal superior to the prevailing ethics of competition under capitalism. They felt the cooperative principles were more nearly commensurate with basic Christian ethics than was the unregulated competition of capitalism. (Winfield & Redekop)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual General Meeting

June 21 at 1:30pm at the ABC Restaurant, 32080 Marshall Road, Abbotsford, following the Volunteer Lunch (12 pm).

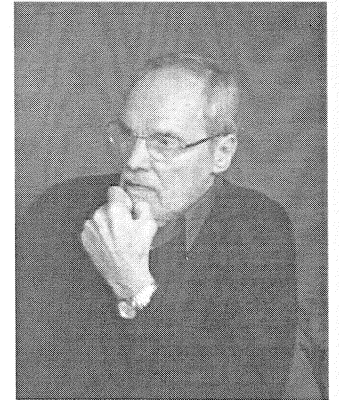
Annual Fund-raising Banquet 2012

October 13 at 6pm, at Emmanuel Mennonite Church, Abbotsford, BC.

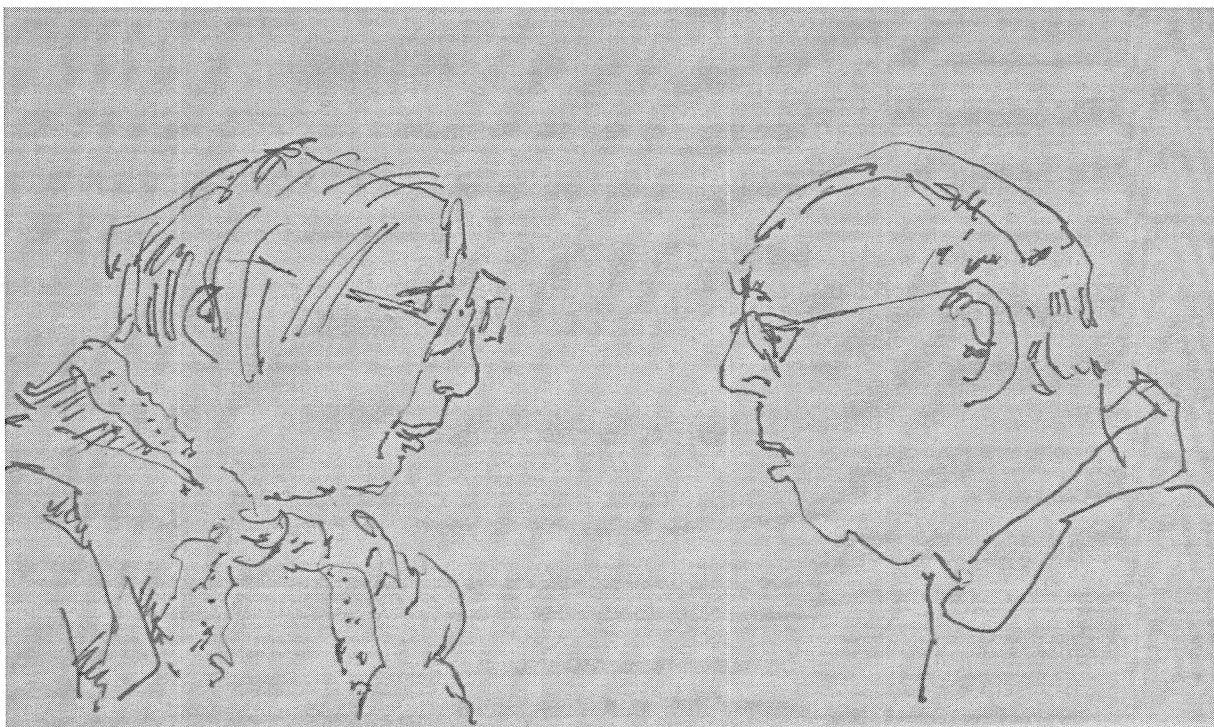
Rudy Wiebe

October 13 at 6pm.

The 50th Anniversary of the Publication of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*



Letters to the editor are welcome, subject to editing for length and appropriateness.



Heinz Klassen,
Conversation
(Vancouver
restaurant),
pen and ink

The Co-operative Movement and the Rise and Fall of the Yarrow Co-op

by Robert Martens

We were trying ... that we should organize our own co-op, and it was always hard, you know, that farmers are individualists, they cannot seem to agree on one thing. But then everybody was down to half a cent a box, then it was possible to talk to the people. (William Schellenberg, Interview)

In the early years of hopyard labour in the Fraser Valley, employees protested low wages by forming an impenetrable picket line. A Yarrow Mennonite, from the centre of a crowd of workers who wanted to cross that line in order to earn a living, yelled out, "Sounds like the red flag to me." Perhaps it was only natural that Russian Mennonite refugees, having seen firsthand the horrors of the new Soviet regime, would be skeptical of anything that tasted even vaguely of socialism. Under these conditions of general suspicion, organizing a co-op in Yarrow might have seemed an insurmountable task. Yet Mennonites had long maintained a tradition of mutual aid. Deacons were appointed to uncover the most pressing needs, women's sewing circles worked together on behalf of the poor, and collections were taken from the pulpit for the less fortunate. In that context, the forming of a co-op in Yarrow may not have been such a huge step.

The global co-operative movement

In 1844, when a group of weavers met in Rochdale, England, to establish the first modern co-operative, it is unlikely that they could have imagined how their idea would catch fire globally. The set of principles that they enunciated are honoured by co-operatives to this day: economics is considered more important than politics; fixed returns are paid out to members in place of speculative profits; each member has a single vote; and religion, race, and politics are considered to be irrelevant or peripheral.

In the Canadian Prairies, the co-operative movement grew rapidly out of farmers' frustration with high tariffs, particularly with the high fees charged by middlemen such as bankers, merchants, and even storekeepers. The result was the formation of the Grain Growers, the Saskatchewan Co-op, the Alberta Co-op Elevators, and the Canadian

Wheat Board. In BC, where smaller farms were the norm, fruit growers, despite their passionate independence, were soon convinced that some kind of co-operative action was essential. Their backs were up against the wall. American growers were dumping surpluses in Canada; there were problems of overproduction; and crops were rotting in unrefrigerated train cars when buyers could not be quickly found. Despite the usually leftist standpoint of most co-operatives, even Yarrow Mennonite farmers eventually accepted the need for mutual action.

Co-ops in Russia

The story of the co-operative movement in Russia is one of turbulence, suspicion, and conflict. In the late 1800s, Russians began building co-operatives to address the huge problems of social misery in the Empire. The movement grew more rapidly after the famine of 1891-2 and the political troubles of 1906. Russian government officials watched closely: after all, many leaders in the movement were leftist, even communist. Among Mennonites, credit unions and mutual finance organizations were common. In the less affluent colonies, where the need for common action was clear, co-operatives were extremely popular. (An employee of the Yarrow Co-op would later recall that he worked in a co-operative for a boss who hired him again in Yarrow.) The modernization of Mennonite colonies in Russia would also have accounted for the expansion within them of the co-operative movement. Mennonites had long ago learned to work together closely, but as they gradually assimilated into a complex economic world, the need for more sophisticated institutions such as co-operatives became clear.

The ultimate Mennonite venture at working together in Russia was the *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein* (All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union), created to protect its people against the growing tyranny of the Soviet state. The leadership of the *Verein* even included socialists, but this union was abolished in 1928 by a totalitarian regime that distrusted mutual action among its citizens. The memories of this catastrophe may well have lingered in the minds of the residents of Yarrow.

The Mission co-op and Japanese-Canadians

Yarrow farmers were barely hanging on in the 1920s and '30s. Prices for their crops were subject to the whims of buyers, and there were occasions when growers lost money on their sales. Eventually they realized that a guaranteed price for fruit and vegetables could only be accomplished through the mutual action of a co-operative. A nearby model was available in Mission's Pacific Co-operative Union, established December 23, 1932, by 100 farmers who had assembled in the town's Japanese Hall. Nearly all the members were Japanese in origin, but the directorship was divided equally between Asians and Europeans. The manager, J. B. Shimek, was befriended by two natives of Yarrow, Bill Schellenberg and Jacob Krause, who had a vision for an agricultural union in their village that would protect farmers and defend their rights. Both men worked closely with Japanese-Canadian growers.

In 1942, however, the Pacific Co-op ran into the brick wall of racism, fears of war, and government incompetence. Japanese-Canadian properties in BC were confiscated, and their owners interned when Ottawa decided they were a threat to the nation at war. At first, the intended policy was the holding of confiscated lands until the return of their owners, but eventually these lands were confiscated unreservedly and leased on a one-year basis. Any farmer could have informed the bureaucrats that raspberries needed more than one year to cultivate, but the ineptness of government resulted in acreage covered by weeds and the consequent underproduction of raspberries. Prices skyrocketed and Mennonite farmers benefited. They also benefited when some of the Japanese-Canadian lands fell into Mennonite hands.

