



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

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Burundi



Russia



British Columbia

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Editorial

by Maryann Tjart Jantzen

Mennonites have long believed that as Anabaptist Christians it is our calling to be peacemakers and justice-bringers, not only in theory but also in practice. But our understanding of this calling has shifted, both individually and communally, depending on time and place: varying interpretations have included embracing the separatist witness of being the “quiet in the land,” rejecting any kind of military or civic service as complicit with earthly authorities, working to bring about not only lack of conflict, but also the necessities of life and human dignity, and seeing peacemaking as encompassing active engagement with and activism for the marginalized of this earth.

This issue of *Roots and Branches* features various accounts of how Mennonites have approached these crucial issues, both globally and locally. These include a historical account of the emergence of MCC through efforts to reach out to the suffering, first in Mennonite communities, and later on a more global scale; in addition, several articles examine the work of Mennonites, through MCC and other organizations, to facilitate peace and justice in Palestine and other troubled areas of the globe. Another article celebrates the past work of local resident Mabel Paetkau in helping refugees integrate into the community.

Working for peace and justice in our broken world is a challenging and compelling vocation – and perhaps Mennonites will never fully agree on how we are to implement this. Should we focus on a vision that “clothes the naked; feeds the hungry, consoles the afflicted; shelters the miserable; aids and consoles all the oppressed,” but, as James Toews asserts, says “no” to political advocacy” because “it will distract us from the task that we have been given?” Or do we, as Jon Nofziger asserts, believe that “that much of the world’s hostility and violence are rooted in unjust systems,” that “if one desires peace, then one must strive for justice” using a “variety of skills and tools such as compassionate listening, mediation, analysis of political/historical realities, support of locally-based initiatives, and advocacy – all as an embodiment of hope?”

This issue reminds us that our call to be peacemakers and justice builders is both complex and compelling. As Robert Martens states, “To make peace, however, is a complicated process that demands patience, attention to detail, and an open regard for opposing ideologies.” What’s crucial is that we are not passive pacifists but active responders to situations of human

need and conflict. We also need to acknowledge that our attitudes and actions are not neutral but political, reflective of our own presuppositions about and interpretation of what constitutes peacemaking and justice building.

Upcoming event

Annual Fundraising Banquet

Contact the MHSBC office for tickets
(604-853-6177; archives@mhsbc.com)

Dr. John B. Toews

“Mennonite Pacifists in Ukraine
amidst Anarchy (1917-1920).”

Saturday, September 21, 2013, 6pm

At Emmanuel Mennonite Church,
3471 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford, BC.

Ticket price: \$25

Mennonites leaving Prussia and settling in Russia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were protected by a bill of “rights and privileges” known as the *Privilegium*. They were exempt from all military and state service. Yet in the 1870s the tsarist government demanded some form of state service which, after lengthy negotiations, took the form of the forestry service. For Mennonites in Russia and Ukraine, this became the accepted expression of pacifism until the outbreak of World War I. During the war many young men served in the non-combatant medical service on Red Cross trains taking wounded from the front lines. Rather suddenly the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the resulting Civil War destroyed the existing social order and plunged Ukraine into chaos and anarchy. Was an historic, institutionalized pacifism capable of addressing the crisis? The lecture will seek to address that question.

Request for Goertzen Family Information

It has been over thirty-seven years now since the first Goertzen Book was published. I am working on publishing an updated Goertzen book; this project would draw on updated research and historical information and include an updated family tree. I am requesting assistance from anyone with relevant information and/or connections to the Goertzen family. If you have any pictures, stories, or information relevant to this project, please forward material to me and/or help in any way you can. I am particularly looking for information to complete 3 family lines: Anna Goertzen (1832-1910) & Johan Hiebert (1830-1907); Helena Goertzen (1841-1925) & Jacob Fehr (1841-1929); Isaac Goertzen (1844-?) & Agatha Andreas (1843-?)

Peter Goertzen

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MHSBC book launch event: Anne Konrad and *Red Quarter Moon*

by Louise Bergen Price

When a question and answer period extends beyond its allotted time, the audience has been captivated. Such was the case at Anne Konrad's presentation, "A Search for Family in the Soviet Union," on April 5. Konrad, who travelled five continents over two decades searching for relatives lost in the diaspora that followed World War II, read from her book *Red Quarter Moon*. Her stories spoke of survivors who managed to elude the clutches of the NKVD and of relatives who disappeared. Each story was familiar in the general picture, but unique in its own particulars.

Are human sufferings brought on by God to punish, or to teach lessons? A member of the audience echoed the same question asked by Job's friends many centuries earlier. It was a thought provoking way to end a most interesting evening.

Red Quarter Moon can be purchased at the MHS office.

Royden Loewen and Eric Dreger Event Report

On June 1 at Level Ground Church, a clearly attentive crowd of more than one hundred took in several powerful presentations focusing on traditionalist Mennonites. The first was by Eric Dreger, a recent graduate of the Vancouver Institute of Media Arts, who showed his photographs from a trip to Shipyard, Belize. Just as compelling as his powerful photos was his story on what he learned about the Old Colony settlement of Shipyard. He went to Belize, Dreger reported, imagining that he would find a "utopian" community of mutual help and respect. Instead he found deep divisions, as the new Gospel Fellowship Chapel was stealing members from the Old Colony community. Nevertheless, Dreger contended that a kind of healing was taking place at the Chapel, with Bible reading now becoming common, and women taking on greater roles.

A very different perspective was presented by Royden Loewen, chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. In his talk on the Old Colony Mennonites of Bolivia, it was clear that he maintained a profound empathy for the ways of traditionalist Mennonites. He suggested that we of the individualistic West have something to learn from them. We should look beyond the recent brutal cases of rape in the colonies (and the cynical media coverage), Loewen said, and recognize the caring, security, and indeed peace of the *Ordnung* (order). And in fact, Loewen argued, Old Colony Mennonites, despite their practices of shunning and excommunication, have a great capacity for non-judgementalism.

All in all, an eye-opening evening.

The Cross and the Dove: Mennonite Central Committee

by David Giesbrecht

Consistent with its logo, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) strives to be the place where the cross and the dove intersect with the world. It's an organization that significantly expresses the aspirations of a faith community. Moreover, the large pool of volunteers that MCC continues to attract is a signal that rank and file Mennonites see MCC as a deserving mission. Noticeably, MCC is an organization that brings Mennonites together as no other event or denominational enterprise does. One need only witness the varied and rich interactions each year at the Abbotsford MCC Relief Sale, where some 10,000 participants enjoy fellowship and food as a means of raising funds for charitable causes.

Among Mennonites there is a long tradition of caring for the needy. Already in 1710 Dutch Mennonites in Amsterdam organized the Foundation for Foreign Relief. This organization functioned for approximately 100 years, providing assistance as plagues swept across Europe. When during the 1870s large numbers of Russian Mennonites began arriving in the US and Canada, those of Swiss origin who had previously settled in the New World at once began to assist these newcomers. In 1873 American Mennonites appointed a relief committee for the purpose of gathering funds. By the time of World War I, Canadian and American Mennonites had raised close to \$200,000 for relief purposes.

The birth of the Mennonite Central Committee in 1920 grew out of a faith heritage which states that human need requires a human response. This understanding of MCC's "rootage" was profoundly articulated by Menno Simons who insisted on a faith that expressed itself in shoe leather: "For true evangelical faith ... cannot lie dormant; but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love; it ... clothes the naked; feeds the hungry; consoles the afflicted; shelters the miserable; aids and consoles all the oppressed; returns good for evil; serves those that injure it; prays for those that persecute it."

Owing to their faith heritage, a culture of caring for needy people, and especially for the needy among their own communities, emerged among twentieth century North American Mennonites. By 1889 the General Conference Church had organized the Emergency Relief



MCC logo

Credit: <http://mcccanada.ca>

Fund, while by 1917 the (Old) Mennonite Church had established the Relief Commission for War Sufferers. Mennonite Brethren (MB) channelled relief work through their Board of Foreign Missions.

However, the deep divisions within the Mennonite family made working together capricious. There were deep theological fissures. "The so called 'Brothers' found it impossible to share communion with each other, to accept each other's ordination, or to come together in a common denominational organization" (Juhnke 67). These groups were also separated by language. For one group the mother tongue was Pennsylvania German, while for the other it was Low German.

This lack of unity was addressed a week before the first MCC organizational meeting in 1920. Daniel Kauffman, editor of the *Gospel Herald*, wrote, "Let us earnestly oppose as soul-destroying any coming together which ignores one jot or tittle of God's Word." And God's word presumably meant that women had to wear head coverings and that men could not wear ties. Wedding rings were deemed worldly adornments, unfit for Christian fingers. The reality was that "in 1920 Mennonites from different conference groups did not know each other very well. MCC was not a marriage born from affection, but a

cautious contract born of necessity” (Kreider).

That necessity included the overwhelming needs in the first Soviet Socialist Paradise. Conditions in Russia immediately following World War I were catastrophic. Politically, the country was torn by internal bloodbaths, civil war and anarchy. With the onset of Communist control in late 1917, the old order was crushed, and the new one was ruthlessly imposing itself. The economy was wrecked. For instance, by 1922 the acreage under cultivation in the Ukraine had declined by 32% and the number of horses decreased to 20% of 1914 levels (Kreider 38).

Ukrainians and Mennonites alike were coming to know what it meant to live under the hammer and sickle. In some Mennonite villages, the front had changed twenty times. Lack of sanitation meant that infectious diseases decimated local populations. Finally, there was a loss of all security and dignity. Rape was being used as a weapon of war. For example, in the Chortiza Hospital during this time, more than 100 women were being treated for sexual diseases. To add to the devastation, a crippling famine was unleashed, ironically, in the breadbasket of the Union. Dead bodies were piled like logs in winter time. In spring they were dumped into a common grave. No one bothered to find out the names of the dead.

In this blighted condition, Russian Mennonites appointed a *Studien Kommission* (study commission) in 1919, to acquaint the wider Mennonite world of their distress. This *Kommission* was led by B. H. Unruh and included three other prominent Mennonites: the well-known teacher A. A. Friesen, the engineer and politician John Jacob Esau, and the merchant C. H. Warkentin. The *Kommission* left Russia early in 1920. After spending five months in Europe, the representatives docked in New York on June 13, 1920. Their vivid accounts attracted wide interest among Mennonites. When the *Kommission* reported in Newton, Kansas, in July 1920, tents had to be erected to accommodate overflow crowds. Their visit to Herbert, Saskatchewan, a few months later generated so much sympathetic response that local farmers at once organized an auction sale, netting over \$1000.00, surely the first Mennonite relief sale in North America. As Robert Kreider notes, “No other project in North American Mennonite experience had captured Mennonite attention as did the Russian relief effort” (28). It was the insistence of these *Kommission* members which convinced North American Mennonites to join in a common charitable undertaking.



Credit: <http://mcccanada.ca>

In this context the Mennonite Central Committee was born in 1920, although the word “birth” is not entirely an appropriate metaphor. In fact it took several meetings and intense negotiations for this delivery to be successful. One of these joint assemblies took place on July 27, 1920, in Elkhart, Indiana, and included D. H. Bender from Heston, Kansas; John Lichti from Medford, Oregon; and W. J. Ewert, D. E. Harder and P. C. Hiebert, all from Hillsboro, Kansas. It was here that a historic resolution was passed: “Be it resolved that we the representatives of several branches of the Mennonites, assembled in Elkhart, Indiana, this 27th day of July 1920 deem it well and desirable to create a Mennonite Central Committee.”

Significantly, the vision of this Committee was entirely focused on assistance to Russian Mennonites. According to Kreider, “[a]ware that many were reluctant to engage themselves in inter-Mennonite activity, these leaders acknowledged that the newly-formed MCC was a

temporary arrangement” (23). It took one more meeting, where representatives from seven Mennonite agencies were present, to formalize the beginning of MCC. Therefore, the official birth of MCC is often viewed as 27 September 1920, at a meeting in the Krimmer Mission in Chicago, where P. C. Hiebert was elected the first chairman.