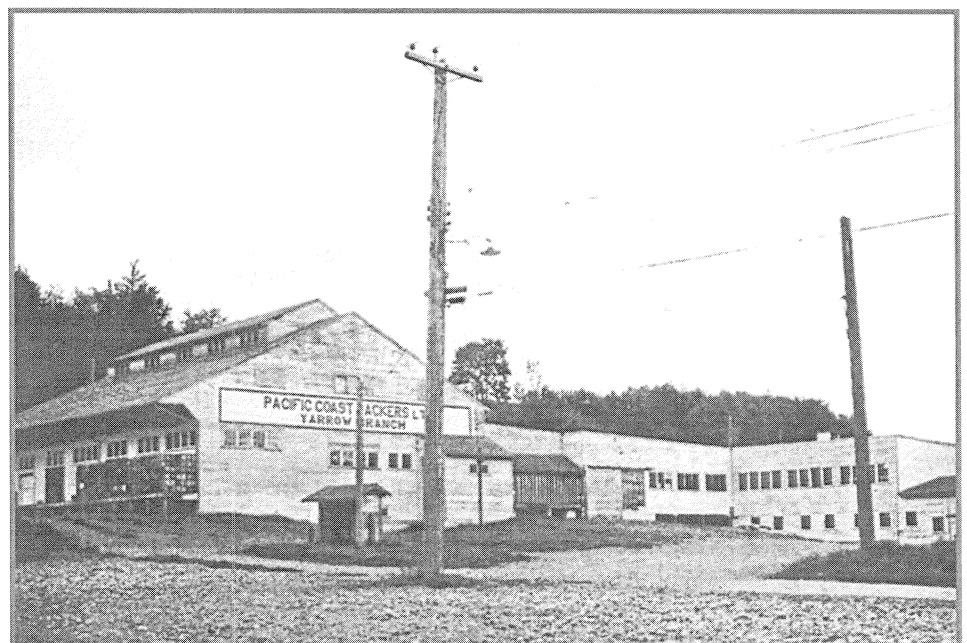
Nevertheless, the Mission Co-op was an early exemplar for Yarrow farmers, and when the Yarrow Co-op was established, crops were initially shipped to Mission for processing. The Pacific Co-op was finally liquidated in 1974; to their credit, when dealing out proceeds from that liquidation, officials sought out as many of the original Japanese-Canadian owners as they could.

Schellenberg and Krause

Yarrow farmers were ready for a co-operative. It was even argued that a co-op could be an extension of the ethnic community and a bastion against the profiteering of the "outside world". Aflame with their vision for mutual action, Schellenberg and Krause pounced on the opportunity.

Wilhelm (William, later shortened to Bill) Schellenberg was born in 1901 in Ignatyev Colony, South Russia. The Schellenberg family moved several times, but were unable to escape the ravages of war, famine, and robber bands. In 1920 Wilhelm married Katherine (Katie) Klassen. They had three children together before fleeing the Soviet Union for Canada in 1926. Bill Schellenberg tried agriculture in the prairies, but it was clear he was not a born farmer. In 1931 the family moved to Yarrow, where Bill and Katie had two more children and lived until Katie's death in 1977.

Bill Schellenberg was a combative individual who didn't seem to mix easily. His family always attended church, but church life seemed to be somehow secondary with him. However, when the possibility for the formation of a co-operative arose, his natural gifts came into play. Schellenberg was a man of action through and through, persistent to the point of stubbornness when he was seized by a cause in which he believed. He devoted the next years to the organization he helped to start: "I was farming," he remembered, "and my wife is a witness of how many times I had to decide between the Co-op and the farm, and the Co-op, it seems to me, always won. ... If there was a trip to



make, or something to go for the Co-op, I went for the Co-op. Maybe I should have stayed home" (Schellenberg interview). Bill's wife, Katie, suffered the ordeal in gentle silence; without her support, Bill might not have endured the struggles involved in running the organization.

On the other hand, Schellenberg's partner in the enterprise, Jacob Krause, was a quiet, careful, and conciliatory spokesman for the Yarrow Co-op. Krause was born in 1894 in Gnadenfeld, South Russia, and trained as a bookkeeper. He and his wife Maria escaped Russia about the same time as the Schellenbergs, and eventually moved to Yarrow in 1928. Schellenberg the fighter and Krause the mediator would work together well for years in the Yarrow Co-op executive.

The rise of the Yarrow Co-op

Responding to the increasing desperation of Yarrow's farmers, a small co-op store was established in a private home in 1935. The following year the Yarrow Growers' Association was created, with a membership that was nearly 100 per cent Mennonite. Shares were sold at one dollar each. Schellenberg was elected president and Krause, general manager, and under their direction the organization took off. Prices paid to farmers were prompt and guaranteed. The Co-op prospered and expanded: a packing plant, feed store, poultry slaughterhouse and jam plant were built. The most notable expansion, however, may have been the Co-op store, spacious and well-supplied. And berries were being sold by the ton to the British for the war effort. "The early years," said Schellenberg later, "it was a pleasure and ... the harmony among the people ... they were actually quite good" (Interview).

The collapse

Troubles were already surfacing in the mid 1940s. "Some individuals," Schellenberg recalled, "were forever ready there to say, 'You think you're going to get any more money than those communists?'" And then the market collapsed. After the war, the Canadian and British government stopped their raspberry purchases, and the American market dried up as well. By 1948, six thousand barrels of berries preserved in sulphur dioxide were languishing in storage with no buyers in sight. Schellenberg and Krause worked furiously to save the Co-op, but in vain. Cornelius Penner, accountant and office manager at the Co-op, later wrote,

"People were disillusioned and many were angry. Of course the anger was directed at the Board and management. ... It is interesting that the leaders of the dissident group got elected to the Board and ironic that none of them depended on raspberries for their living" (Penner 34). In 1949 the Co-op's holdings were put up for auction, and Bill Schellenberg himself was appointed liquidator. He was heartbroken.

Who was at fault?

Schellenberg's bitterness and sense of betrayal endured for a lifetime. A few years after its closure, he made a bonfire at his farm and destroyed the documents and minutes of the Yarrow Co-op. Schellenberg laid part of the blame for the collapse of the Co-op on the ignorance of farmers: "I am one of our people but to tell the truth, the biggest thing in this was the ignorance of the people. ... We have so many people that read nothing but the Bible and some of them didn't even read the Bible, and that's not much in this day and age" (Interview). He also blamed the dissolution of the Co-op on rising prosperity and self-interest: "The co-op is an organization you join together in case you come together in hard times, when you can't make it alone, and then you have company; you can do things together that you can't do alone."

Schellenberg and Krause retired to private life, Krause relatively peacefully, but Schellenberg, to the end of his life, never lost his feelings of being betrayed and unappreciated. He died in 1991. Although he was later strongly defended by some of his employees, perhaps he was somewhat responsible for the financial mess in which the Co-op became mired. Perhaps, however, the time for an ethnically based co-operative had simply passed. Yarrow, as an ethnic Mennonite community, was rapidly dissolving by 1949, the year of the liquidation, and the Co-op vanished into history, along with the Mennonite village that created it.

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Report from South Abbotsford: Minutes of the MB Provincial Conference, 1938

Translated by Robert Martens

The 1938 minutes of the BC Mennonite Brethren Provincial Conference are strewn with discussions on the possibilities of building a strong Mennonite settlement through communal or cooperative work. Jacob Krause, who was involved in the founding of the Yarrow Co-op, speaks extensively on the need for a new institution that would protect farmers from the vagaries of the market. Yet Mennonites were a stubbornly independent bunch, and their objective remained the independent and debt-free working of personally owned land. In the following extract from a report originating in South Abbotsford, the two ideals – cooperation and independence – exist side by side. The language used is plain and frank, and reflects the prejudices of its time.

*

With regard to the development and establishment of South Abbotsford, two principles were strongly emphasized: making a living, and the Christian education of our youth. We left our old home especially with these principles in mind, and *not* to become rich.

There was a better chance of making a living elsewhere in Canada or BC than here among the tree stumps.

Certainly, with our meagre resources and the expenses involved in a closed German settlement, the taking over of expensive farmland, for example, in Yarrow or Sardis, and the prospect of paying off debt through our families' labour in the hop yards was impossible here. Here we have truly hard, onerous work among our tree stumps: we clear the land but together with our children, build our homes through our own labour, and shape a closed family and village community.

The objection that we are meanwhile performing necessary

wage labour for the government is unworthy of discussion. It is no evil or disgrace to earn a living through wages from government until our land is built up and becomes productive. In the early years, this kind of work was not at all possible for us newcomers. The work was done by farmers who had long tilled their land in this region and who were always richer than we were. Consequently we were shoved aside. Some injustices were done to us. Today the situation has changed, so that the neediest among us can clear land or make roads [for the government]. Our main intention, however, before and always, remains independence from the working of our land and, if possible, paying our own debts.

Our situation is similar for many farmers in the prairies (Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta). As witnesses reported from the land of Canaan, "The land is great and beautiful, but impossible to take. We saw there great giants, great swarthy men, sons of Enoch." That means, our Abbotsford is occupied by great giants, by swarthy sons of Enoch. We say here with Joshua and Caleb, "If God is with us, then we can take this land." And our "stumpland" can only be taken with God's help and unbroken patience. It is a settlement that calls upon our poverty-stricken not to shrink back from the hardest pioneer labour. ...

Through all this exertion, our children will be raised well. It is clearly normal when adults and children work the land together, build it up, and ensure that good schools will be constructed. In Russia this was our way of life; here in Canada it seems that everything is going wild. ...



THE
YARROW GROWERS
CO-OP. UNION
BELONGS TO YOU
THEREFOORE PATRONIZE
YOUR OWN STORE

Ship your produce & fruit through your own organization. Your new completely modern Department Store caters to your every whim.

By buying at your own store you build your own business

FOR SERVICE & SATISFACTION SEE YOUR

CO-OP.

From Co-op to *Kolkhoz* – The Experience in Jasykowo

by Julius Loewen, selections translated by Louise Bergen Price

Julius Loewen (1900-1965) was an agronomist from Franzfeld, Jasykowo Colony (often spelled Yazykovo). He left Ukraine in 1943, settling in Canada. Jasykowo was published by Loewen's wife, Elisabeth, in 1967¹. His book provides a fascinating insight into how one Mennonite colony coped with the movement towards collectivization and with Soviet life in the Stalinist era.

Collectivization (p 61, 62)

At first, the movement towards collectivization of the land was not too strict. One tried to entice the farmers by sweetening the pot. Much was spoken and written to convince farmers to move towards this new endeavour. Co-operatives were to be organized to work the land jointly, in order to utilize large machinery in individual farm plots. Farmers organized into these co-ops (*Sos*) would receive tractors and new agricultural implements on credit. Also, better quality seed grain would be made available to increase yields. The harvest would be divided among the individual members based on the acreage each had farmed in the past. That was what was promised – the reality looked quite different. For that is the worst, that the Soviets never felt bound by promises or contracts, whether in the political realm or any other.

The facts show that it was not the poor farmers who joined the co-operatives, but the wealthy. By doing so, they hoped to become invisible to the Party. They wanted peace, and hoped they could buy it by their willingness to conform.