MCC leaders soon discovered that it was one thing to pass resolutions in Akron, but quite another to actually launch a program in Russia. Pervasive Soviet suspicion had to be overcome. Consequently, MCC appointed the very capable Alvin J. Miller to negotiate with Soviet authorities in Moscow. A year would pass before official permission was received from the Soviet government to do relief work in the Ukraine, and then only on the condition that food distribution would be non-discriminatory.

The first MCC unit to serve in Russia was headed by Orie Miller who together with Arthur Slagel and Clayton Kratz left New York on September 2, 1920. Timing was critical. It was while they were already underway that MCC officially coalesced around a vision to help “their needy Brethren in Russia.” The news was at once wired to Miller, already sailing across the Atlantic. Orie Miller could now write, “We felt the stimulus of a praying church at home, and with an abiding faith that He who called us into this work would see us through....” (qtd in Unruh 17).

After arriving in Constantinople, their base of operations, Orie Miller and Clayton Kratz proceeded to Molotchna, where they found the deplorable conditions as the *Kommission* had reported. Moreover, the civil war was raging with the imminent surrender of the Ukraine to the Red Army. Somehow Miller was able to extricate himself and escape to Constantinople. Clayton Kratz was arrested and never heard from again.

Successful agreement with Soviet leaders notwithstanding, selecting distribution centers was politically sensitive. Henry Smith says that MCC chose to assist in those areas mainly populated by Mennonites, thereby also complying with Soviet demands for non-discrimination. Feeding operations began on 16 March 1922 and continued until August 1923 (Frank Epp 57). At the height of the campaign, 140 field kitchens were in operation, feeding 40,000 persons per day (Frank Epp 59). Thousands of Mennonites escaped starvation in this way. Some 15,000 Ukrainians were spared as well.

After the initial threat of starvation had abated, MCC determined that Russian Mennonites required more

than food assistance, and according to Robert Kreider, “shifted from helping the needy to help themselves” (40). This help included clothing and medical supplies as well as 200 horses to replenish those stolen by the Soviets. In 1924 MCC imported 100 sheep to Siberia to foster spinning and weaving and the production of clothing. And then American Mennonites assisted in one more way. Fifty Fordson tractors and ploughs were sent to Mennonite villages to jump-start land cultivation. Amazingly, with the arrival of American tractors, Soviet officials offered large plots of land for cultivation. In this way “MCC played a role in the mechanization of Soviet agriculture” (Kreider 40).

The gratitude of Russian Mennonites was effusive. One letter signed by 500 people read, “We welcome with joy every furrow that is plowed, and every parcel of land that is cultivated, for these efforts, next to the grace of God, [we] promise to furnish our own home-raised bread for the future. We therefore take the liberty to thank you for your whole-hearted assistance, in the name of the inhabitants of the Gnadenfeld and Halbstadt Volosts and request that you transmit these our words of thanks ... to the kind donors in America, and our dear Mennonite brethren” (Kreider 398).

Why were American Mennonites so willing to help? This generosity was certainly a response to an Anabaptist faith and the emotive words of Jesus, “For I was hungry and you fed me...” (Matthew 25). Historian James Juhnke suggests another dimension to the early Mennonite generosity. He notes that since American Mennonites had prospered during the war, they were relieving a sense of guilt with their largesse. And for many of them, in responding generously to President Woodrow Wilson’s call to “establish a just democracy throughout the world,” Mennonites could again be seen as patriotic Americans” (Kreider 25).

Much credit is owing a generation of courageous, visionary Mennonite leaders for birthing the MCC vision. Among them was Henry A. Fast, a pastor, teacher, administrator, and relief worker. In 1922 he began teaching New Testament at the then Witmarsum Theological Seminary in Bluffton, Ohio. He earned his PhD degree at Hartford Theological Seminary in 1936. Fast was MCC’s vice-chair (1943-1960) and, in 1951, led its relief work in Europe.

Another formidable leader of this generation was Orie (O. O.) Miller, a Mennonite layman and administrator who bridged the worlds of business and church. Miller

felt called to the ministry. By practice, his church elected ministers by casting lots. Three times he was a ministerial candidate at Ephrata Mennonite Church, but each time the lot failed to fall on him. Orié's father-in-law, heading a business adversely affected by the postwar economic slump, was not ready to release his son for MCC work. "You can't mix business and the church," he said. "You must give full time to the business or leave it." Orié Miller left for Russia.

During his lifetime, Miller held 65 church-related leadership positions, some for as long as 45 years. His interest in Mennonite refugees from Russia never ended. He gave his life for the well-being of the larger Mennonite community. When MCC was born in 1920, Miller was involved in its administration and continued in a leadership role until retiring in 1963, a 43 year commitment (GAMEO).

Another visionary, courageous Mennonite leader of the early twentieth century was Peter C. Hiebert. Hiebert was an MB educator, minister, and relief agency leader. He served the MB Conference as chair of the Board of Home Missions for 18 years. In 1920 he became the first chair of MCC and served in that capacity for 38 years. With the approach of World War II, Hiebert joined a Mennonite delegation that appealed personally to President Franklin D. Roosevelt on behalf of conscientious objectors. As a result, the Civilian Public Service was established, allowing twelve thousand Americans an alternative to military service.

After World War II, MCC mounted a major relief effort in war-ravaged Europe, culminating in the shipment of 58,000 tons of food to Germany alone. One out of every three German citizens received some form of MCC food assistance during this time. On 30 June 1953, a consular representative of the West German government visited the Hiebert home in Hillsboro to bestow on him an Iron Cross. The citation, signed by President Heuss and Prime Minister Konrad Adenauer, reads, "In recognition of the activities of Mennonites and as symbol of the gratitude of

the German government, the President of the Republic has bestowed upon you, dear Dr. Hiebert, the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit."

The story of Mennonite migration during the early twentieth century and the work of MCC is not complete without mention of Benjamin H. Unruh. He had been ordained in Russia as an MB minister. While studying in Basel, he received a Licentiate in Theology (equivalent to the doctor's degree in Church History) and in 1937 was awarded an honorary Doctor of Theology at the University of Heidelberg. Unruh began his career as teacher at the Halbstadt *Kommerzschule*, where he taught



*MCC Quilting Demonstration -
Clearbrook Public Library. Credit: <http://bc.mcc.org>*

German and Religion.

From 1920 to the end of his active days, about 1955, Unruh served the interests of Russian Mennonites in emigration and resettlement. He worked in this respect directly as commissioner for the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization for the immigration to Canada (1921-25), and later for the Mennonite Central Committee for immigration to Paraguay (1930-33). On his own authority he signed an agreement with the German government that "Mennonites of the world" would repay the costs of getting Mennonites out of Moscow in 1929 (Unruh 218).

However, Unruh's enthusiastic support for Hitler and his regime cannot be ignored. For instance, in

1938 Robert Kreider visited Unruh in Germany. Unruh compared Hitler favourably with Menno Simons and George Washington. Said Unruh, "Hitler is a good man. ... He loves the whole world. Hitler does not want war. Hitler is like your George Washington." At that point, reports Kreider, Unruh leaped up, saluted and declared, "Heil George Washington. Heil Hitler" (Kreider 237).

In 1934 Unruh wrote a letter to the mayor of Fernheim Colony, defending the use of the Heil Hitler greeting: "Heil Hitler means that one heartily wishes the head of a new German government wellbeing." Unruh says further that Adolf Hitler wants nothing for himself, only for his people: "I honour him with my whole heart, and I love him as one can only love a leader. Only history will reveal what God has given to Germany through Adolf Hitler." According to Gerhard Rempel, Unruh hosted Himmler for a three-day meeting in the Ukraine, during which time they discussed the Nazi occupation of the Ukraine and Mennonite cooperation. Later Unruh joined the *Förderne Mitglieder* (contributing members) of the SS, and made monthly contributions, often signing letters, "Heil Hitler." Gerhard Rempel states that "Benjamin Unruh needs to be recognized as a collaborator with this regime ... not merely a well-meaning fellow traveller or cooperative independent observer" (qtd in Hershberger). Amazingly, Unruh died with this confession, as he lay dying in the Mannheim hospital, "I too cannot live without forgiveness."

MCC did not suspend operations with the end of the Russian mission. On the contrary, the experiences

of this first famine relief resulted in valuable lessons for North American Mennonites. The book *Feeding the Hungry*, by P. C. Hiebert and Orie Miller, essentially contains the report given to the MCC Executive Committee in 1927 on the mission to Russia. This report observes that

- (1) This was the greatest outpouring of corporate generosity in North American Mennonite history.
- (2) Some 10,000 Mennonites had been saved from starvation.
- (3) North American Mennonites gained confidence in their ability to support large projects.
- (4) Trust among the various denominations had been established and horizons broadened. "The shared experience of famine, feeding, and exodus focused in MCC an enduring symbol of what it meant to be Mennonite" (Kreider, 41).

In retrospect, few would disagree that the contributions of MCC to the Mennonite family have been diverse. MCC has informed and challenged Mennonites in their understanding of the Bible and Christian discipleship. Moreover, MCC has forced Mennonites to think how Anabaptist Christians relate to government. And certainly MCC has been a window for the Mennonite community to form a deeper, more accurate understanding of the global village we inhabit.

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This year marks the 80th anniversary of *Holodomor*, the artificial famine engineered by Stalin that took the lives of up to 7 million Ukrainians. Canada has set aside the 4th Saturday of November as “Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (*Holodomor*) Memorial Day.”

The logo selected for this year’s commemoration – five stalks of wheat bound with a black ribbon – was designed by Ukrainian Canadian artist, Oleh Lesiuk.

Peacemaking in Palestine

It seems easy to make war. To make peace, however, is a complicated process that demands patience, attention to detail, and an open regard for opposing ideologies. The following three writers address the issue of peace in the

Middle East from startlingly different points of view, but all three are making serious comments about a conflict that seems endless, sometimes hopeless. It is to be hoped that some light can emerge from intelligent and respectful debate.

We welcome response from our readers either by letter or email to the Mennonite Historical Society office.

Robert Martens

A Theological Journey with MCC to Palestine

by James Toews

The most lasting impression I left the Palestine Learning Tour with was of a racially divided region and of life seen through the eyes of the oppressed and displaced Palestinians. It was often a tragic and sometimes a hopeless looking picture. I went knowing Israel is a racially divided nation but seeing it firsthand through the eyes of the Palestinians left a deep impact on me – as it should have. Things in Israel/Palestine are not right.

Israel is of course not particularly unique in the family of nations when it comes to racial divisions. But even more than South Africa, it is part of a western, humanist, democratic tradition which brings racism into stark relief. And the stories of racial injustice we heard were both compelling and pervasive. They clash sharply with the democratic, and even more importantly, the biblical worldview that every person is equally created in the image of God.

These may have been the most lasting impressions the

Palestine Learning Tour left on me but the most difficult question I left with was about MCC’s evolving role in the region. This evolving role in Palestine was highlighted by comments such as, “We are so glad that MCC has moved beyond simply relief and development” and “Our partners want more from us than aid. As a matter of fact if that is all we have to offer – they don’t want us here.” With these comments in mind, it was suggested that we go home and press our Canadian government to stop supporting the Israeli government and even that



Credit: <http://middleeast.mcc.org/palestine-israel-learning-tours>
MCC Learning Tour participants

boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel be undertaken.

Since MCC is an Anabaptist relief and development agency, those requests raised a difficult question – is this shift to more political advocacy appropriate for MCC? Like the region itself, the question is not easy to get a handle on. Why wouldn't political advocacy be a natural role for MCC given that it has been active in the region for 60 years? Don't our workers there have a deep insight into what solutions in the region should look like? When we see injustice shouldn't we demand that the injustice cease?