Four such co-operative groups were formed in Franzfeld. Most of the farmers joined one of the groups; only a few remained independent.

It was decided to sell the first crop co-operatively, and to distribute the income. At this point, the four groups decided to amalgamate to make the best use of both the work force and the farm machinery. This, of course, was the direction

in which the Soviet government had been steering them.

Only those who were disenfranchised, and those who were so poor that they were not worried about the authorities, did not join this large co-operative. These individuals received the poorest land in the farthest corner. By the end of 1932, all were included in the *kolkhoz*² – as this new child was now baptized (*wie man jetzt das Kind taufte*).

Private property in the Soviet Union (72)

Private property by decree of 1936 consisted of the following: single family home and furniture, clothes, items needed for daily living. (Apartment buildings belonged to the state or collective.)

The *kolkhoz* worker was allowed to keep one cow and 2 head of young cattle, 2 pigs, 10 sheep and goats, 10 beehives, and any number of poultry. This allowance seemed quite substantial, but both feed and housing for animals were in short supply. Not one householder in Jasykowo was able to take full advantage of this allowance. The home garden plot and a small parcel in the fields were the only places individuals could grow food for themselves.

The women's revolt in the *kolkhoz*, 1932 (87-88)

In the spring of 1932, the farmers' last cows, as well as most of the chickens, were appropriated and taken away to the *kolkhoz* barn. Many a chicken found an early end in a soup pot because the owner would rather eat it himself than send it to the collective. Through these draconian measures the authorities made themselves even more unpopular. There was a swelling of unrest among the masses. ... Food had long been scarce, and now milk and butter would also be absent from the table. The men did not dare to do anything for fear of reprisal by the authorities. But the women spoke about their discontent openly.

One lovely summer evening, as the herd en-

tered the village toward the collective cow barn, groups of women gathered on the road, each woman with rope in hand. When the herd arrived, each woman put the rope around her own cow's neck, and walked it back home. This caused a huge uproar in the *kolkhoz* administration. Officials demanded the return of the cows. The women refused.

Of course, the men felt the same as the women, but were worried about punishment that likely lay in store. Very few slept that night. But in spite of these fears, nothing happened, and the women kept their cows.

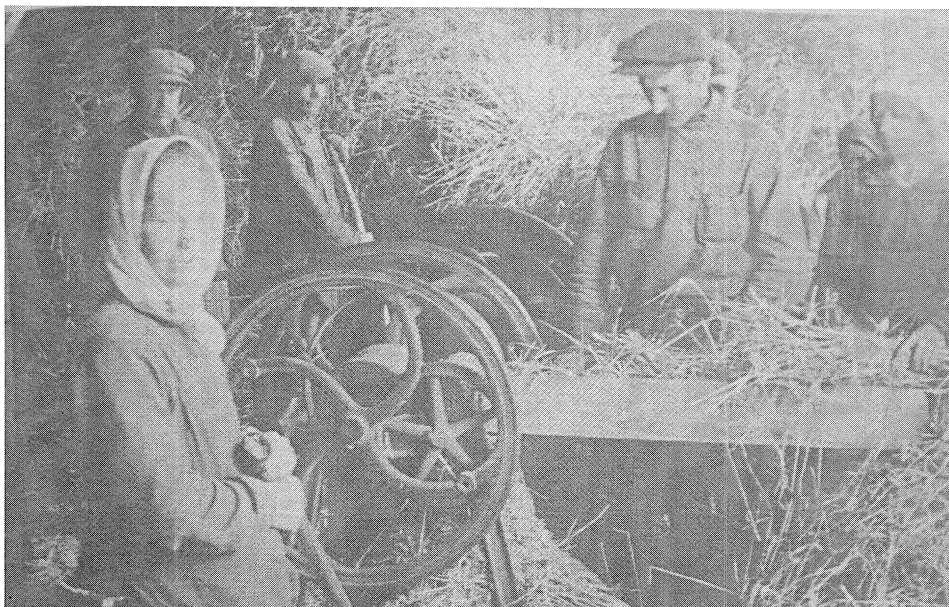
Similar events happened in many settlements, and cows that had been taken by force were reclaimed by their owners. The Soviet government took advantage of this setback. From the party headquarters came a new directive with the heading: "Dizzy with Success³." It was signed by Stalin. The farmers were declared to have acted properly in reclaiming their cows. Over-zealous local officials were blamed, and examples were made of a number of them. They were accused of having interpreted the law in too strict a fashion. By this action, they had incited the farmers to revolt, which in turn hindered the progress of socialism.

That is how Stalin rewarded his loyal minions. He remained the workers' Father who never made mistakes in his dealings with them.

Primary Document: "Dizzy with Success," an excerpt from *Pravda*, No. 60, March 2, 1930

Who, we may ask, benefits from this blockheaded "work" of lumping together different forms of the collective-farm movement? Who benefits from this running too far ahead, which is stupid and harmful to our cause? Irritating the collective-farm peasant by "socializing" dwelling houses, all dairy cattle, all small livestock and poultry, when the grain problem is still unsolved, when the *artel* [a general term for various cooperative associations in both Russia and Ukraine, historical and modern] form of collective farming is not yet consolidated – is it not obvious that such a "policy" can be to the satisfaction and advantage only of our sworn enemies? One such overzealous "socializer" even goes so far as to issue an order to an *artel* containing the following instructions: "Within three days, register all the poultry of every household"; establish posts of special "commanders" for registration and supervision; "occupy the key positions in the *artel*"; "command the socialist battle without quitting your posts"; and – of course – get a tight grip on the whole life of the *artel*. What is this – a policy of directing the collective farms, or a policy of disrupting and discrediting them?

<http://www.marx2mao.com/Stalin/DS30.html>



Cutting chaff in the kolkhoz, 1938. source: Jasykowo

¹Loewen, Julius. *Jasykowo: Ein Mennonitisches Siedlungsschicksal Am Dnjepr*. Winnipeg: Regier Printing, 1967. Now also available in English as *Jasykowo: Mennonite Colony on the Dnieper*, translated by Jacob B. Klassen. Beausejour, Manitoba: Henning/Loewen Family, 1995.

²A collective farm in the USSR. A Russian word formed by combining and contracting *kollektivnoe khozyaistvo*: collective farm.

³This incident may have occurred in 1930, the year *Pravda* (the official newspaper of the Communist Party) published the document entitled, "Dizzy with Success". See above.

A Mennonite Communist

by Robert Martens

The traditional Russian Mennonite story is of a people fleeing the Communist terror. Of course there were some who collaborated with the Soviets, a few of them out of conviction, but most of these acted out of a desperate attempt to avoid starvation, arrest, or execution. The story of Jacob Penner is the flip side of the standard Mennonite narrative. As a young man living in the decades shortly before the Russian Revolution, Penner agitated against the czarist regime on behalf of the poor and dispossessed, and was at serious risk of spending some time in the notorious prisons of the Empire. Penner was forced to leave his motherland. This youthful left-wing ideologue, like thousands of Mennonites, became a refugee immigrant to Canada, but for very different reasons. His flight from Russia and his subsequent Canadian career are perhaps unique in Russian Mennonite history.

Jacob Penner was born on August 12, 1880, to prosperous Mennonite landowners in Ekaterinoslav. As a student, he came into contact with Marxists and other leftist radicals, and soon developed into an avid fighter for the impoverished. There was no shortage of causes for leftist activists in the Russian Empire. The gap between rich and poor was enormous, and the nation was a revolution waiting to happen. "Peasants in the villages surrounding Mennonite villages," Penner later remarked, "the poverty of these peasants was appalling. ... I became a socialist. And that brought me on the road to think in different terms" (Gulkin, YouTube). The Penner family itself, however, apparently fell into financial difficulties, and decided to emigrate to Canada. Jacob argued that he wished to remain behind in Rus-

sia in order to continue his activist work on behalf of the peasant class, but his parents, fearing for his life, insisted that their son accompany them across the ocean in 1904.

Jacob Penner taught school for a time in the Mennonite community of Gretna, Manitoba, but found few sympathizers there for his left-wing causes. As a result he moved on to Winnipeg, where it was possible to collaborate with other socialists on behalf of the urban poor. With this move, Penner was essentially abandoning his Mennonite community, and at some point he left his Mennonite faith as well. His "religion" would henceforth be justice for the dispossessed; his convictions never faltered. By 1906, Penner was meeting with a group of young orthodox Winnipeg Marxists. That same year he helped found the Socialist Party of Canada. When that party split, he was involved in the creation of the Social Democratic Party of Canada. Penner remained a loyal member of that party until the shattering events of the Russian Revolution, when he became convinced that Russia would lead the world to an equitable and just political system. In 1921, he was among those who founded the Communist Party of Canada. As late as 1958, Penner was the Communist Party national chair.

The times were ripe for revolt. In 1917, after Russia had withdrawn from its allies in the Great War, Penner was a leader in the anti-conscription campaign in Canada. Workers, who were subject to poor workplace conditions, low wages, minimal rights, as well as rampant inflation, were being asked to limit their demands and "sacrifice for the war effort". Conscription under these conditions



was naturally unpopular. In 1919 Penner was an organizer for the Winnipeg General Strike, which erupted out of the wretched living conditions of the working class. Eventually, in response to provocative government action, strikers mobilized a huge demonstration that deteriorated into a riot. Hundreds were injured on both sides, and two strikers were killed.

Then came the 1929 stock market crash and the ensuing Great Depression. Tens of thousands lost their jobs, especially in urban centres, and among these, immigrants tended to suffer even more severely due to poor language skills, as well as their need to pay off travel costs. Many were deported as punishment for becoming wards of the state. Jacob Penner never forgot his ethnic upbringing; thus, it was natural for him to inspire the founding of the German Workers Education Society in Winnipeg. In that same year, 1929, an Edmonton chapter was formed. In 1930 the executives of these chapters, as well as locals in Regina, Calgary, Toronto, and Vancouver, met to unify their organization as the *Zentralverband deutschsprechender Arbeiter*, or Central Association of German-speaking Workers. The Association, however, soon succumbed to conflict. In Edmonton, the leader Walter Widmer emphasized practical day to day solutions to problems of unemployment, sickness, and housing shortages for impoverished immigrants. Jacob Penner, on the other hand, fought for the alignment of the Association with the Soviet regime. His intransigence led to the expulsion of the Winnipeg chapter from the Association.

During these turbulent times, Penner somehow managed to marry and raise a family. In 1908, while attending a speaking event by prominent anarchist Emma Goldman, Jacob met Rose Shapack, a Jewish Russian immigrant. Rose was born in Odessa, Ukraine, to a poor Jewish family. She was five when her mother died, and when her father remarried,

the stepmother forced the eight-year-old Rose and her sister to work in a factory to support the family. Rose fled Russia with its poverty and pogroms to seek a better life in Canada. Jacob and Rose married in 1912. Together they raised three children with very little money, and often endured insults from political enemies and even neighbours.

In 1921 the *Manitoba Free Press* ran an editorial excoriating two candidates running in the federal election for the seat representing North Winnipeg. One of them, it said, "is a socialist of the revolutionary type and also a communist of the school of the third international. ... Neither believes in parlia-

[A]t some point, he left his Mennonite faith as well. His "religion" would henceforth be justice for the dispossessed...

mentary government nor has any intention if elected, of trying to bring about reforms by legislation. Their candidatures will make no apparent appeal except to extremists, of whom unfortunately there are a good many in North Winnipeg" (cited in Urry 229). Jacob Penner was one of those candidates; he represented the newly formed Workers' Party. Calling for common cause with the Stalinist regime, Penner split the left wing vote and lost badly, thus conceding the seat to the Liberals. During his lifetime he ran four times for provincial or federal office, and always failed miserably.

In local office, however, Penner was a great and longstanding success. There was good reason for "extremists," as the *Free Press* called them, to thrive in north Winnipeg, where the urban and working poor had clustered. In 1934 Jacob Penner was nominated by the Workers Unity League and elected as a Communist alderman to represent Ward Three in north Winnipeg. His popularity there was enormous, resulting in a near-continuous term on city council from 1934 to 1960. "I was elected during the Depression," he later said, "and at that time our municipality had problems which seemed entirely unsolvable, the problem of unemployment in the city" (Gulkin). Penner always remained a hardline Communist, but during his long tenure as alderman, he emphasized issues such as unemployment insur-

ance, minimum wage, recreational facilities, and above all, low rental housing.

His career on city council was twice interrupted. During World War II, he was interned between 1940 and 1942 for being a member of the Communist Party. When he was released, Penner was immediately re-elected. Then in 1952 he was defeated, but returned to council the following year. He fought for working class concerns until about the age of eighty when he resigned. It is a

"The poverty of these peasants [in the villages surrounding Mennonite villages] was quite appalling. ...I became a socialist. And that brought me on the road to think in different terms."

measure of his enduring popularity that after his resignation fellow Communist Joseph Zuken succeeded him and served on city council into the 1980s.

Penner never deviated from his hardcore Communist stance.

Two of his sons, however, while maintaining left wing convictions, differentiated themselves from their father's ideology. In 1956 the Soviets

crushed the Hungarian revolt. That same year, Nikita Khrushchev exposed the totalitarian atrocities of his predecessor, Joseph Stalin. Jacob's son Norman consequently resigned from the Communist Party and enjoyed a lengthy career teaching at York University in Toronto. His brother Roland joined the NDP Party of Manitoba, was elected, and served in the Cabinet as Attorney General.

For Canadian Mennonites, Jacob Penner was a sort of bogeyman: "[H]is obvious Mennonite name and origin served as a constant reminder to many Mennonites of the dangers to their faith and their sense of peoplehood from living in urban areas and becoming involved in 'worldly' politics" (Urry 231). Penner's infatuation with Stalin is inexcusable, and the terrors of the Soviet regime should have been clearly apparent to the world by the 1930s. Some

Mennonites, like B. H. Unruh, blundered into the evil of support for Hitler's totalitarianism: the question may be, how do we forgive good people for their blind backing of malevolent regimes?

In Jacob Penner's case we have an individual who promoted perhaps the worst human holocaust in history, and yet struggled for justice on behalf of the neglected poor. Even today, the Jacob Penner Park Project in inner city Winnipeg commemorates Penner's legacy and ideals with student volunteer programs for deprived youth. Stalinist supporter Jacob Penner was an honourable man who made some bad decisions. Perhaps only those without sin among us should cast the first stone.

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“Eating the Flesh of the Poor”

by Pieter Pietersz 1638, from *Readings from Mennonite Writings New and Old*, ed. J. Craig Haas.

Pieter Pietersz (1574-1651) (German, Peter Peters), called "de Oude" (Senior), was a Dutch Mennonite preacher, serving in the Waterlander congregation of De Rijk about 1600-1625, and then until his death in the Waterlander or "Komenjannen" congregation at Zaandam. Pietersz is said to have been a gentle, peace-loving, pious man, averse to doctrinal strife: for more than fifty years he worked with unusual effectiveness in the office of preaching. He was a carpenter or rather a maker of windmills and had no special theological training. (GAMEO)

The individual tight-fistedly seeks to beat the labourer out of his remuneration even though he knows very well that it is impossible that the labourer can properly subsist from such a miserly wage. Nevertheless, he sharply squeezes the labourer and says, "Do you not want to work for the price? I can obtain someone else for that price." Then the poor working man reflects to himself, "Is it not better that I labour for half a wage than that I go away empty?" And he must grasp for what he can.

Those who increase their empire of wealth in this manner are eating the flesh of the poor. And in chapter five, the apostle James speaks and laments with respect to these when he says, "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you and shall eat your flesh as if it were a fire. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped your fields, which you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are

entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

However, those who throw this speech of the apostle James into the wind are assuring unto themselves that they might do well, namely, to ruthlessly exploit a labourer as much as possible, for they are counting only on their own advantage. How much can they consume in their household in one year? How much will their income be and how much will they save? In addition to this, they think to themselves that the less they need to pay out for the wages of the labourers, the greater the profit in and from the yearly rentals. But they do not consider that they are also to be economical with respect to their lavish household expenditures: for their huge houses which are constructed like temples, and also with respect to their costly clothes and feasts, household embellishments, paintings and other magnificence. Oh a most fortunate empire of wealth which is assembled in this manner!

And in addition to all of this, when they have to pay their labourer they frequently do so with bad coinage, which has been shaved down in weight, or which is not even legal tender, which the employee cannot even readily pass on. And of course the labourer should not complain of this, in that he must be scared to be treated sourly or actually to be fired. But his wife at home quickly becomes conscious of the situation as she cannot even offer him the equivalent of the crumbs which fall from the table of the rich man.

Haas, J. Craig, ed. *Readings from Mennonite Writings New and Old*. Good Books: Intercourse, PA, 1992.

A Former Refugee Remembers

as told to Helen Rose Pauls

Whenever I pass Robertson School on Chilliwack Central Road, a fire rises in me and I want to throw stones at the bell cupola on the roof and knock it down. That school became my prison sixty-two years ago, when our family of four stepped off the train at Chilliwack. From the refugee camps of Europe we had arrived with two suitcases and a travel debt.

After five years of fleeing, of homelessness, of working on German farms, of refugee camps, we were sponsored by distant relatives to come to Canada. The hopyards became our home; a shack was provided, and plenty of work. I was a boy of six years and did not see the mountains until September when school started, since we left the shack before sun up to go pick hops in the long tall rows and returned exhausted at the end of the day to boil and devour huge pots of potatoes.

If I thought picking hops was bad, school



Grade one reader.

was a confusing immersion. Memories of the war were fresh and anything German was considered toxic. If we spoke our language the teacher rapped our knuckles with a ruler and yelled angrily in words we could not understand. For a long time, I thought “Mennonite” was a swear word because it was always accompanied by unrepeatable language on the playground. Later on I learned that Mennonites are a Dutch pacifist religious group that formed during the Reformation and that I was one of them.

Once I was given macaroni to paste to paper in art class, but I was not allowed to eat any. My eyes grew round at this waste of food. I was handed some papers with the chemical smell of the jelly pad duplicator still strong on them. I had no idea what to do. The pupil next to me was making marks that looked like letters in the blanks so I looked up at the alphabet above the blackboard and began to print letters willy-nilly on the page before me until all the blanks were full. The long finger of the teacher waggled in my face, and I looked in fascination as harsh words came out of her ruby red lips. Later, when I could speak a bit of English, I tried to win her favour by complementing her on her lovely lipstick, which was certainly a novelty to me. Severely reprimanded, I could not understand her anger and ran to hide in the cloakroom.

Math I could manage but the Reader was a mystery. I realized that if I looked busy and kept my head down, she tended to ignore me. Before long I memorized the text beside each picture from hearing it read by other students, and sometimes actually said the right words when called upon: “See Puff and Spot. Look, look, look.” The pointing of fingers and taunting on the playground subsided and I began to hold my own in the classroom.

Meanwhile, my parents made a life for us in the hopyard shack where we spent our first year.

...continued on page 16.

Genealogy Column: The Ties That Bind

A Successful Search: from England to Abbotsford.

By Sandi Massie (nee Hiebert), Wednesday Volunteer-Genealogy/EWZ

Who would think that a man in the middle of Surrey, England, would be searching for his Hiebert roots?

John Hiebert came in to our office a few years ago. He and a friend were looking for information about his Hiebert family that had once lived in Clearbrook. John's mother had recently passed away, leaving very little information. All she had told John was that his father had been in the Canadian Army and was stationed in England where he had met John's mother. They married and shortly after the end of World War II came to Canada to live where John's father's family was. His mother had also told John that shortly after having John in Canada she became very homesick for England. Because she was not fitting in, she soon returned to her homeland with her infant son, leaving John's father and his family behind. John knew his father's first name but no birth dates or places. John really wanted to meet his father. He did have an address for where his mother had once lived in Clearbrook.