For some Christian traditions the answer is a clear “yes,” but we Anabaptists come from a different theological foundation than much of Christendom, and there are at least two reasons why we might say no. First, the Gospel gives us no blueprint to guide our advocacy. In the world of the early church three great evils were woven through the fabric of society: sexism, slavery and racism. There is absolutely no room for any of these in the Kingdom of God: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). And yet the people of the Kingdom are advised that “each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them” (1Corinthians 7:24). This advice has caused a great deal of consternation for some, but it is part of a deep stream that Jesus established when He declared that we are in but not of the world.

Evil exists in the world, but unlike the people of God in the Old Testament, we are not given the authority to, nor the process by which to uproot it. In this context Jesus told the parable of the person who had an impure spirit driven out, but without the “house” being reoccupied the later state was worse than the first (Luke 11:24-26). Political activism without a political paradigm seems to be very ill advised.

The second reason to say “no” to political advocacy is that it will distract us from the task that we have been given – and we have a task. In the words of Menno Simons, “true evangelical faith is of such a nature that it cannot lay dormant; but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love . . . it clothes the naked; feeds the hungry; consoles the afflicted; shelters the miserable; aids and consoles all the oppressed.”

Israel/Palestine is a land full of the afflicted, miserable and oppressed. There is no shortage of widows, orphans, wounded and prisoners who need a helping hand, a listening ear and a heart of compassion. We may think we can mix our tasks without compromising them, but feeding the hungry and healing the broken often

clashes with political agendas. We cannot afford to be naïve in weighing these trade-offs. And we must not forget what we have been directly commanded to do. I believe it gives us a compelling reason to say “no” to political advocacy.

From its beginnings the Church has wrestled with the question of political advocacy because there are times when properly applied political engagement seems to be self-evidently prudent. On that side of the story Christendom has its heroes, William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King among them. But we dare not forget that the legacy of political engagement by the church also has very dark stories. In the Middle East we still live under the shadow of the Crusades which reflected the mixed political and Biblical dynamics of the medieval world. Being convinced of our cause, of the trade-offs that justice involves, does not make it right.

The Anabaptist tradition is among the voices of caution in regard to political advocacy. We don't have to judge other Christians for their political convictions but I think we should be very careful not to shift our mandate without careful consideration.

James Toews, pastor of Neighbourhood Church (MB) in Nanaimo, was one of the participants in the 2012 MCC Palestine Learning Tour.

Mennonite Central Committee's Peace Witness in Palestine/Israel

by Jon Nofziger, MCC BC

As followers of Christ, we are invited to participate in God's redemptive work on this earth and to embody hope even in the midst of violence and despair. This invitation lies at the heart of the Gospel, which MCC attempts to live out through its multitude of engagements around the world. As disciples of Jesus, we are led into new experiences and relationships, including the pain and suffering of others. Over time, MCC has deepened its recognition that much of the world's hostility and violence are rooted in unjust systems. If one desires peace, then one must strive for justice. This peacemaking journey calls for a variety of skills and tools such as compassionate listening,



*Security barrier between Abu Dis and East Jerusalem.
Credit: Wikipedia Commons*

mediation, analysis of political/historical realities, support of locally-based initiatives, and advocacy – all as an embodiment of hope.

Such is the evolving peace witness of MCC in the Middle East, specifically Palestine/Israel. MCC began its involvement in Palestine in 1949 by providing material assistance (canned meat, clothing, blankets) to Palestinian refugees who were driven from their homes by the creation of the State of Israel and the War of Independence – or *Nakba* (catastrophe) to the Palestinians.

By the early 1950s, MCC began several income-generating projects for refugees, one being a needlework program for women that still sells its products to Ten Thousand Villages, a nonprofit Fair Trade Organization. MCC also provided support for Palestinian Christian schools to serve both Christian and Muslim students. In the 1970-80s, MCC programs focused on rural development with thousands of farmers through the planting of fruit trees, the introduction of drip irrigation, and the reclamation of land for cultivation. This work was seen as political in nature, as Israeli authorities routinely confiscated uncultivated Palestinian land. As the capacities of the local population developed, MCC turned projects over to local administration, and began a phase of entering into partnership with local Palestinian organizations. The role of MCC changed to being a catalyst for and supporter of local initiatives. One example is the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement between Peoples – a grassroots movement that initiates dialogue with Israelis and promotes nonviolent resistance to the occupation.

As time passed, MCC came to understand that addressing issues in Palestine was not only about material resourcing and capacity building, but also required efforts to address injustice. Sustainable economic development could not take place under the harsh realities of occupation. Today MCC is supporting the witness of the local church and working with Israeli and Palestinian groups that are pursuing justice and peace. Areas of activity include food security and water resources; nonviolent conflict transformation; theological resources for the Palestinian church; psychosocial services for children and youth who have experienced violence; and the promotion of reconciliation by stopping home demolitions or rebuilding destroyed Palestinian homes.

On the 2012 learning trip, group participants listened to representatives of the organization Combatants for Peace, a group of 600 former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian militants. Members of this group have laid aside weapons and instead employ non-violent action to address conflict arising from the occupation. A Jewish Israeli member reflected during the presentation that the occupation not only “serves to destroy the spirit of Palestinians,” but at the same time is “destroying the moral fabric of Israeli society.”

For a more complete understanding of current MCC partners and program in Palestine/Israel, see <http://middleeast.mcc.org/mcc-partners-palestine-israel>

Jon Nofziger lives in Abbotsford, BC and was part of an MCC Learning Trip to the region in March 2012.

On School Patrol in Hebron

by Greg Rollins

The term “school patrol” is a common one used by Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in the West Bank city of Hebron. This is because most mornings CPT goes out on a patrol of several local schools. Israeli soldiers in Hebron often close Palestinian schools or refuse to allow the children to go to school. CPT tries to help the children get by checkpoints or keep the soldiers from closing the schools. Often we have succeeded. Often we have failed.

On school patrol anything can happen. Sometimes local Israeli settlers attack Palestinian children and CPTers. Sometimes Israeli soldiers detain us. Once, a soldier tried to confiscate a ladder that Palestinian children used to get to school. Due to closed checkpoints, the children were forced to cut through a Palestinian woman’s apartment in the old city of Hebron and then down the ladder to the street below. It was the only way for the children to get out of the old city. The soldier was shocked when I grabbed the ladder out of his hands and put it back against the wall. He started to argue but grew nervous when he noticed another CPTer pulling out a video camera.

At the same time just around the corner a third CPTer was explaining to an Israeli officer why a Palestinian boys’ school shouldn’t be closed. The CPTer explained to the officer that according to international law it was illegal to close schools. He also pointed out that if the boys were off the streets they would not throw rocks at Israeli soldiers. The officer thought about this and agreed not to close the school.

There are other times when we in CPT have not been successful in keeping tensions down while on school patrol. There have been days when we helped the children get to school only to have soldiers close the school down ten minutes later. No matter what we say the soldiers refuse to listen. Out on the streets the Palestinian boys respond to the closure by throwing rocks at the soldiers. The soldiers return fire with tear gas, metal-coated rubber bullets or sometimes



Children trapped in border turnstiles

Credit: <http://www.cpt.org/cptnet>

live ammunition.

It baffles me as to why the Israelis close these schools. Maybe Israel doesn’t want Palestinian children to learn how to read or write. Surely the soldiers do not close schools for the security of Israel. I fail to see how it keeps Israelis safe in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem when Palestinian children in the West Bank cannot go to school. In fact, I would think it would make Palestinians more likely to attack Israelis because they are angry. Angry they cannot go to school. Angry they cannot learn.

I don’t think I will ever find out the real reason why these schools are closed. The soldiers don’t often know themselves and even if they did they wouldn’t say. I don’t think they could give a good reason why someone else’s children aren’t allowed to learn.

CPT (Christian Peacemaker Teams) is a faith-led organization that seeks to transform violence and oppression through partnerships with local peace groups and bold action. Greg Rollins is from Surrey, BC, where he was raised in the Mennonite church. He worked with CPT from 2000-2006 in the West Bank and in Iraq. In 2012 he self-published his first children’s novel The Dragon and the Butterfly. He currently lives in Vancouver, BC. The above is an excerpt from his journal written about his CPT experience.

Online interview with John Siebert, executive director of Project Ploughshares

by Robert Martens

*First of all, could you tell us about Project Ploughshares?
For example, what is its mission, and how does it work?
What is your personal role in Project Ploughshares?*

Project Ploughshares (www.ploughshares.ca) is a church-related research institution that proposes alternatives to war and military expenditures. The short-hand is that we work to get rid of guns, bombs and war. Ploughshares has tracked and annually reported on wars throughout the world since 1987. We maintain information on the export of military goods from Canada to ensure that basic human rights are not being violated with those lethal instruments. We have partners in the Horn of Africa who are struggling to stop civil wars and insurgencies, and in the Caribbean where there are high murder rates because of illegal drugs and hand guns. We work with them to try to understand the complex reasons for violence and to propose peaceful, more just ways that citizens and governments can respond.

*Could you describe some of your own background, e.g.,
where you grew up, under what conditions, family, etc.?
Did you grow up inside one of the Mennonite faiths?*

I was raised in the Mountview Mennonite Brethren Church in Stoney Creek and the Vineland Mennonite Brethren Church, where I was baptised on confession of my faith. My parents, Jim and Nita (nee Enns) Siebert, were very involved as lay people in their local congregation and in Mennonite Brethren conference committees. I am the youngest of five children. When it was time to go to university I followed my three brothers to Winnipeg where I lived and studied at Mennonite Brethren Bible College for several years, and subsequently graduated from the University of Winnipeg with a major in political science. After completing university studies and starting work, my wife, Carolyn Wiens, and I have belonged to Mennonite Church Canada congregations in Ottawa, Toronto, Vineland, and now Kitchener-Waterloo where we are members of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church.

*What drew you personally to Project Ploughshares? Did
Anabaptist/Mennonite values influence you in any way?
Does peace play a central role in your core beliefs?*

The opportunity to become the Executive Director

at Project Ploughshares came up in 2005. After I had completed four years as a Canadian diplomat in 1986, and returned to school to study for an MA in theology in Toronto, I began working as a volunteer and then as a staff person for various ecumenical organizations such as the Canadian Council of Churches. Two friends, one a United Church member and the other a Mennonite, tapped me on the shoulder to consider working at Ploughshares. I wasn't expecting this. Ploughshares has a well-earned reputation for its in-depth knowledge of quite technical matters related to defence policy and disarmament processes. I had not worked on these issues since leaving the diplomacy job 20 years earlier. There was a lot to learn, quickly.

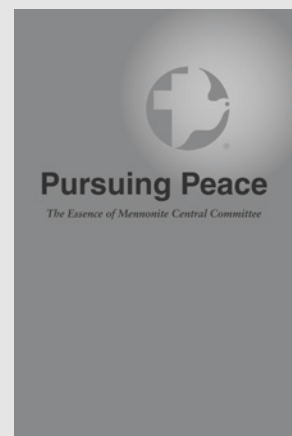
Project Ploughshares is a part of the 23-member Canadian Council of Churches, which includes Mennonite Church Canada. The opportunity to work on peace issues, which is integral to Mennonite theology and witness to the world, was also significant. The Biblical injunction "to seek peace and pursue it" is also part of our work together as Mennonites through Mennonite Central Committee Canada, which sends someone to be a director on the

Pursuing Peace: The Essence of Mennonite Central Committee

This booklet is intended to explain Mennonite Central Committee's pursuit of peace. Peace and peacemaking lie at the heart of MCC identity and ministry.

Yet many people find themselves struggling to understand what this means. This booklet is an attempt to offer some answers and to stimulate your own thinking and reflecting.

This resource may be accessed in pdf form at http://peace.mcc.org/stories_resources



Credit: www.mcc.org/about/purpose

Ploughshares board and supports our work financially.

Would you perceive Project Ploughshares as a vehicle for drawing together various peace groups, for example, the traditional peace churches and secular organizations?