We checked for a Gerry Hiebert in our *Grandma* database but without more information than just a name, it is very difficult to track down a person. One of our volunteers, Dora Becker, drove with John and his friend to the address that John had saved from his mother's things. They took some pictures and then returned to the office to say goodbye. He and his friend were leaving for home the next day and did not have time to search for more leads. We took his contact information and said our goodbyes. Shortly after his visit, we received a thank you and a picture of John and Dora at his father and mother's former residence.

Since I am a Hiebert myself and was at that time looking for my Hiebert branch, his story stuck with me for a long time. Eventually I did find someone who might match whom he was looking for. I

sent this information along to him as well as some local phone numbers that might direct him on the right path. Since I am not from Abbotsford, I checked with the rest of our volunteer group to see if they might recognize any of the names that I had suggested might belong to his family line. But my efforts had no results. No one with any Hiebert relatives had this story in their past.

One day, Mary Ann Quiring said to me, "Do you remember that John Hiebert from England? Do you still have his contact information?" I asked, "Why?" She said that one of her uncles through marriage had had a brother, George, who had just passed away. She had been talking to her aunt about family issues, and a story came up about George and his second wife going to England to see if they could find his son from his first marriage to an English girl. Mary Ann said she just about fell off her chair. She then found out what she could and brought the information to us at the Society.

I could not believe what she was telling me. As I checked out her information, I found that it involved the same family names I had sent a year and a half ago to John. We sent John a package with all the material we could find. Not knowing how he would react to all this information, we sent along an email to let him know that although we had found his family, his father had just passed away. There was some good news, however; he did have two half-brothers. It took a little while for John to return our emails. I think he was just a little overwhelmed. I do not know if he will ever return to Canada, but I hope he has found some closure for his long search. And I hope that he will try to connect with his new family.

[Since these discoveries, John and his half-brother have been in contact.]

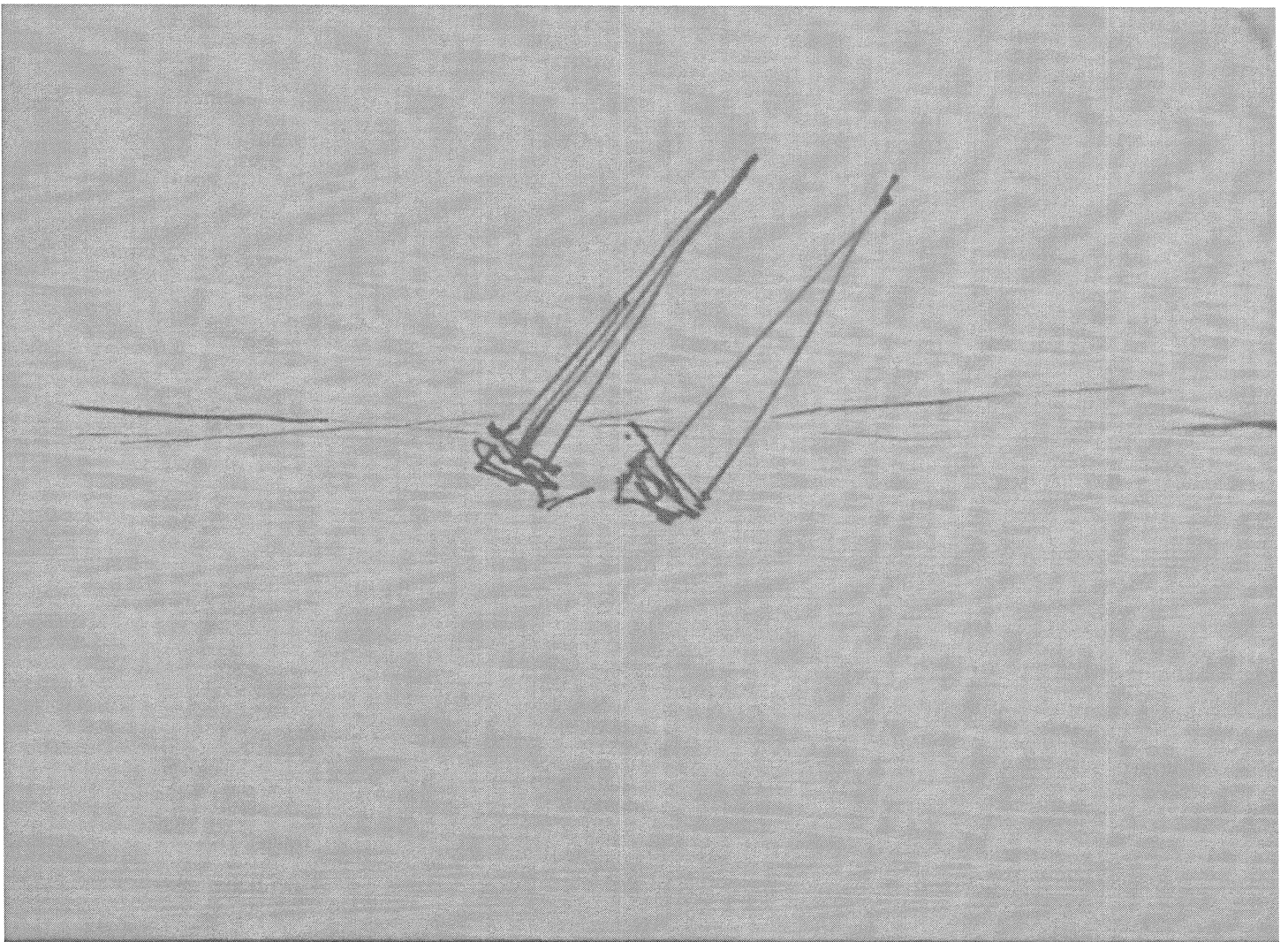
...continued from page 14.

Mother cut cardboard boxes apart and nailed them to the shiplap walls. Somewhere, she found paint and the shack looked homey. Dad got a year-round job and we managed to survive through the winter. Before long we were able to buy a small piece of acreage and keep a cow. We built a cozy house ourselves and planted a huge vegetable garden. My mother sifted the rich black soil between her fingers and wept for joy. My parents were so grateful and happy to be in Canada, where honest work meant honest gain. They could look to the future once more and build a new life in this wonderful country.

Our vibrant little Mennonite Church meetings on Prest Road almost made up for our dim so-

cial life at school. Here we felt at home; we could sing our songs and speak our language. We worshipped in peace, something the Soviet system had almost extinguished. We also visited back and forth, compared stories, shared opportunities and learned from each other.

Now Mennonites in B.C. are integrated and are represented in all the professions and walks of life. Our children have had every advantage and know very little about our struggles as refugees and newcomers. But once in a while when I drive through my old neighbourhood, I see that school cupola and the old rage rises. Or I drive near the hopyard lands in my heated farm truck and remember the winter I saw stars through the cracks in the walls of the shack.



Heinz Klassen, Sailboats on Semiahmoo Bay, pen and ink drawing

Reda and Tahany Hanna: The Arab Evangelical Church (MB)

By Robert Martens

Reda and Tahany Hanna arrive a little late for our interview in a coffee shop, apologizing that they have been delayed while visiting a hospital patient. With Reda gone from the table for a moment, his wife confides to me that their lives are very busy, almost overwhelmingly so. And yet the Hannas radiate energy and convey a warmth and graciousness that is infectious. Considering the highly unusual and difficult ministry in which they are involved, all that energy will be indispensable.

The Arab Evangelical Church was founded in 1991 under the leadership of Sammir Youssef and joined the Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in 1993. At first the fledgling congregation met in New Westminster, but eventually it moved to Surrey and also established a daughter fellowship, Abbotsford Arabic Church, in 1998. Although these church plants were initially financed by the MB Board of Church Extension, subsidies were terminated in 1999. It was in 1998 that Reda Hanna began his pastorate of both congregations.

The Hannas were both raised in Egypt's Coptic Church. The Coptic organization, they tell me, is not monolithic. The majority of Copts belong to an ancient orthodox and liturgical strand of Christianity, but there are other minority wings, such as Catholic and evangelical Copts. Reda's father was orthodox and his mother, evangelical. Both Reda and Tahany had conversion experiences in their teens, subsequently joining the evangelicals, who are less liturgical and more focused on grace and Bible study. The Hannas, who met in the church, both trained as pharmacists. They were married in 1982, speaking their vows in a church building off to the side of

what has become known as Cairo's Liberation Square.

Between 1980 and 1990 Reda worked as a part-time pharmacist and part-time minister in Kuwait. Tahany joined him there in 1982. The Hannas, however, felt a need to move on. "God called us to fulltime ministry," says Reda. They made a radical change in their lives, becoming church planters in New Orleans from 1993-1998. But they would move yet once more. Sammir Youssef contacted the Hannas, asking if Reda would be willing to serve as pastor of the Arab congregation in Surrey. Accepting this request was a difficult decision. "We didn't feel comfortable to just leave and go," says Reda, "but you can't say no." After a time of prayer and fasting, the Hannas immigrated to Canada.

Their ministry to the Arabic Church is a challenging proposition. Services are held in the Arabic language which, the Hannas are quick to point out, is broken down into regional dialects. Their experience in Kuwait, a country fifteen different ethnicities, introduced them to other dialects, and over the years the Hannas learned to speak Iraqi and Syrian fluently. And their Egyptian origins were helpful: "Egypt," says Reda, "is Hollywood for the Arab world," exporting movies and music so widely that the Egyptian dialect is widely understood.

Perhaps the most challenging and unusual aspect of the Hannas' ministry results from the exclusive use of Arabic in church services: the congregations are mainly comprised of first generation immigrants. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus remarked that one never crosses the same river twice. In the Hannas' case, they never minister to

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus remarked that one never crosses the same river twice. In the Hannas' case, they never minister to the same congregation twice.

the same congregation twice. Second generation immigrants in British Columbia are raised as English speakers, and, consequently, although the Hannas do Sunday school and some youth work in English, members of the Arabic Church move on once the children grow older and are unwilling to attend church in what is now a second language. At first, says Reda, "this frustrated me, I helped these people, and then they left me." Eventually, however, he says that "the Holy Spirit convinced me, they start their journey with me, then leave and move on."