Ploughshares was designed to work with a wide variety of groups, including Christian denominations, other faith groups who share our desire for a more peaceful world, and non-faith based organizations. Further, we want to be understood and listened to by governments, both in Canada and elsewhere. Many of our publications do not use religious language but rather public policy language, with the hope that governments will actually implement our recommendations. We are grateful that Ploughshares has had some success in influencing government decisions over the past 35 years. We know that Ploughshares' research and policy work is only a part of the broader movement for peace. In virtually all of the issue areas we cover, such as nuclear disarmament, there are friends and partners in Canada and around the world with whom we work for shared goals that build peace.

What do you see as the future for Project Ploughshares? How would you like Anabaptist/Mennonites to become involved?

We see ourselves continuing to work with and for our

supporting churches to advance peacebuilding and disarmament, whether those churches are historic peace churches, such as Mennonites and Quakers, or those which have a just war tradition. We have common ground as Christians in the pursuit of peace even if there are differences and sometimes tensions about whether, for example, it is permissible for the military in certain circumstances to intervene to protect vulnerable civilians.

Particularly since 1995 there has been a remarkable and welcome decline in the number of wars in the world, and countries are learning more about how to address conflicts without violence, or with less violence. Sadly, the impulse for war to resolve conflicts is still too prevalent and spending on the military is still far too high. Ploughshares will not be going out of business any time soon. We need people to continue working with us and supporting us.

Is there anything else on your heart that you would like to add?

There are about 8,000 people across Canada who support Ploughshares financially. We are grateful for this and want to encourage others to consider joining this work by reading our publications, talking to their elected representatives about peace, and being ready in season and out of season to witness to the vision in Isaiah 2:4 of turning swords into ploughshares.

“A Most Excellent Job”: Mabel Paetkau’s work with refugees

by Louise Bergen Price

It was a birthday party with a difference: many of those crowding the Eben-Ezer Church gym on January 25, 2013, were former refugees who had arrived in Canada between 1979 and 1988 from countries such as Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Poland, El Salvador, Iran and Guatemala. They had gathered to celebrate Mabel Paetkau’s 80th birthday, and to show thanks for the work she did as MCC BC’s refugee coordinator. The celebration was joyous, like that of an extended family, with singing, storytelling, visuals, and a potluck dinner.

A nurse by profession, Paetkau has always enjoyed meeting people of other cultures. When her pastor, David P. Neufeld, asked for a volunteer to prepare for the arrival of a Vietnamese refugee family in the spring of 1979, Paetkau agreed to take on the job. “The learning curve

was swift for me, my helpers, and for the family, as there really was not any helpful information for the task,” Paetkau writes. “The Immigration Office, a Vietnamese lady from the area, and Stephen Lee were all godsend in those first days.”¹

Within months, the trickle of refugees from Southeast Asia turned into a flood. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, those who had cooperated with the American forces and the former South Vietnamese government were being sent to prison, re-education camps,

¹ Mabel Paetkau, “A Unique Experience: MCC and Refugee Co-ordination, 1979-1988.” Paper presented at the University of Winnipeg Conference, “A 25 Year Retrospective of Mennonites and Refugees,” held Oct. 1&2, 2005, hosted by Royden Loewen. All quotes are from this paper unless otherwise noted.

or worse. Tens of thousands fled the region, often in old, leaky boats. Many drowned. Those who survived ended up in overcrowded refugee camps in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Indonesia. Between 1979 and 1982, 623,800 Indochinese refugees, mostly “boat people,” were resettled in the United States, Canada, Australia and France, as well as sixteen other Western countries.²

MCC BC responded to the disaster by opening a staff position to coordinate the refugee sponsorship program. Paetkau applied and was accepted. She worked with refugees, churches and sponsors, screening potential sponsors, holding orientation meetings, and explaining Canadian practices to new arrivals. She made house visitations, providing liaison between refugees and host families, immigration officials and the Ministry of Health. It was an immense task, involving 1244 MCC-assisted refugees and their sponsors during her term of service. Paetkau writes, “From 1979 until 1988 when I left MCC, my life and the life of my husband Walter (‘Mr. Mabel’ as he was called by the refugees) was almost completely taken over by former refugees, and we allowed that to happen. Invitations to parties, weddings and dinner were constant. Christmas and other holidays were always busy with folk stopping in to plead with me to get their families to Canada, and to say hello. We never knew what the next day or night would bring.”

Paetkau describes the effort it took to unite members of the “H” extended family. Mr. H was released from prison and told to leave Vietnam or go to re-education camp. Quickly, the family – which included ten children, some married with children of their own – made plans to escape. At the dock, two of their sons, university students, became separated and left on a different boat, ending up in Canada as the first government-sponsored refugees. Since they’d heard no news from the rest of the family, the sons assumed all were lost at sea. Eight months later, they learned that pirates had swarmed the boat the others were on, robbing them of gold and possessions. Their boat was sinking when a passing ship heard screams for help, rescued those on board, and dropped them off in Malaysia.

Now that the sons had news of their family, they approached MCC with a sponsorship petition. Four months later, the family was reunited – “a glorious day,” Paetkau writes. Two people, the grandmother and an adult



Photo: New Leaf Studio

grandson, remained in camp, however, and the family now worked to bring them to Canada as well. “On the day [the grandmother] arrived, I took her a yellow rose. The family was overwhelmed with joy at her arrival – so was I.”

Each year, at Christmas, members of the H family still come to Walter and Mabel’s house with tea and biscuits and mushrooms to say thank you. Mr. H told his children that after he died, they must continue the tradition, and they have done so. Over the years, this family has prospered. Mabel states, “They studied hard, worked hard, and learned English well. They are active in the business community, in professional work and have many mushroom farms. They are active in philanthropic efforts to assist others in need as they were assisted in their time of need.”

Along with success stories such as the above, there were also challenges. While most refugees adapted well, some became addicted to gambling, and a few turned to crime. When Paetkau considers this she reminds herself, “I very quickly have to stop the negative thinking and realize the statistics show that an extremely small percentage of crime in BC is done by Southeast Asians, and that these problems are not peculiar to, or any different than in any long-term established society.”

After Mabel Paetkau’s MCC assignment, she was appointed by the federal government as a permanent member of the Immigration and Refugee Board, working out of the Vancouver Office. One of the immigration officers who wished her well joked, “Better a devil we

² UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees): *The State of The World’s Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*. Ch. 4: “Flight from Indochina,” p. 8. www.unhcr.org/3ebf9bad0.html



Photo: New Leaf Studio

know than one we do not know!”³ The mandate of the board was “to listen and to evaluate the refugee claimants’ statements as to whether they had a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”

“The refugee sponsorship program brought together communities as only tragedy can do,” Paetkau comments. She found satisfaction in ecumenical and inter-church cooperation. Many churches became actively

³ Mabel Paetkau, Email to author, May 30, 2013.

involved, especially Chinese Mennonite (Vancouver), Eben-Ezer Mennonite and Central Heights MB, as well as Bakerview and Olivet. Some sponsors had been refugees themselves: “All [sponsors] were appreciated and did it out of the goodness of their hearts, and possibly as a way of showing their thankfulness for being accepted into Canada in their time of need.”

Social Services provided invaluable assistance, and immigration workers Adrian French, Tom Steele, Lloyd Axworthy, Tom Scott, and Russ Bleakly were “outstanding.” UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) staff person Sharon Russo

in Ottawa was also helpful. In Thailand, a “wonderful and competent” field staff consisting of the Buhlers, the Kehlers, Annie Krasker and Henry and Tina Neufeld was indispensable, as was Stuart Clark in Winnipeg. Mabel comments, “I can only thank them all for making our job in the provinces easier and credible.”

Mabel Paetkau calls the years she worked with refugees as her “most excellent job!” At the birthday celebration, it was obvious from the smiling faces, hugs, stories and songs that Mabel Paetkau’s work was very much appreciated by her large refugee family.

The Ties that Bind: Genealogy Corner

Mystery Pictures

Please contact MHS, by visit, email, or letter, if you have information about these photographs.



Sandie Massie: This picture was found in my Grandfather Hiebert’s things after he had died. On the back is written “Maternal Grandparents of Peter Nachtigall, b. 1914 in Ebenfeld, Russia. Last name of Penner.” Grandfather always said that he was a cousin to Cornelius Penner, b. 23 Aug 1893, Elisabethtal, Molotschna Colony, who ministered in the Greendale MB Church for a time. Peter Nachtigall married my Grandfather’s oldest niece, Gredel Huebert from his oldest sister, Liese Huebert (nee Hiebert). I would appreciate help sorting out these family connections.



Patricia Schmidt, Castlegar:
In this picture is my Grandfather, Peter Schmidt, from Schardau. He is the tall man in the back row, holding 2

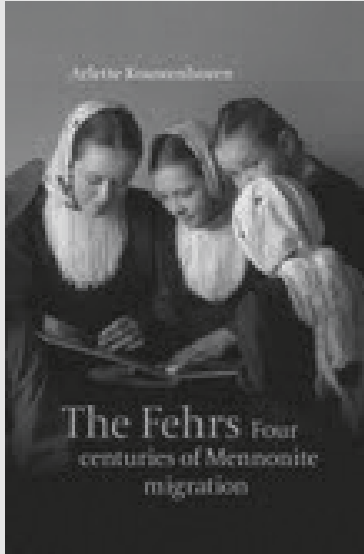
eggs. My father was born in Schardau, in 1916, and was 5 or 6 when his father was executed by the Red Army, since he was a member of the Home Guard/*Selbstschutz*. Can anyone identify the other men in the picture? Were they also from Schardau? I am looking for information about this Schmidt family, as I am trying to discover which Schmidt line my family comes from. Peter Schmidt's oldest son was executed with his father, and I have often wondered if the young man standing beside him was his son, Isaac.



The family pictured here needs identification. Their first names are given on the back, all in German, with what appear to be some birthdates. The latest date given is "Jascha 10, Juni 20, 1970." If this is a birthdate, the photo would appear to have been taken around 1980.

New Book

Arlette Kouwenhoven, an anthropologist from The Netherlands, has written a fascinating book detailing the spread of the Fehr family from Amsterdam to Danzig, southern Russia, the Canadian prairies, and Mexico and beyond. *The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration* is not just a family history; it is a study of those Mennonites who have chosen to retain the Old Flemish (Old Colony) way of life in order to practice the Mennonite faith. Furthermore, over 20% of Mennonites in the GRANDMA database can trace their ancestry back to the Fehr family progenitor, Gijsbert Jansz de Veer, so the book should be of interest to many in the Mennonite community. The book retails for \$30 and is available from the MHSBC Archives.



Katie Funk Wiebe Research Grant Awarded

June 24, 2013



Christine Kampen



Dorothy Peters

Winnipeg, Man. – Christine Kampen and Dorothy Peters are this year’s recipients of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission’s research grant. At the annual general meeting earlier this month, the Commission selected the project proposal co-authored by Kampen and Peters.

The Commission was impressed with the project design, the research question, and the potential for understanding better the particular story of Mennonite Brethren. The project title is *From Generation to Generation: The History and Transmission of the Spiritual Formation of Two Granddaughters*.

Kampen and Peters’s project studies the history of the Christian spiritual formation of two Mennonite Brethren (MB) women, one serving as a co-

pastor in an MB church (Kampen, Highland Community Church, Abbotsford, BC) and the other a writer and professor of Biblical Studies (Peters, Trinity Western University, Langley, BC).

Of special interest to Kampen and Peters is the “legacy of leadership” they received from their grandparents and parents. The study will combine oral interviews, analysis of contextual factors, and theological reflection on the process of writing a “history of spiritual formation” as MB women leaders.

“Kampen and Peters’s research will encourage us to listen to and record the living history of men and women ‘elders’ in our families and the MB Church. It honors the path Katie Funk Wiebe has taken in reminding us of the gifts both men and women can bring to the church,” says Don Isaac, Commission chair.

The \$1,500 research grant is made possible with support from the Katie Funk Wiebe fund. For more information, see www.mbhhistory.org

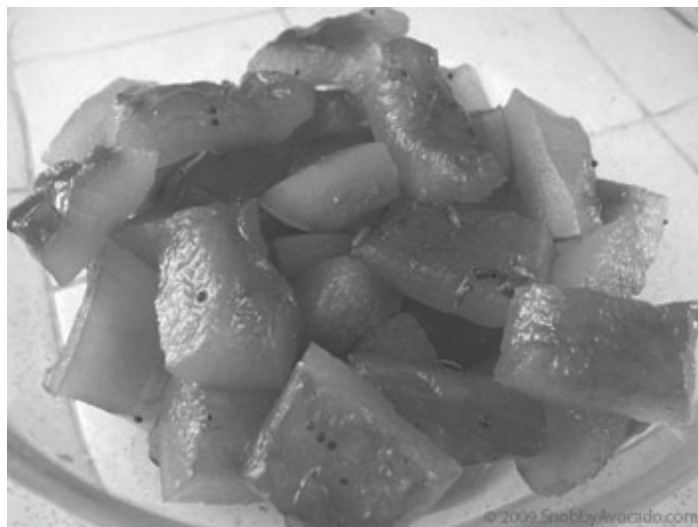
Jon Isaak, executive secretary (jisaak@mbconf.ca)

Watermelon Pickles

by Helen Rose Pauls

Friends and family joined a widowed and aging father for *faspa*. Alongside the cheese, buns and Safeway doughnuts he provided lay a saucer of watermelon pickles, a family treat in better times when their mother was still alive. But she had passed on a decade before. Relishing each bite, the son asked, “Dad, who made these delicious watermelon pickles for you?” “Your mother, of course,” was the reply, “I’ve been saving them.”

In an era when nothing was wasted, even watermelon rind was used for pickling. Numerous recipes appear in the old cookbook, *The Mennonite Treasury of Recipes*, and all call for cider vinegar and lots of sugar. Some even add cinnamon, ginger, allspice, and cloves. One, definitely a cheater, calls for red food colouring, always suspect by other Mennonite cooks.



Apparently, after the luscious red meat of the watermelon was eaten with *rollkuchen* for supper (a whole story in itself), the rinds were chopped into inch cubes, with all peel removed, and soaked in brine overnight to be canned the next day with sugar and vinegar. Or the fruity part was mashed, sieved, and boiled in the giant *Mehrgruppe* cauldron for watermelon syrup, a staple before sugar was readily available.

The sweetest watermelons flourished in the hot summers on the Ukrainian steppes, and they were enjoyed all summer long, becoming very much a part of Mennonite cooking and culture. My mother, who could grow almost anything in her garden, tried numerous times to grow this fruit to maturity in the Fraser Valley, but the unsatisfactory results became cow fodder.

Each summer, we waited for word to swirl

around our little village of Arnold – “The watermelons are in at Neumann’s store.” We would run to stare at the huge wooden box filled with stringy wood shavings that protected the ripe fruit. The storekeeper would reach in and hold up a green striped watermelon. I remember eating ten pieces at one sitting – no wonder the memory lingers!

A relative remembers a time from his childhood when he accompanied his uncle’s family to Funk’s store in Clearbrook in search of the perfect watermelon. Boxloads had just arrived and great excitement surrounded the choosing of six flawless orbs. Some customers knocked on the taut peel and listened carefully. Others played crokinole on the tight skin. His aunt even pressed a fingernail into the green outer flesh and was rewarded with a spurt of moisture. After hurrying home, my young relative eagerly helped to carry one of the ripe fruit up the 14 steep stairs of the farmhouse. He struggled and made it almost to the top of the steps, when he slipped under the load and the green elliptical ball bounced down the wooden stairs and broke open at his uncle’s feet. Two jagged red halves gaped. Picking up the remains, his uncle said, “I guess we’ll have to eat this one first.”

The following recipes for Watermelon Pickles from *The Mennonite Treasury of Recipes* are very different: one very spicy, the other, bland.

Watermelon Rind Preserve

Rind of one medium-sized watermelon

3 cups cider vinegar

6 cups sugar

4 tsp. whole cloves

4 sticks cinnamon

1 tsp. mustard seed

1 tsp. allspice berries

1 piece ginger root

Pare and cut off all green and pink portions from the watermelon rind. Cut in one inch cubes and soak overnight in salt solution of 4 tbsp. salt to 1 qt. water. Solution must cover rind. In the morning, rinse well. Cover with fresh water and cook until almost tender; drain. Make syrup of sugar, vinegar, and spices (tied loosely in a cheesecloth bag); cook 5 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes, add watermelon pieces and cook until clear and transparent. Pack boiling hot into sterilized jars and seal.

Watermelon Pickles

1 gallon watermelon, ripe or semi-ripe, peeled and cut in small pieces

1 cup vinegar

1 tbsp. salt

4 tbsp. sugar

Bring sugar to boil, then add the cut watermelon. Bring to a boil. Put a sprig of dill in each jar, and then fill with pickles. Seal.

The Mennonite Treasury of Recipes. Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1962.

How the Emerging Church Renewed My Anabaptist-Mennonite Faith

by J Janzen

Ten years ago I was in my mid-twenties and disillusioned with church. My cynicism stemmed from a combination of factors. For one, various jobs had given me opportunity to visit and work with dozens of Mennonite Brethren churches in Canada. In almost half of those congregations I heard stories of acrimonious endings to church-pastor relationships and of conflict culminating in schism. For all of the praises, prayers and preaching, there didn’t seem to be a whole lot of “peace that passeth understanding.” Despite claims that “we know the truth,” church politics didn’t look much different from what was reported on CBC television.

While I was encountering some disturbing patterns in grassroots church life, I was working as a radio producer and immersing myself in the writings of communications theorists such as Neil Postman and Quentin Schultze. Marshall McLuhan proved most significant. McLuhan’s observation – “The medium is the message” – was particularly influential. McLuhan argued that *how* we communicate has more power to shape us than *what* we communicate. Take the typical sermon as an example. The preacher might very well explain that Christians are to love others, and that Christians must live out their faith seven days a week – one’s faith must move from head to heart and hands. Yet because there is little to no space provided

for interaction with others, one doesn't learn how to ask good questions or listen well – skills that are crucial when it comes to loving others. And because the sermon doesn't allow for questions or discussion about how the ordinary issues of life might be understood in the light of Scripture, the sermon simply remains an idea – something we just think about in our heads. In that way, sermons shape people to think that faith in Jesus can be experienced alone and in private, as something theoretical with little connection to everyday life.

Looking at church through the lenses McLuhan provided, I had growing concerns that what the church *did* undermined what it *said*. What bothered me most was that most Christians I knew seemed content to keep on with the status quo; they didn't seem to recognize that the medium was short-circuiting the message.

The message of salvation I heard on a typical Sunday morning was a third element that left me disenchanted with the church. Conversion – as it was generally presented – was about getting my soul into heaven. Assuming that was the case, I questioned the need for church. If accepting Jesus as “my personal Saviour” was the primary goal, then why was church necessary once the prayer was prayed? If faith was primarily about me and God, then meeting with others to cultivate that relationship was nonessential.

Furthermore, if church was simply intended to get others to come to church so they could be saved, then why did the church insist on meeting on Sunday mornings, and singing hymns, and having 45-minute sermons on the book of Ruth – times, music and topics that were ill-suited to reach “the lost”? Besides which, weren't crusades and para-church ministries more effective at the task of evangelism? Why meet weekly just to feel guilty about how far short we fall in our efforts to see people saved? In sum, the standard definition of the mission of the church rendered the church irrelevant.

In the midst of this questioning, Brian McLaren's book, *A New Kind of Christian*, crossed my path. It was a simple story that put into words many of the questions I was feeling. More importantly, McLaren's story introduced me to a larger, ongoing conversation – what commentators have called the “emerging” church. To my relief, I discovered that others shared my ambivalence about church. Better yet, I discovered that others were pursuing constructive courses of action when it comes to modes of Christian worship, evangelism, and Christian community.¹

For the sake of clarity, it's important to note that

¹ Scott McKnight wrote one of the best overviews of the emerging/emergent church movement in 2005 in a 4-part series of blog posts: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2005/10/31>

the emerging church is a movement that includes Christians from a wide range of denominational and theological backgrounds primarily in Western Europe, North America and the South Pacific. The emerging church takes various forms – some groups are independent house churches, while others meet as more traditional congregations that are part of established Christian denominations. It's important to note that emerging churches are often distinct from the “emergent movement,” which tends to have an additional interest in theological revision.²

What I found particularly surprising was that the emerging church borrowed heavily from Anabaptism. In fact, it was via the emerging church that I found myself with a deeper appreciation of Anabaptist-Mennonite convictions and a reinvigorated commitment to the church. One of the most appealing features of the emerging movement is the prevailing spirit of generosity.³ Emerging writers insist that a biblical view of human nature and sin requires humility on the part of Christians. Because we are limited and finite and because we get things wrong, emerging church leaders state that there is always more to learn as we journey with Jesus.⁴

As a result of this call to generosity, emerging churches tend to shy away from hierarchy. Instead of a top-down approach in which the elders (or board, or council) set the agenda and everyone else follows, or the pastor has the last word when it comes to biblical interpretation, emerging church leaders insist on empowering *everybody* for ministry. Emerging leaders claim that as Christians listen to one another, a deeper understanding of the Way, the Truth and the Life will be experienced *together*. It didn't take long for me to recognize that this ethos imitates the Anabaptist community hermeneutic – studying the Bible together in the belief that God speaks in and through the church when Christians gather around Scripture.

A second feature that resonates with Anabaptist values was the emerging movement's emphasis on praxis. For emerging leaders, church is not something that takes place on Sunday morning. That may be the time when the church worships together, but the work of the church occurs during the week at home, in the neighbourhood, on the job.

² See “Emerging Church trend expands, diversifies,” http://www.religionlink.com/tip_060410.php (accessed September 24, 2012).

³ To be clear, emergent leaders are critical of various western Christian practices. At times their provocative rhetoric can be divisive. See Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today* (February 2007) 51.

⁴ Some critics of the emergent movement have interpreted this posture to mean that truth is completely unknowable. They have characterized the emergent movement as being “revisionist” or “unbiblical”. (See Ed Stetzer, “First-Person: Understanding the emerging church,” *Baptist Press* (January 6, 2006). I have not encountered that sentiment in the emergent authors I have read.

Instead of “bringing people to church,” the church goes to the people, where the church proclaims Jesus through *performance*. The high value placed on a *lived theology* echoes the Anabaptist claim that an inward change should be expressed in outward holiness. What is important for Anabaptists holds true for emerging leaders as well: behaving like Jesus outweighs one’s theological beliefs.

Tied to the emerging emphasis on praxis is the belief that salvation requires community. The emerging church clarified for me that salvation entails relationship with God and others. Instead of an individual with tract in hand explaining salvation, the church community demonstrates salvation for others to see as Christians love one another. In that sense, simply working at being a group of people that get along with one another blesses the world as it models grace and love and forgiveness. On the basis of this commitment to community, emerging churches take a variety of forms including house churches and intentional communities – many of which bring to mind Hutterite colonies that hold possessions in common, and the fire insurance, orphan funds, and barn raisings that Mennonite congregations provided in the past.

Rediscovering these aspects of my Anabaptist-Mennonite convictions through the emerging church didn’t completely address all of my concerns. For instance, the emerging church borrows from Catholic and Orthodox traditions to create multi-sensory worship that is more interactive, so that instead of being told about prayer, people learn to pray by praying. This participatory aspect of worship has been largely absent in Anabaptist-Mennonite experience. Similarly, the emerging church draws on the work of Irenaeus, Gustav Aulen, Lesslie Newbigin, and N. T. Wright to articulate a theology of salvation in which God will save the whole world, so that any Kingdom good done on earth here and now will somehow last into eternity. Anabaptist-Mennonites have generally lacked this here-and-now sense of salvation that hopefully affirms the goodness

found in creation and culture.⁵

At the same time, not everything about the emerging church is perfect. Emerging church leaders have questioned the we’re-right-and-you’re-wrong approach to evangelism that typifies evangelical Christianity. Instead of an “in or out” mentality, emerging church leaders have tended to adopt the healthy posture: “This is what I believe. What do you think? Let’s talk.” Unfortunately, in rethinking evangelism, some emerging Christians shy away from proclamation. They affirm the truth and wisdom in other worldviews (nothing wrong with that to be sure!), but they stop short of inviting people to confess Jesus as Lord.