The two Arab congregations have become a welcoming centre and transit point for refugees and immigrants who feel the loneliness and estrangement of a living in a brand new world. Many are Iraqis, traumatized by the brutal war and acts of terrorism in their country; others are Palestinian, Syrian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Egyptian, or Moroccan. The Hannas help these new immigrants settle, and run an out-of-home Christian Food Bank. As one would expect, achieving adequate financing for these Arabic congregations is an ongoing problem: immigrants and refugees don't typically arrive in Canada with a lot of money. In order for the churches to stay afloat, fundraising friendship dinners are held every November.

A significant difficulty for new immigrants is finding work that matches their education. Do the Hannas feel welcome in Canada? "Of course," says Reda, adding that "the Canadian government is the only one in the world allowing the church to sponsor refugees." The immigration authorities, he remarks, are helpful. On the other hand, Arabic-speaking immigrants, who are often highly educated – education in Egypt, Reda points out, is virtually free – sometimes end up in menial jobs. "After 45 years as a pharmacist," says Reda, "you have to start again." He has met with the Canadian Minister for Immigration, but reform of the system has been very slow.

What is the relationship of the Arabic congre-

"We treat them [Muslims] like normal people. We don't make this sharp difference between believer and unbeliever." The Christian message, he says, is simply presented to them as fellow brothers and sisters.

gations with Islam? First of all, there are many misconceptions held by a poorly informed public. It is not widely known that Christians have lived in the Arab world in significant numbers for thousands of years. As a consequence, "so many people," says Tahany, "don't believe there are Arab Christians living in the city." She adds that, after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, their annual fundraising dinner was not advertised as Middle Eastern. As for Muslims, there are some in their congregations. "We treat them like normal people," says

Reda, "we don't make this sharp difference between believer and unbeliever." The Christian message, he says, is simply presented to them as fellow brothers and sisters.

Why are the Arabic Churches associated with the Mennonite Brethren Conference? Are there shared values? "Peace and justice – of course," says Reda, but "we consider ourselves evangelical, and we have no difference in evangelical beliefs." Practically speaking, the Mennonites, he says, "were the only denomination to sponsor an Arabic group." Above all, the Hannas are deeply impressed with the support of the MB church planting administration. Services at the Arabic Churches are often more charismatic in nature – singing, clapping, healing – than Mennonites may generally be comfortable with, but the MB Conference has been keenly sympathetic. Finally, the Conference has been supportive despite the unusual nature of the Arabic Churches: the flux and flow, the constant arriving and leaving of church members.

Canada is a nation of immigrants. Canadians are accustomed to new faces and new values, to debates on assimilation, to the poverty and loneliness often associated with new immigrants. It is not easy: Reda and Tahany would love to church plant in Vancouver, but finances simply don't permit. Their energy seems undiminished, however, as our interview ends with handshakes and warm embraces.

“Third Culture People”: Andrew Dyck Reflects on his Years at King Rd MB, 1996-2007

by Robert Martens

Considering that both his parents were born and raised in Canada, it might seem paradoxical that Andrew Dyck would spend eleven years as pastor of a church predominated by German-speaking Mennonites. Andrew's parents received all their schooling in English, and his father went on to teach and become a principal in the public school system. Andrew grew up in Broadway MB Church in Chilliwack, was educated at MEI, and achieved a music diploma on the piano under the tutelage of Menno Neufeld. In 1980 he enrolled at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (now CMU) in Winnipeg, feeling conflicted about his life and career. Science was a passion, but so was theology.

Eventually Andrew graduated as a physiotherapist from the University of Manitoba in 1986, then worked in his chosen profession for eight years in Winnipeg, where he also met his wife-to-be, Martha Goossen. The couple's three sons were born there. Meanwhile Andrew, seemingly a Mennonite "Renaissance man," was also pursuing his passion of music, directing a Winnipeg choir and singing in the Mennonite Festival Chorus under world-renowned choral conductors Robert Shaw and Helmut Rilling.

And then Andrew's theological interests impelled him in yet another direction, when he graduated in 1996 with a master's degree in Congregational Worship, a fascination of his, at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. He was still uncertain as to his future, however, asking himself, "Would I go back to physiotherapy?" But King Road MB Church in Abbotsford "was looking for someone," and Andrew decided to answer the call. He began there as associate pastor, doing work in worship, music and care groups. A few years later he was invited to be senior pastor, and after a four-month sabbatical, occupied that position for five

years. In 2007 Andrew decided to move on to acquire a Ph.D. He resigned from the pastorate at King Road MB on good terms – "I was glad to have been there that long," he says. He then served as co-pastor at Highland Community Church for several years, but is currently moving on to new opportunities.

King Road MB had split from South Abbotsford MB in 1966, when a group of church members of Russian Mennonite origin felt a need for worship services in their mother tongue, German. At that point only a single couple from South America was among the charter members. In the late 1960s, however, there was an influx of Mennonite immigrants from Paraguay and Brazil, and their arrival became a defining event for the congregation. Andrew estimates that during his time at King Road eighty percent of the membership was of South American derivation, many second or third generation. Two worship services are held each Sunday, one in English and one in German, the former being only marginally larger. The German group is complemented by recent immigrants from Russia (*Aussiedler*) and by a sprinkling of German Baptists. For recent Paraguayan-Canadian Mennonites, Low German is the language of choice, followed by High



German and typically fluent Spanish.

Andrew Dyck had stepped into a congregation with special needs, problems, and gifts. Most of the South American influx were permanent immigrants, but a minority were transitional, "flipping" back and forth between their two homelands, Canada and Paraguay. About ten families that arrived in the 1980s moved back to Paraguay a decade later, and a recent wave brought more than forty back to Canada. This "flip flopping" can be done with some ease, as most of the recent transitional group are from Paraguay's Menno Colony, founded in the late 1920s by traditionalist Canadian Mennonites. Because of those connections, these individuals are granted Canadian citizenship after a stay in Canada of a mere two years. "The Paraguayan roots are strong," says Andrew, "the lifestyle there is a little more *manaña* [literally "tomorrow," slow and relaxed], and also more stratified than in Canada, perhaps a bit more comfortable." On the other hand, as life in North America is generally far more prosperous, the decision for these individuals on where to live can be difficult, even heartbreaking. "There are economic reasons to come here," says Andrew, "and cultural and perhaps economic reasons to return."

"Life is easier here," he remarks, and yet all South American immigrants, both permanent and transitional, face problems of displacement and loneliness. "Families are torn," Andrew says, "the children are 'Third Culture kids', like missionary kids who don't fit in anywhere, they struggle to find what their place is going to be." Consequently, "one of King Road's ministries is to provide a transitional home." Even for the majority who "have stayed put in this new world," assimilation into mainstream western culture causes further pain, as children grow up, learn English, and perhaps move on to other churches.

The Brazilian component at King Road MB was at one point rather different than the Paraguayan. Mennonites in Brazil were more educated, more integrated and "western", less isolated on remote ethnic colonies. Young men, in fact, were required to serve in the military. But, comments Andrew, "that's changing so much, Paraguayans are playing catch-up," and are becoming increasingly educated.

Paraguayan Mennonites, however, carry with them a special sense of togetherness. Andrew states, "A sense of community and village life have been key to the Paraguayan experience, and there's good in that." There is a wonderful inclination to visit, to linger, "drop in, drop out, sit together with maté. They know their zwieback and borscht and family names." Paraguayan Mennonites have also "retained the sense that decisions are made by the congregation," and even when a church has grown to the point where this may not be entirely practical, still "the ethos is that the community is in charge." Despite the well-known negative aspects of community, such as suppression of secrets, gossip, and ostracism, this "sense of villageness," according to Andrew, is overwhelmingly positive. "[This group] have a community experience that others may not have had," he says, "how can we welcome others to this? How can this be transposed to our own society?" Western culture can be devastatingly lonely and individualistic. "People who need to be welcomed, cared for," says Andrew, "that was my dream."

Andrew is frequently asked about rigidity and conflict at King Road MB. "No," he says, "we worked through that in the language change that has been going on for forty years. King Road has been so stereotyped in this town, put in a box." There has been a rich tradition of drama at the church, with a great latitude to speak freely on stage. "Because I was working with crosscultural influences, I needed these anchors of hope, needed to focus on creative things."

Andrew's final sermon at King Road MB was based on Paul's beautiful love poem of I Corinthians 13. "The congregation helped us so much in our lives," he says, "one of the strengths of that congregation is practical action." "Walls come down between alienated groups," he adds, when evangelism is wedded to "waging peace." Perhaps, considering the current western interest in community, and Andrew Dyck's passion for building bridges, it is not that paradoxical that he stayed so long and felt so welcome at the multicultural King Road MB Church.

BOOK REVIEW

Anne Konrad. *Red Quarter Moon: A Search for Family in the Shadow of Stalin*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 356pp.

By John B. Toews

In 1962 the Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn published a modest volume entitled *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. At the University of Calgary, my students in a Russian History survey course refused to believe its contents. The assault on human dignity that occurred in the Soviet slave-labour camps was beyond their comprehension. Perhaps if they had been able to read Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973) the doubting students of the 1960s might have thought otherwise. Today personal diaries, memoirs, declassified archives and dedicated scholars not only recreate the stories of the gulag and labour camps but the indi-

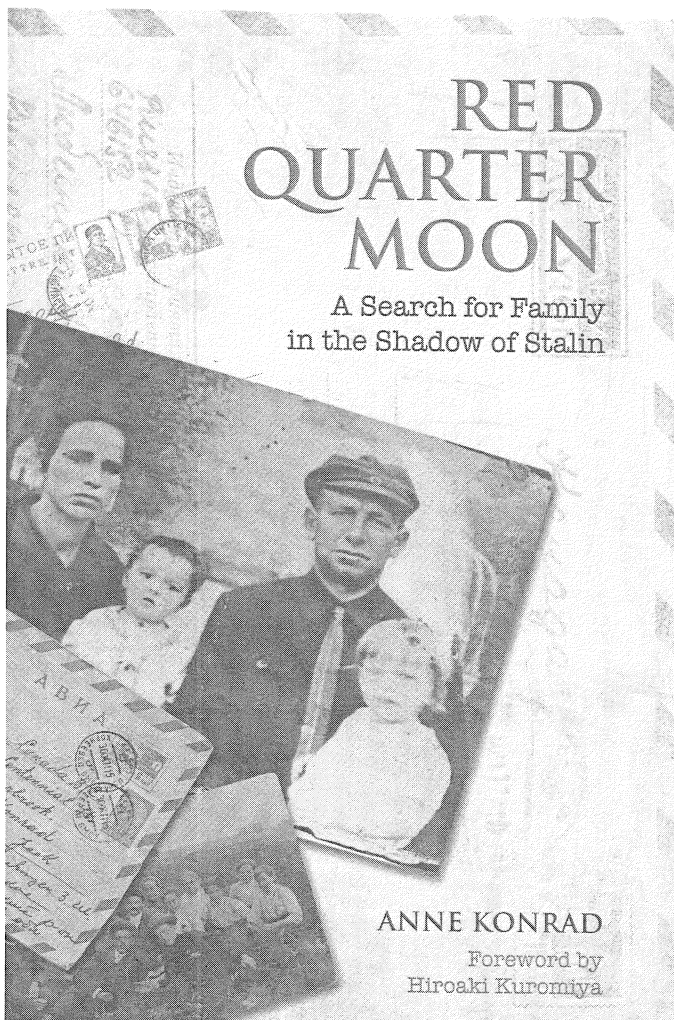
vidual pathways of its victims. Tyrants are usually not able to kill everyone. Eventually some survivors will tell their tales.

In this respect *Red Quarter Moon* is unique, at least in the Russian Mennonite story. The book is the product of the author's detective-like twenty year investigation of family members who, because of personal decisions or prevailing circumstances, were unable to leave Soviet Russia in the late 1920s. It seeks to answer the question, "What happened to those who stayed?"

For author Anne Konrad, finding answers to that question becomes a tenacious search that remains personal throughout. She claims no objectivity or distance from her subject matter. She simply states, "This is my extended family and here is what happened to them." Early contacts and information came from cautious letters of inquiry sent to Canada. The resulting correspondence, always guarded, set the stage for visits with cousins, primarily in Russia but also in Germany, Brazil and Paraguay. Persistent interviews, repeated visits and gentle prodding gradually encouraged distrustful survivors in a totalitarian state to tell their stories. In some instances, records from the secret police archives literally allowed the dead to speak and long silenced voices of the falsely condemned to be heard. All this is set in a carefully constructed historical framework that describes how successive Soviet policies impacted the lives and deaths of family members.

This book is bulging with stories. Some individuals are arrested and released, others arrested and executed. There are fateful decisions, deep tragedies, familial betrayals, rationalizations of compromises, and survival strategies. The stories intersect and are sometimes repetitive, yet are essentially different. The structure of a paranoid Stalinism often

...continued on page 22.



BOOK REVIEW

Among the Ashes. Peter J. Rahn, ed., trans., commentary. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2011. 299 pp.

by Ed Janzen

Peter J. Rahn's *Among the Ashes* records the experiences of his ancestral PJ Rahn family in Kontinuisfeld, Ukraine, for a short period from 1930 to 1935, during the period of collectivization and restructuring of society by the Soviets. The particulars of what happened to this family are as chilling and appalling as we have generally been led to believe. This account documents a period about which relatively few details are known from the perspective of a typical Mennonite family in the Ukraine.

The source of the material is a series of letters and postcards sent from the village to the author's father, Jacob Peter Rahn, who had managed to leave the village for Canada late in 1929. He had been sent ahead to Moscow to get the proper emigration papers for the family, but shortly after he left, the police came to arrest Jacob's father, Peter Jacob Rahn. The rest of the family were subsequently unable to leave, but they did send what letters they could to keep in touch, and these letters were carefully preserved by Jacob, in Canada, as an heirloom.

The correspondence is intriguing in its portrayal of the values by which such a family lived in the horrendous times of social experimentation by the Soviet regime. Often there are expressions of thankfulness in spite of grim cir-

cumstances: "But every evening we all feel very thankful that we are still allowed to go to sleep in our own beds. Have nice weather at the moment." Although one of the sons dealt illegally in rabbits, the family generally continued to practise honesty in a time when it would have been tempting to cheat in order to feed a hungry family: "Many people have been visited [by the police], but absolutely nothing [forbidden wares] was found at our place." "Hans has gotten involved in dealing rabbits. ... We keep saying that he should let it be, that the young people will report him."

The family continued to value relationships; they visited and interacted and cared for others in the village, but also believed that everyone had the responsibility to be industrious and contribute to the welfare of all: "Our neighbour is supposed to provide even more, but it doesn't seem to bother him. He is lazy like no one before. ... The sisters are not afraid of work, just like our [relatives] in the past. He is a lazy person." While humility continues to be highly valued – "But you must not praise yourself too much" – pride in their gardens still shows through: "but our garden patches were the cleanest."

Music and games took their minds off some of the

...continued from page 21.

generated a similarity of experiences yet they imprinted themselves very differently on the various family members. Victims reacted differently. Some succumbed and were broken; others became resilient and, where possible, outwitted the system. The book enters into the lives of very ordinary persons who, often reluctantly, talk about their losses and personal tragedies yet offer few pious platitudes when seeking to come to terms with their often horrendous past.

This is not a book one can read dispassionately. Together with the author, the reader shares outrage, anger, sadness and despair. There are few hap-

py endings and many unanswered questions. The scars of persons uprooted from their moorage and subjected to humiliation and ridicule never heal, even when these individuals are freed. Jewish writers sometimes speak of the "absolute evil" of the Auschwitz experience. Perhaps when reading of the impact of Stalinism on the lives of a closely related family, one is struck by the unevenness of evil, but it is evil nonetheless. The book provides a chilling portrait of Mennonites who lived through Stalin's totalitarianism. While it is a fitting paradigm for the experiences of only one family, it embraces the multiple tragedies engulfing millions living in the vast Soviet Empire. This study is destined to become a classic in its field.

difficulties and maintained their spirits: for example, one family member writes, "In the evening I was at Peter Penner's place. Made music until 2:00 AM." Above all, there are constant references to faith and its sustaining power: for example, "Spent the holidays, prayer week and bible study [week] in complete peace."

Slowly, however, the noose began to tighten. The Soviets organized the farmers into collectives and then began to demand more and more contributions from each collective: "From us they have also taken the last of the flour, so all that we have now is the previously baked bread." To fulfill quotas the Soviets took the seed grain, after which individuals were allowed to buy back some small portions at excessive prices for seeding in the spring. Horses and other animals were slaughtered and replaced with tractors in the drive to mechanization, but the "tractors work[ed] only poorly..." and so cows were trained to pull wagons. The regime instituted "Tractor Sunday" in which tractors were driven through the village to attract locals away from church services. Eventually, gleaning in the fields was also declared to be theft from the state, and families turned to planting their own small plots, trapping pigeons and rabbits, eating mice and crows, scrounging for berries and mushrooms, and relying on money sent from abroad, in this case from JP Rahn in Canada.

As the situation grew more desperate, gold and cash were confiscated, individuals were tortured to extort confessions about hidden money, and more and more leaders were arrested and sent into exile. Receiving letters also became an act of sabotage: "Therefore you are no longer permitted to send us money. For we cannot make any use of it. We received the order [money order]. Thank you very much, but please, please send nothing more..." Eventually all this took its toll; the family became disheartened and resignation set in: "... for what good is that working, if in

return for all that work one has to starve for the whole year, for they take everything away." In March 1935 the father, PJ Rahn, became ill, and in November 1935, JP Rahn in Canada received the last letter. He did not hear from his family again until 1947 when the family was in a refugee camp. Remarkably, the last letter shows how they still clung to their faith and values: "Here it is especially sad and still, Jacob, you should know that I have to thank God that we have not been destroyed."

The book is remarkably well structured, beginning with historical background to provide context, followed by ancestral charts and the family background. The charts are especially well done, and the various family members who appear in the letters can easily be traced through them. The maps, photos, and documents at the end help to round out the picture of village life and structure.

In the main section of the book, the letters are placed side by side in German and English. Thus German readers can access the thoughts as they were originally expressed since translation often adds barriers to intended meaning. Footnotes are very helpful in explaining what the writers intended or of whom they are speaking. Most useful are Rahn's commentaries sprinkled throughout the text to explain and interpret the circumstances surrounding particular incidents.

Author Peter Rahn's evaluation of his family's experiences is not overstated; he does not universalize the family's understanding of what happened to them to the whole of the Soviet Union. In his concluding commentary, he writes, "The ultimate reward, moreover, for all the contributions that the working classes made to the new economic system was personal starvation. Somehow, within this utopian ideology that was supposed to provide the workingman's paradise, the agricultural worker, at least, was forgotten."

The concluding line explains the meaning of the book's title: "My ancestors certainly endured the ashes of destruction but they never experienced the promised phoenix of egalitarianism."



Soviet Poster: "We will We will annihilate Kulaks as a class."

A Close Encounter that Led to “Living Room”

by John Konrad

When I was languishing in the psychiatric ward at MSA General Hospital in the fall of 1994, having suffered a complete psychotic breakdown, I could not have imagined that this experience would become a primary qualifier, 14 years later, for me to become a “Co-facilitator” of a support group for people suffering with mood disorders.

I was in the prime of my criminal justice career, working as a Special Adviser to the BC Forensic Psychiatric Services Commission, when I found myself unable to perform my advisory and executive responsibilities. After a brief holiday, during which I thought I would overcome the incapacitation and regain strength, I returned to work, only to relapse in less than a week. I was referred to a psychiatrist, to be diagnosed with clinical depression and acute anxiety. Many months of psychiatric intervention and medication were of no avail, and when I became acutely suicidal, my family contacted a psychiatrist on my behalf, who advised hospitalization. Even there, with repeated attempts using numerous different medications, health failed to return, until finally a new medication, along with supplementary clinical interventions, was effective in “jump-starting” my recovery. After a month in hospital, and a few more months of recovery under the psychiatrist's close supervision, I was able to return to work – albeit different work, which was challenging, rewarding and life-giving.