Nevertheless, my emerging-influenced reengagement with Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and practice fuelled a deeper commitment to the church – so much so that I now find myself a pastor of a Mennonite Brethren congregation. When the church invited me to be their pastor, I said yes because I believed that God spoke through the gathered community. When there is disagreement in our church community, I make a point of reminding myself and others that none of us has a monopoly on the truth, and that we will hear God speaking to us as we listen to one another. And over the past five years, I’ve seen newcomers and longtime members experience salvation as we do our best to simply be a church that loves one another.

At times I find it hard to believe how involved I am in the church. Yet given what I’ve learned about God in the company of the emerging church, it now seems hardly surprising.

J Janzen shares pastoral duties at Highland Community Church in Abbotsford.

⁵ My friend David Warkentin has written about convictions and practices that Mennonite Brethren share with the emergent church. I resonate with much of what he says. See “Adapting Faith in a Changing Culture,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (July 2011) 50, no. 7.

Book Reviews

Neufeld, Henry. *In This Place: A Memoir*. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2012. 148 pp.

by Robert Martens

The underlying theme of Henry Neufeld’s memoir, *In This Place*, is the rootlessness so common on a global scale. Whether it be immigrants searching for a better life, refugees displaced by war or famine, or simply the high mobility among citizens of the Western

world, a sense of place and home seems to be slipping away from many of us. “The quest for place is common; a destination, an Eden, is sought and yet paradise is always elusive,” writes Neufeld in his introduction (xiii). The author writes, interestingly, from the perspective

of a second generation Russian Mennonite immigrant: this book is not a story of personal exile: “What effect did leaving Ukraine on a few hours notice have on my parents? Any major moves I’ve made have been planned in advance; I’ve not experienced the traumatic disruption of having to leave on short notice” (xii). Yet Henry Neufeld has frequently taken risky moves, leaving the “comfort zones” of home and community, and his life was consequently marked by both the rewards and losses of those choices. He concludes that home must be safeguarded within us: “John Milton recognizes this loss [of place] in *Paradise Lost* when the angel assures Adam that though he may no longer reside in Eden he shall possess a happier paradise within his heart; one he can carry wherever he goes” (xi).

Neufeld was born in 1937 in Manitoba but spent much of his youth in the Fraser Valley. Although his early life seems to have been reasonably happy, Neufeld felt stifled by the constraints of the ethnic religious community: “Our proximity to the English speaking majority – most of my classmates in elementary and junior high were non-Mennonites – the subtle message was that other religious groups didn’t measure up” (9). In 1957 Neufeld cut his home ties and signed up for a brief term with MCC in Bethesda, Maryland. When he returned to the Fraser Valley, he no longer felt at home in his former community. Neufeld soon married Tena Suderman, and the couple eked out a meagre existence while Henry studied social work at UBC.

Neufeld started his career as a social worker in Saskatoon, where he and Tena felt somewhat isolated. Here he shocked some pastors by developing a rating system for local churches. Throughout his life, Neufeld would in fact butt heads with the establishment, showing little patience for the hypocrisies of power, but his anger was leavened again and again by his conciliatory sense of humour. (The book is good evidence of this with numerous quotations such as Bertrand Russell’s: “One of the symptoms of an approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one’s work is terribly important” (28).) In 1968 the Neufelds moved to Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, where Henry worked for the Children’s Aid Society. Here he pioneered the reuniting of adopted children with their birth parents. He also, out of frustration with what he perceived as rigid thinking in local churches, partnered in establishing the Portage Mennonite Church.

In 1985 the Neufelds took the risky move of leaving home and career for a stint in a refugee camp in Thailand. It was a huge learning experience. “Some people and some countries profit financially from refugees,” Neufeld writes. “[Refugee camps]

foster dependence and lethargy. Camps train people in helplessness” (51). The Neufelds’ stay in Thailand was marked by a traumatic incident: the suicide of a young male refugee who, in Henry’s opinion, was badly misused by indifferent Canadian immigration bureaucrats.

Upon their return, the Neufelds were shocked when Henry was offered a five year appointment with the Immigration and Refugee Board in Vancouver. Once again they pulled up stakes and moved on. He writes, “I faced an ethical dilemma early in this job: Tena and I had just come from Thailand where we saw thousands in refugee camps with no prospect of returning home or resettlement anywhere. Now in Canada I spent hours (sometimes days) deciding one case. This seemed a badly skewed system” (83). Tensions increased when Neufeld was vilified by the press for supposedly rejecting too many refugee claimants. After his five year term expired, the government refused to reappoint him; Neufeld spent the final years of his career as a social worker in Vancouver.

In This Place ends with an appendix of original documents, including several of Neufeld’s sermons. His homilies are provocative and thoughtful:

In this world there are three scarce resources for which everyone is competing; power, wealth and status. Jesus never sought the three resources.... (97)

The sense of belonging, the growth of a new community, an atmosphere of caring, does not just happen. It occurs when people have time for each other, when we stop talking (as I will very soon) and start listening to each other. (98)

Jesus tells us to become like children – he calls us to babyhood. Citizens of the kingdom will be like children. He calls us to flatten out the hierarchies and organization charts and forget them and ignore them as children do. (99)

Where are the prophets? Are they hiding in seminaries afraid to emerge lest the congregation run them out of town? (101)

The early Anabaptists had it right when they viewed the church as one priestly nation in which there could be no distinctions between members and clergy – each member assumes responsibility for the work of the Lord in the church and in the world. ... In the kingdom we work together, not

as lone rangers. (106)

The Bible is not a rulebook; it speaks to a lot of issues, but not in a rulebook sort of way. ... We haggle over little stuff while love goes ungiven. Love is the identity marker of Christians. ... Everyone who loves is a child of God and loves God. (109)

Henry Neufeld's sermons sometimes seem more revealing of the man than his own memoir. A collection of his talks would be an interesting read.

In This Place can be purchased at the Mennonite Historical Society office.

Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine (1922-1927), Mennonite and Soviet Documents. Edited by John B. Toews and Paul Toews and translated by John B. Toews, Walter Regehr and Olga Shmakina. Fresno, CA: Center of Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2011.

by guest writer Harvey Dyck

This excellent volume of sources translated from the German and Russian should attract a wide readership of Mennonites and others interested in the Soviet Mennonite story during the 1920s. It was a time when Mennonites emerged shell-shocked from the terror-filled civil war of 1919 to 1921, briefly regained their voice, and then set about desperately to chart a future course for themselves. To spearhead the rebuilding of and adaptation of ravaged villages to changing economic and ideological times, Mennonites in 1922, with grudging Soviet state support, founded a purely Mennonite institution, "The Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine."

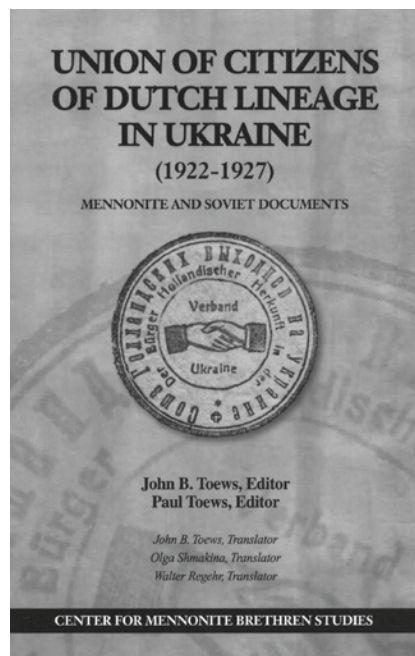
The Union, a state-chartered producer and consumer cooperative, was popularly known as the *Menno Verband*. Chaired by the astute and devoted Benjamin Jantz and restricted in its membership to Mennonites, it had representatives in each village. Until it was harshly liquidated by authorities in 1927, it functioned through sub-committees, annual congresses and regional administrations. During its prime the *Verband* played a prominent role in the shaping of all facets of Mennonite public life and commanded the loyalty of the vast majority of Mennonites. The large number of documents in this volume witness to the Soviet preoccupation, indeed obsession, with the *Verband* and the tiny ethno-cultural minority of Mennonites that it served.

Among its many functions, the *Verband* pioneered and organized the early stages of what would become the immigration to Canada of about a fifth of all Soviet Mennonites. This dramatic, consequential and largely successful initiative was seen by Soviet officials as an act of gross disloyalty on the part of the Soviet Mennonite community. At the same time, the *Verband* tried to carve out a future for those Mennonites who voluntarily or of necessity remained behind in the Soviet Union. Supplying clinics with medical supplies and village teachers with food, it established networks of stores that had vanished

in Mennonite villages. To diversify and intensify agriculture for farmers who had been divested of fully half their land, it pushed for the development of pork, cow-calf, dairy and butter operations. These would become models of cooperative enterprise and sources of considerable income.

During its heyday, the *Verband* even extended its reach into post-secondary education, founding and subsidizing the operations of several short-lived schools of agriculture. Of longer endurance, it created and ran oil presses, grist and flour mills. However, what aroused the particular ire of state and Party officials at all levels to the top of the Communist hierarchy in Kiev and Moscow were *Verband* initiatives to negotiate broader "political" matters

with the regime collectively on behalf of all Mennonites. Among them were such hotly contested issues as the



distribution of land, alternative service for conscientious objectors, and prohibitions on the teaching of religion to children and youth. The overall *Verband* objective, pursued with great courage, was, as best possible, to wall off Mennonite society from Communist ideological penetration.

Eventually, Soviet leaders, obsessed with the relative success of the *Verband* in obstructing the “sovietization” of Mennonite society, became deeply troubled that this achievement might embolden other ethnic and ethno-religious groups to follow the Mennonite lead. They concluded that the *Verband* was fundamentally a religious organization “masquerading” as a cooperative. This analysis led to the momentous decision by senior state and Party organs – reaching all the way to Kiev and Moscow – to liquidate the *Verband* in root and branch, a decision executed with great severity in 1927.

This action had a tragic sequel. In 1933, a period beyond the chronological limits of this book, the Soviet secret police, in a first wave of arrests of Mennonites, apprehended around 100 onetime Mennonite leaders, the bulk of whom had played active roles in the *Verband*. Brutally interrogated over many months, most were forced to falsely confess that the *Verband* had gone underground after its liquidation and was now conspiring with German fascism in support of its plans to conquer the Soviet Union. Virtually all arrestees were sentenced to long periods at hard labour in the Gulag from which most never returned.

The novelty and value of this collection is its breadth and bifocal Mennonite and Soviet perspective. Three quarters of documents in this book are in German and of Mennonite origin; one quarter are in Russian, and of Soviet origin. Emeritus professor John B. Toews, a distinguished historian of the Russian and Soviet Mennonite experience, has compiled, edited and translated the German-language documents of this volume (Walter Regehr helped with translations). Over a period of many years, Professor Toews scoured private and public archives in Germany, Canada and the United States in search of the key German sources published in this volume. His arresting finds consist of often dramatic and poignant letters, memoirs, reports, minutes of meetings, *Verband* congresses and much else.

The Soviet documents, compiled and edited by Paul Toews and translated by Olga Shmakina, are similarly revealing. Olga Shmakina, an accomplished interpreter and translator for Intourist, and familiar to Mennonite tour groups in Ukraine, is experienced in the use of Soviet archives. Paul Toews, a prominent historian of American Mennonite history and a popular lecturer on Mennonite-related themes on bus and river tours in Ukraine, broadened

his interests and passion to embrace the Soviet Mennonite experience which he also studied in Soviet archives. Often frank and routinely marked “secret,” these Soviet sources consist chiefly of correspondence, minutes of meetings, and memoranda of Soviet state and Party officials, some at logger-heads with one another about how to manage the “Mennonite problem.” A number of sources are copies of documents found in central Soviet archives, but the bulk have been taken from a volume of sources on the *Verband* compiled and edited by V.I. Marochko, a member of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences and a specialist on the history of Soviet Ukrainian cooperatives. Regrettably, missing in this volume are key documents from the Zaporozhe State Archive (in which Marochko never worked), contained in a large microfilm collection readily accessible through the BC Mennonite Historical Society.

The invaluable sources in this collection are well organized in eight sections that follow a handful of key subjects: the turmoil and chance encounters that surrounded the founding of the *Verband*; the establishment of the *Verband*; the work of the organization as reflected in the revealing minutes of its congresses; Soviet perspectives on the origins and work of the *Verband*; the forcible integration of the *Verband* and its affiliates into the Soviet cooperative network in 1926-1927; and the role of the *Verband* in the emigration of large numbers of Soviet Mennonites.

Given the *Verband*'s sorry end, the reader might well ask whether its founders had not been on a predictably suicidal course from the beginning. Why then had they persisted? In their defence one might well argue that in 1922, and through until the late 1920s, the future of the Soviet Union was still anything but certain. The USSR's position within the world seemed in doubt and Soviet leaders, in sharp conflict with one another, pursued conflicting objectives. Under these conditions, many *Verband* leaders may well have thought that their mission was to bravely keep Communist influence at bay while keeping open the future for themselves and their ethno-religious community until such time as the Soviet Union collapsed or the Soviet leadership fundamentally moderated its ideology and programs. The observer might well keep this question in mind while reading these intriguing documents.

Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage in Ukraine can be purchased at the office of the Mennonite Historical Society.

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Jantzen, Mark. *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion, and Family in the Prussian East, 1772-1880*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. 370 pp.

In 1814, Karl August von Hardenberg, Prussia's chief minister, remarked on the reluctance of German Mennonites to participate in the military. "One can expect," he wrote, "that both the Rhineland and Prussian Mennonites will eventually realize the error and inhumanity of their principles, in part as the older generation which has the stronger conscience on this issue dies out, in part as their own preachers become convinced of the need for improvement..." (94). Hardenberg's prediction was correct, although the process perhaps took longer than he imagined. Over the period of a hundred years, German Mennonites gradually relinquished their opposition to military involvement. It was a protracted exercise of "push and pull," in which nationalism was both imposed from above and desired from below. There were deep divisions both among the Mennonites and in government on the issue. At the heart of the matter was the rise of the German state, of democracy and individual rights – but also of war, which was equated with the new order. By 1888, Mennonites declared that their "love of the fatherland is as holy a feeling as for any other German" (15).

The history of Russian Mennonites has been thoroughly documented, but the story of those who remained behind in Germany is less well known. In his meticulously researched book, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, Mark Jantzen does a superb job of filling the gap. When the first Polish Partition took place in 1772, Mennonites formerly living under Polish authority suddenly found themselves under the jurisdiction of an incipient Prussian state that prioritized the military. Many Mennonites chose to emigrate to Russia at the invitation of Catherine the Great. Some, however, stayed behind, choosing to argue for military exemption in their homeland. It would be a difficult and complex struggle. A Charter of Privileges was granted to Mennonites in 1780, but military exemption was coupled with severe property restrictions. A religiously intolerant state was using a carrot and stick approach: the implication was that service in the military would result in the lifting of property restrictions.

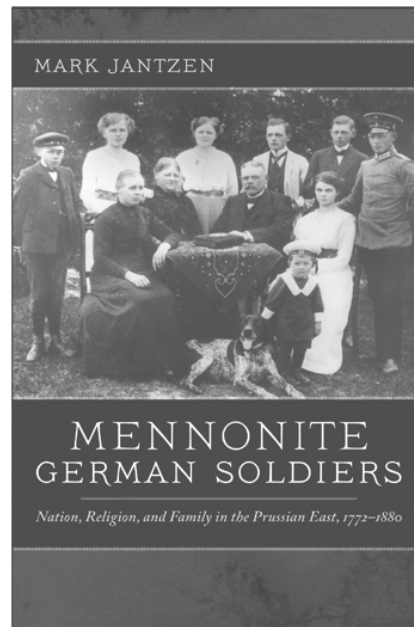
The push and pull continued over decades, and initially Mennonite elders, who negotiated for

their community, were enormously empowered. In the momentous Edict of 1789, provisions for the Mennonite "sect" took precedence over general law. Military exemption was permitted only if a communal tax were

paid to the authorities. Children of mixed marriages were not allowed to be raised as Mennonite. Mennonites were prohibited from purchasing non-Mennonite properties. Taxes to the official Lutheran Church were enforced. The Declaration of 1801 then made the choice for Mennonites explicit: either join the military, or face restrictions on property. It was a choice between increasing poverty or increasing enlistment. The most bigoted government representatives considered Mennonites "apostate," and considered that the state would lose nothing if these "sectarians" chose to emigrate, as they "belong together with Jews to the unique group of persons who live without working" (76).

Then the Napoleonic wars intervened, and a catastrophic Prussian defeat by the French. Popular support for the state and the military was quickly coalescing, and Mennonites felt the pressure. Nonetheless, many of the elders stood firm, even as the French threat was only miles away. Jantzen writes, "The Mennonite theology on display here, although deeply offensive to their neighbours, was no abstraction and directly challenged the massive appeals being made to convince men to accept military service" (97). The surrender of Napoleon and restoration of the Prussian monarchy did not, however, decrease the pressure on Mennonites to conform. This was the time of a new nation, a cohering German identity, a nation at arms. A newspaper editorialized that "[a]lthough the teaching of the Mennonites is not anti-biblical, it is definitely *anti-Prussian*" (105). Liberal reform, with its ideals of democracy and individual responsibility, was also fiercely militaristic. Mennonites preferred to deal with the old system in which a king made personal decisions based on petitions of communities or estates; political conservatives, in their battle with liberals, often strategically supported Mennonites in their struggles for exemption.

The next decades saw gradual Mennonite capitulation. In 1826 a law was passed in which military exemption was granted on the basis of income tax; this



sharply decreased the power of Mennonite elders, who had previously collected a tax communally. Younger Mennonites, increasingly individualized, yearned for increased participation in the greater Prussian society, and by 1830 most of the sharp Mennonite distinctives had nearly disappeared. In fact, the congregation at Krefeld in western Prussia had long been leading the way towards mainstream integration. Mennonites there had developed a booming cloth industry, and the immensely rich von der Leyen family was at the forefront. Well before the Napoleonic wars, the Krefeld church had dropped its opposition to military service, intermarriage, and the oath, and no longer practised the ban. When the provincial government there imposed specific oath restrictions on Mennonites, one of the van der Leyens complained to the State Ministry that the law “was a decisive step toward separating Mennonites from the bourgeoisie and making them equal to the Jews” (112).

Integration with the state seemed unstoppable. Soon the first salaried Mennonite ministers made their appearance. Education was being used as a state tool for mass mobilization. Mennonites were also cooperating with mainstream Protestants, particularly neopietists, in missions projects, acculturating them even further. In the 1840s a prominent Rhineland liberal, Hermann von Beckerath, vociferously attacked the notion of Mennonite privilege; ironically, he was himself a Mennonite. Beckerath prioritized the nation over religion, describing nationalism as a spiritual force. For Mennonites, writes Jantzen, “[r]eligious feeling directed toward the nation was an important element of nationalism’s appeal” (151). Other liberal Mennonites led the way, notably Carl Harder, who denounced ritual as stale tradition and downplayed the significance of nonresistance, and Wilhelm Mannhardt, who glorified the emerging Reich with his study of German folk tales.

Mennonites had grown prosperous, and the young were restless. During the rise of the consummate politician and eventual chancellor Bismarck, the warlike German state became an integral part of the new way of life. When in 1867 military exemption was finally universally denied,

there was little dissent from the majority of Mennonites. A few stragglers emigrated to the United States, and those who continued to petition for special dispensations from government pledged that they were willing to serve in the military as noncombatants. Many Mennonites now became “vocal supporters of Prussia during the subsequent war with France” (232). In the 1880s a stage production of *Der Mennonit*, a play by the then renowned (and now forgotten) Ernst von Wildenbruch, was mounted in Berlin. The play cast Mennonites as villains, traitors to the ideals of defence, nation, and purity. The Mennonite reaction was to proclaim Mennonite patriotism and attempt to block the production from being performed.

“During the 1870s,” writes Jantzen, “the hundred-year project of the Prussian state to create Mennonite soldiers was brought to a successful conclusion... [T]he sense of relief and satisfaction at finally being allowed into the German nation was palpable” (247). In 1879 the Mennonite congregation at Fürstenwerder applied for corporation rights, affirming that although “every war is a great evil that results from sin,” it was now a Christian duty to defend the preservation of the state (249). When the Danzig congregation applied for corporation rights just a few years later in 1886, it made similar statements but downgraded war to a “terrible misfortune” (250). Yet some ambivalence lingered. Mennonites still perceived themselves as a distinct community dedicated to adult baptism, separation of church and state, refusal of the oath, and localized authority based on decisions by free believers. And when the great writer Theodor Fontane wrote his novel *Quitt*, he used Mennonite characters as ideal types symbolizing simplicity, order, and peace. Mennonites had integrated, but the alliance was uneasy. The German state never adapted well to minorities in its midst. The perception endured of Mennonites, and of other minority groups, as alien to the nation.

Mennonite German Soldiers is available for purchase at the Mennonite Historical Society Archives.

Alternate Readings:

The Mary Martha *Maedchenheim*

by Sandra Borger

The first great wave of Russian Mennonite refugees, that of the 1920s, was followed by a second, immediately after the Second World War. With the help of the Canadian

Mennonite Board of Colonization, about 22,000 arrived in Canada after the Russian Revolution of 1917; and close to 6000 Mennonites immigrated to Canada from Russia

between 1947 and 1949, escaping Stalin’s terror and the chaos of World War II. The two waves of refugees had much in common. In British Columbia, the key destinations were Yarrow, Chilliwack and Abbotsford, as they were located far from the “evils” of the city and conducive to recreating the agrarian lifestyle left behind in Russia. For most of these families, the joy of a peaceful new home was tainted by the burden of a significant travel debt known as the *Reiseschuld* – as it was known to the 1920s immigrants, who arrived just in time for the Great Depression – as well as the debt owed to their Canadian sponsors, an obligation more common for the post-World War II wave. And among the latter, most families had lost fathers and husbands during the war and were unable to make do and also repay their loans with the work available to them in the Fraser Valley. In order to fulfil their obligations, parents had no choice but to send their daughters into the big city. It was widely known that in Vancouver, the employment of a Mennonite domestic was “virtually guaranteed” (Derksen 121). According to an article in the General Conference (GC) newspaper, *Der Bote*, “The demand for our girls is often greater than the supply” (Thiessen 1). However, this financial opportunity quickly prompted a new crisis for the Mennonite community of the Fraser Valley.

As Mennonite author Andreas Schroeder notes, “Both family and church were solidly patriarchal. [Through biblical examples] the man was the undisputed head of his household” (14). With the removal of these young women from their community, there was great fear amongst church leaders that without male guidance in all things, Mennonite domestics would fall off the “straight and narrow pathway to Heaven,” and slide straight onto the “broad highway to Hell, and the everlasting fire” (Reimer 53). One interviewee recalled that her father “was reluctant to let me go to that wicked

city.” There was a profound contradiction, then, between a worldview that saw females as highly vulnerable, and the decision to send Mennonite daughters from the Fraser Valley to work in Vancouver, where they would be exposed to worldly sins and all the city’s temptations. It seemed impossible for the church or for fathers to extend their

continuous influence over such a distance on a regular basis. In addition, many Mennonite maids had no living father at all, which worried church leaders even more, as these young women no longer had a father-figure constantly upholding religiously-based norms. There was further concern regarding the community’s cohesion and continuation, as the girls’ participation in the paid work force might tempt them to remain in the workplace, or a non-

Mennonite male might seduce a Mennonite woman. How could the community possibly deal with such tensions?