I continued psychotherapy with my psychiatrist for about 8 years, able to process many issues, including guilt, repressed bereavement, spiritual issues and life goals. During the following years, I had many opportunities to “come alongside” people who

were suffering with depression. By sharing my experience, I attempted to inspire them with encouragement and hope.

Shortly after this experience, I was invited to serve on the first (and subsequent) planning committee for an annual “mental health retreat” sponsored by Communitas Supportive Care Society in Abbotsford. It was here that I first met Marja Bergen, one of the presenters at these retreats. Marja has lived with bipolar disorder for most of her adult life, and after working with the BC Mood Disorder Society, made the observation that people of Christian faith are often reluctant to talk about their beliefs in a community support group, and are equally reluctant to talk about their mental health issues in care and prayer groups in the church. This awareness led her to create “Living Room,” a faith-based support group for people who suffer with mood disorders, including depression, anxiety and bipolar. In addition to being a wife, mother, photographer and advocate, Marja has written two books describing her journey with bipolar disorder: *Riding the Roller*



Heinz Klassen, Bird bowl, hand built ceramic bowl

-*Coaster* and *A Firm Place to Stand*. In order to promote "Living Room," Marja created a website (www.livingroomsupport.org), which contains the mission, vision and history of this program, along with a program guide, facilitators' manual, and devotional samples. The program has spread to many other locations in BC, as well as other provinces and countries.

On learning of this resource, I made a proposal to the Elders at my church (Highland Community Church, Abbotsford) and 9 months later, in September, 2008, "Highland Living Room" was launched, with Co-facilitators Lorraine Isaak and myself, and Joanne Thiessen providing support services. The church authorized a small working budget that enabled us to produce handbooks, program guidelines, and lunches for participants. We chose to meet during the day, since two other mood disorder support groups in Abbotsford were meeting in the evening. Our format is simple: our objective is to create a safe place where people feel accepted, are able to share their struggles with people on a similar journey, and to understand the issues they struggle with.

Living Room has now been offered at Highland Community Church for three years, every 2nd and 4th Friday of the month, from September to mid-June. We have been fortunate to have one or two graduate students each year (from the Family and Marriage Counselling program at ACTS Seminary, Langley, BC) fulfil their practicums in group facilitation with us. While benefiting from this practical learning experience, these students also provide relief for the Co-facilitators by participating in all aspects of leadership in the program. A typical two hour support meeting start with a make-your-own sandwich lunch, then moves on to self-introductions and a review of the agenda and guidelines. Next comes a time of spiritual focus that attenders can participate in. Breakout groups work to apply the self-help principles of giving help, receiving help, and helping oneself.

Living Room participants have come primarily from the community, with about 5% from Highland Community Church. This ratio has resulted in

Living Room participants highlighted significant benefits:

- support and understanding from other individuals who have also experienced mental illness
- welcome and acceptance from leaders and other group members;
- opportunities to talk openly about their struggles without having to worry about making others feel uncomfortable;
- the safety of being with people like them and of feeling normal.

the program being seen largely as a ministry of the church to the community. The ratio of women to men was 2:1 the first and third year, and 1:1 the second year. Participants range in age from early 20s into the 80s.

The Co-facilitators at Highland collaborate with other support groups in the community, and are in regular contact with local mental health agencies and services. We are affiliated with the Mood Disorder Association of BC, which provides resources and training opportunities. We have also been significantly involved with the Mental Health Commission of Canada (Senate initiated), participating in peer support workshops, round table discussions and focus groups.

At Highland, we promote a model of recovery and relapse prevention that focuses on medication (psychiatrist), psychotherapy (therapist) and support (family/friends/faith). Research has indicated that where these three elements are present as required, the odds of recovery increase, and the odds of relapse decrease.

Highland Community Church continues to support this program through finances and prayer; in addition, one of the Pastoral Elders meets with the Co-facilitators three times a year to provide support, counsel, and encouragement, ensuring we are not overwhelmed and are able to continue to function well.

For me, a life-endangering illness has led to a life-giving ministry to others.

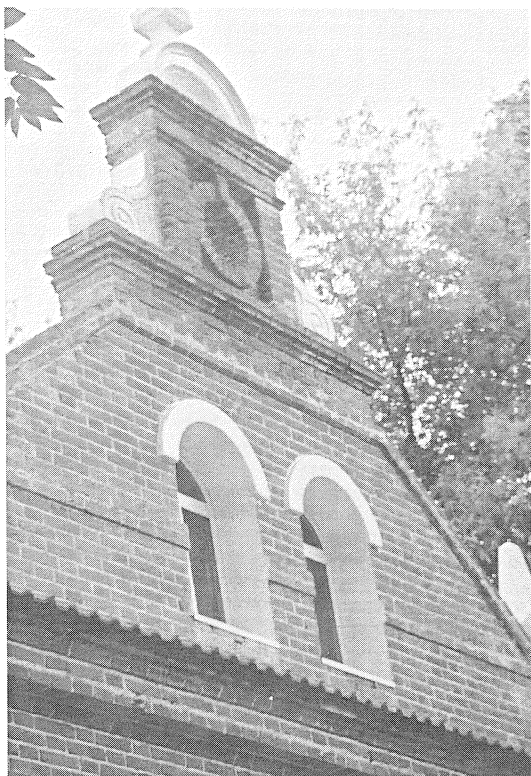
From the Ukraine Mennonite Centre Blog

<http://www.regehrsинukraine.blogspot.ca/>



“Typical” or “routine” are not the best words to describe life at the Mennonite Centre. On Monday our day began with an extended breakfast visit with Jakob & Natasha Tiessen, the German pastor couple of the Kutuzovka Mennonite Church. While our German language skills are often put to the test as we discuss various issues facing the church and life in Ukraine, we enjoy the opportunity to communicate without an interpreter. They are planning a transition back to Germany after giving leadership to the church for 9 years. This represents a major transition for the church that so far has had only non-Ukrainians in leadership. The church is also in the process of building a new place of worship in Molochansk with plans to convert the former sanctuary into a personal care home. These are challenging transitions for any congregation, and they are amplified in a community with limited financial and other resources. At the same time we celebrate an increase in participation among the youth and young families in the congregation. Six individuals were baptized last summer.

Tuesday morning finds us enroute to our neighboring city of Tokmak. As we bob and wave our way, carefully choosing which of the pot holes we can drive through and which need to be avoided to prevent damage to our Lanos,



the 10 kilometer drive often takes us more than half an hour. A recent rain complicates the process because we cannot determine the depth of the pot holes. The purpose of our trip is to do some banking for the Centre. This time, the forty-five mi-

nute process is successful.

We maximize the benefit of the trip to Tokmak by including other errands: picking up glasses for some seniors as prescribed by the optometrist who does regular eye-examinations at the Centre (we can provide prescription glasses for 25 to 40 grievna, or about 3 to 5 U.S. dollars), and doing some grocery shopping. Fresh fruits and vegetables we pick up at the open-air market while other goods are available in a small, crowded supermarket. Deciphering the Russian labels on the various products is always an interesting process, occasionally resulting in surprises after we open them at home.

Wednesday we enjoy a visit from one of our co-workers from Zaporizhia. She speaks English fluently and has become a trusted friend, so the conversation flows easily and comfortably. However, in the afternoon a phone call to the Centre announcing yet another building inspection causes more frustration. Allegedly for the purpose of ensuring a safe workplace for us, these inspections tend to be onerous because of the technical documentation required.

Thursday morning we are greeted by the director of a local school requesting some financial assistance in repairing some of their sewer pipes and several toilets. The need for such repairs is seldom in question, and since this is a school with whom we have worked previously we expect the project to be approved by our board. We write up the proposal and email it to Canada.

After her regular day at the clinic or hospital, a local doctor sees patients at the Centre after 4:00 p.m. Prescriptions are ordered by the Centre at reduced cost for the patients.

Friday is the day some 50-60 seniors come to the Centre for tea and a sandwich. But before they are done, we receive unexpected guests from Germany.

Their Mennonite background tweaks their curiosity about the purpose of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine and we enjoy a pleasant lunch together, once again exercising our German by describing to them the various projects of the Mennonite Centre.

Roots and Branches

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Artist Bio - Heinz Klassen

Heinz Klassen studied art at Vancouver Community College (now Langara) and at the Alberta College of Art, where he received a BFA with a major in ceramics. Following his studies, he worked at the Vancouver School of Art (now Emily Carr). His art work has been shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the UBC Fine Arts Gallery, and was part of a province-wide travelling exhibition sponsored by the VAG.

After completing Art School he found work at the Vancouver School of Art (now Emily Carr University of Art and Design) but cancer, its treatment and their side effects reshaped Heinz's art and career path. He moved from working at the Art School to working in several City Building Departments and also found time to teach sculpture at Fraser Valley College (now University of the Fraser Valley).

Currently, Heinz' passion for art is mostly expressed through drawing. He writes, "I have always been attracted to drawings, their immediacy, intimacy, expressiveness, seductiveness; their beauty. I like the notion that drawings come closest to reflecting an artist's creative involvement with his subject. Just follow the movement of the line across the page. It can be enthralling. Notice the line: now thick, thin, dark, close together, weak, strong, continuous, broken, heavy, sharp, dull, angular, smooth, rough, etc."

Heinz and his wife Lois live in Yarrow in "what old timers would remember as the Funk house." They have two children and five grandchildren. Heinz will be exhibiting his drawings (together with ceramics by Ted Driediger) at the Chilliwack Gallery, 9201 Corbould St., December 8-January 12, 2013.



Above:
Heinz Klassen,
Edge of Beaver
Pond (near
Chilliwack River),
watercolour,
pen and ink

Left:
Heinz Klassen,
Self portrait,
pastels on paper