To watch over these young, vulnerable women, the General Conference Mennonite Church established a *Maedchenheim*, or Girls’ Home, in Vancouver. With the organizational assistance of the British Columbia Home Mission Board and funding support provided by the US Missions Board, the Mary Martha Girls’ Home was established in 1935 in a temporary location in Kerrisdale.



Daughters in the City

Mennonite Maids in Vancouver, 1931-61

RUTH DERKSEN SIEMENS

Photo courtesy of Ruth Derksen Siemens



Photo courtesy of Ruth Derksen Siemens

By 1937, a small church with an adjacent home was purchased at 6460 St. George Street. The purpose of this home was two-fold: to monitor the maids' well-being and security in the homes of employers through the guidance and expertise of its matrons, and to extend the community's ethnoreligious norms into the city.

The *Maedchenheim* was located next door to the GC's first Vancouver-based church. This allowed constant contact between the young women of the Girls' Home and the spiritual guidance of male church elders. Girls' Home matrons provided opportunities for religiously appropriate, low-key pastimes, such as knitting, crocheting, singing and the creation of religious plays. Mennonite directors recommended that parents "advise their daughters to take part as much as possible in the programs at the homes on the Sundays and Thursdays [the maids' day off]" (Toews 2). In the eyes of the General Conference, the Mary Martha Girls' Home provided Mennonite domestic workers with a stable spiritual environment during their time away from the community.

For the young women who went to work in Vancouver during the postwar period (1948-mid 1950s), the Mary Martha Girl's Home served a very different purpose. The Girls' Home provided a welcome escape from the harsh realities of a difficult lifestyle; these young women worked strenuous jobs in strange homes filled with an unfamiliar language, far away from the love and support of their families. The *Maedchenheim* was a place where young women could "relax and let go of all anxiety, and forget about work, as if we are in a different world." One interviewee remarked, "After all, we were just teenagers, and we had to live this very serious life; we had no outlet for being teenagers whatsoever. So when we got there it was fun." Some of the maids were quite young, and in their short years they had already survived the war, the trek and immigration. At the home, the young women could be themselves: "We giggled a lot," remembered one domestic.

The Mary Martha Girls' Home was also a place of learning; a place where maids could gather together and share stories of new skills and new language. One domestic explained, "We had a very small place at home. I had never seen a vacuum cleaner or a floor polisher or anything like that. And here I was supposed to be cleaning people's houses and I didn't even know how to use them. . . . So the lady had to show me how to work these things first; it was the first time I had used them. The floor polisher wanted to take off on me!" The girls were able to meet up at the *Maedchenheim* on their days off and share their experiences, teaching each other how to work with their employers' appliances.

Furthermore, many of the Mennonite domestics

who worked in Vancouver did not speak English upon their arrival. There were no ESL classes or night school opportunities for these immigrants; rather, they were tossed into a sea of English and forced to learn the language as they worked. "I wanted a pair of boots with a zipper," remembered one maid. "So I go [to the saleslady], 'Slipper zipper, slipper zipper.'" So she brought out slippers. I got so frustrated. I told a friend of mine about it. She says, 'But those are slippers. Those are house shoes, not boots.' I never went back to the store again, I was so embarrassed!" The *Maedchenheim* was like a haven, where the girls were able to release their tongues from their employers' language, while at the same time teaching one another new English words and phrases.

In the end, the General Conference Mennonite Church fulfilled its mandate, as the Mary Martha Girls' Home seems to have been a motivating factor in pushing girls towards the life their community expected of them. The women's experiences showed them that they were capable of maneuvering about the city, learning a new language, and participating in the paid work force; yet most of the women interviewed for this project decided to rejoin the Mennonite community in the Fraser Valley, get married, have children, and remain in the home as full-time mothers and wives. When asked about the role of faith in her life, one interviewee stated, "I would think that [faith] played a part in it, that's what girls did. Most girls, I would say 99% of females would prefer to be married and have children and raise a family." She reflected on her role as a mother as the only plausible route: "I think that's what we all thought life was all about. We didn't think a career or going to school was much of an option." Even though they worked in the homes of upper- and middle-class women and were exposed to the temptations of the city, their constant affiliation with the *Maedchenheim* and young women from their own ethno-religious background may have kept these new ideas from taking root.

However, it should be said that when interviewees speak of their time working in the city and their return to the Fraser Valley, they do so with joy. They do not necessarily feel that the *Maedchenheim* was the driving force behind their decision to become wives and mothers; rather, their time in the city was seen as a necessary, but temporary stage in their lives. "In the fifties and sixties it was just one wedding after another, and then there were soon baby carriages lining up along Fraser Street," remembers one interviewee. "And they were all just so proud to have their own home." Ultimately, Mennonite domestics worked in their employers' homes, took care of their families and waited for the time when they could leave to start lives of their own: "The babies and the children; yes, that was the

happiest time.”

Sandra Borger has a Master's Degree in History from Simon Fraser University.

The book, *Daughters in the City: Mennonite Maids in Vancouver, 1931-1961*, by Ruth Derksen Siemens with Sandra Borger, chronicles the stories of the young women in both the Mary Martha Girls' Home and the Bethel Home (its MB counterpart). Books are available at the MHS office, on the website, www.daughtersinthecity.com, and by email, info@daughtersinthecity.com. They will also be available at the MHS banquet on September 21, 2013, when they can be signed by Ruth.

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A Casual Meeting in Courtenay

by Rudy Friesen, Denman Island

Some years ago my wife and I were shopping in the Driftwood Mall in Courtenay. We engaged one gentleman, a complete stranger to us, who had his work on display in the mall, and discussed buying a pine storage chest. We ended the conversation by asking him for a business card which he gave to us. Ellen, my wife, looked at it and saw the name Dave Derksen. She couldn't help commenting that it looked like a Mennonite name and stated that her husband was also a Mennonite. I introduced myself and we began comparing a few details about our origins.

Since I had never met this man before, who was perhaps fifteen years my senior, I asked him where he was from. It turned out that he was from Brandon, Manitoba. I mentioned to him that my father's oldest brother had lived near Brandon in the small farming community of Alexander. "Well," he replied, "I actually grew up in Alexander and there was only one Friesen family in town."

As it turned out he had gone to school with my cousins in both elementary school and high school.

We continued our conversation and discovered the following:

1. While he had gone to school with my cousins in southern Manitoba, it turned out that I had gone to school with his cousin in southern Ontario;
2. Furthermore, his brother Walter had married my cousin and my brother Walter had married his cousin; and
3. As if this wasn't enough, he pointed out that his aunt had married my dad's cousin.

A casual conversation with a complete stranger in a mall on Vancouver Island had resulted in all of the above connections. We did buy the pine chest.

Letting Loose in the Archives: An Intern's Tale

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada news release

June 19, 2013

By Ellen Paulley

Winnipeg, Man. – It was designed so that “a young person [could] let loose in the archives, explore, and have fun,” says Jon Isaak about the first MB Historical

Commission Archival Internship. Intern Amanda Bartel of Iowa City, Iowa has done just that. She's “done a marvelous job of engaging the material,” says Isaak,



Amanda spent several days working in the MHSBC office in June

Executive Secretary of the MB Historical Commission.

Bartel, a history student at Bluffton University in Ohio, says she's "always had an interest in history" and initially thought she would like to study archaeology. Her career aspirations changed after a high school class resulted in accepting an opportunity to job shadow an archivist. Bartel says of the opportunity, "It was kind of similar to what I was thinking and maybe this will open a whole other door. Maybe I will actually do this for the rest of my life."

The goal of the five-week internship is to provide a college student with practical archival experience at each of the four MB archival institutions in North America. Bartel spent time at the Centers for MB Studies in both Hillsboro, Kan., and Fresno, Calif., the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia in Abbotsford, B.C., and the Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg, Man.

Bartel restored papers, some covered in mould; sorted and organized donated documents; updated a visual inventory; and inputted data into archival systems.

The work of the archival centres is connected to the mission of the church in a broad sense, explains Isaak. The stories collected are about "gathering [the] people of God, restoring hope, and [God] freeing them from various bondages. Archives is a repository of these congregations and people who have tried to be faithful," he says.

The research topic for the internship was left flexible, open to the interests of the student. Bartel was interested in missionary stories since members of her family were connected with the Mennonite mission field in China in the mid-twentieth century.

She tracked the stories of missionaries at each of the different archives. One such story is of Paul Wiebe, a fellow church member at First Mennonite in Iowa City, Iowa. In Hillsboro, Bartel found photos of a young Wiebe and his family from the time when they were missionaries in India. She scanned some of these photos and sent them to Wiebe's daughter, who hadn't been aware of them.

When asked what she'll remember most about her internship, Bartel says, "The thing I'm going to take away most is the people I've met. It's just been really fun to meet everyone and figure out what they're doing and see what their different jobs are."

The MB Historical Commission will be hosting the internship again next year. The enthusiasm and spirit with which Bartel approached her work has been encouraging to Isaak. "She's been a bright light ready to go. It's neat to see the future is in good hands," he says.

Ellen Paulley is the communications coordinator for the Canadian Conference of MB Churches.

For more information about the MB Historical Commission, visit their website at www.mbhistory.org

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada News Release

Manitoba played host to the annual Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) meetings held at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies January 17-19, 2013. In conjunction, several related committees also met including the online encyclopedia (www.gameo.org) committees. MHSC is made up of member organizations including provincial Mennonite historical societies, Mennonite denominations and other like-minded

organizations including MCC. Participants came from Quebec to British Columbia.

The society has revived an archives committee. This, during the third year it has met, has undertaken an exciting project of a Mennonite online photo database to help large and small archives manage its photo collection and provide much enhanced access by the public to the rich photos in Canadian Mennonite archives. The task

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: Jim Baerg, Arnold Klassen, Robert Martens, Wilf Penner, Richard Thiessen, Maryann Tjart Jantzen, John Van Dyck, Gerald Van Dyck, Elmer G. Wiens, Robert Wienneiah, Vi Chappell

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force was given the green light to pursue the project and seek additional partners and look for ways to cover the estimated \$20,000 cost. Jake Buhler, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan noted that this project will link archival centres large and small across the country like they never have before. While the society has undertaken important projects such as the writing of the three volume set, *Mennonites in Canada*, and the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, the photo database is institution based, designed to help institutions and researchers. The database project testifies to the on-going good relationships and cooperation among Canadian Mennonite historical societies and their participants.

Other items of business included reporting on the beginnings of a new genealogy web site and the ongoing Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites symposiums hosted by the Chair of Mennonite Studies. Society members were pleased to hear that Esther Epp-Tiessen is almost finished the manuscript exploring the role of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada. A 2014 launch date is being planned.

As is tradition, one block of time was set aside for a learning tour. This year we were privileged to have an interior tour of the Canadian Museum of Human rights which is still under construction. Participants donned on safety gear and were impressed with the size and architecture of the building which is set to open in 2014. Angela Cassie of the museum took 20 participants on a 90 minute tour explaining unique materials, symbolism and opportunities the museum provides to Canadians.

Bill Schroeder of Winnipeg was awarded the MHSC award of excellence for his historical maps, publications and tours of Russia he has undertaken over the past decades. Schroeder was pleased with the award and came to the meetings for the award ceremony. Schroeder has been involved in historical research and volunteering at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies since 1969. *The Mennonite Historical Atlas* that Schroeder co-authored with Helmut Huebert has sold over 7,000 copies and is a mainstay in most Russian Mennonite research libraries. The nomination noted that "Bill Schroeder exemplifies Mennonite historical research with his quiet tenacity, humble demeanor, and collaborative approaches, all the while cognizant of relationships and striving for excellence."

The next annual meeting of the society will again be held in Winnipeg in either December 2013 or January 2014.

By Conrad Stoesz



Zambia



India



Photo Credits: MCC