

# 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

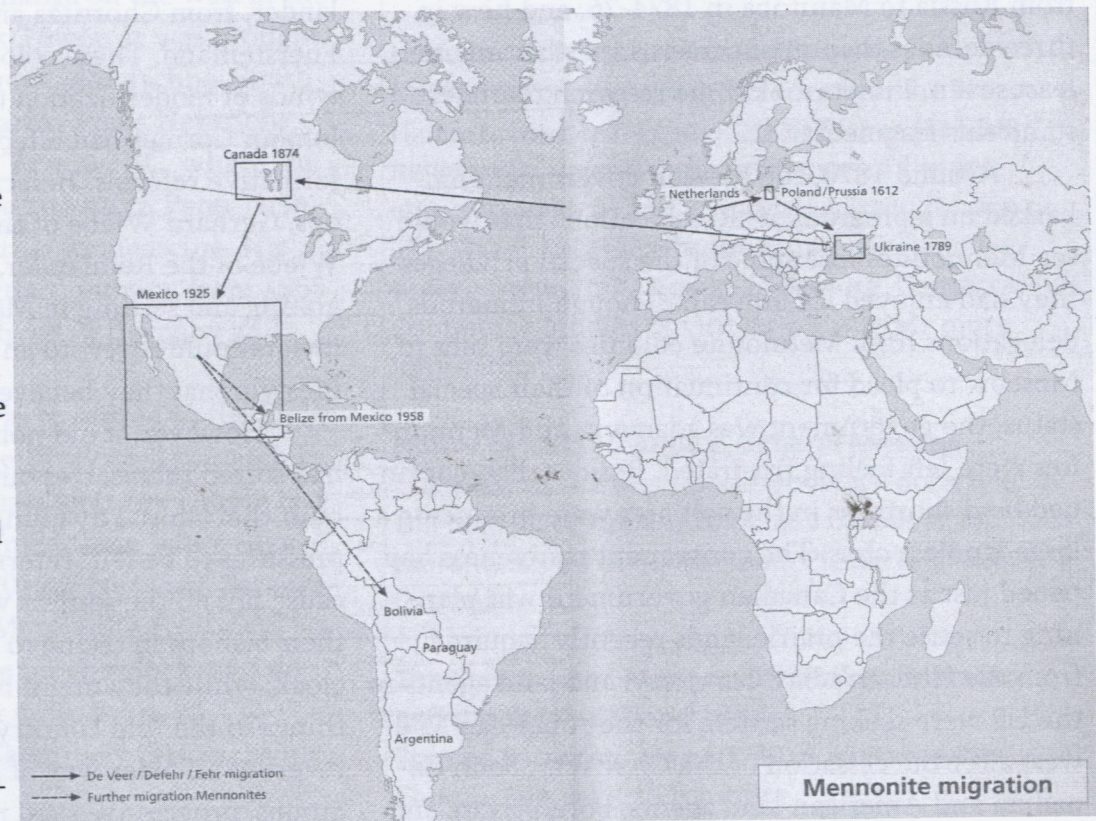
## Mennonite Fragmentation in Manitoba 1875-1900

by Wilf Penner

During my childhood years in rural Saskatchewan I picked up, more or less by osmosis, a number of prejudices regarding various Mennonite groups living around me. I knew then of only four distinct groups:

There were the "proper" Mennonites who adhered to the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church. Then there were the *Kirchliche* (General Conference) Mennonites. Some of them were good neighbours and even friends of my MB parents, but there were men among them who smoked, and therefore were very much "second class." The third group known to me were the Old Colony Mennonites. Not only were there smokers among them, but there were also some who imbibed alcohol. According to my youthful misconceptions, they were hopelessly stuck in their tradition-

bound ways, and didn't even believe in salvation by grace, claiming it was proud presumption to talk about "assurance of salvation." In fact, my mother's cousin and her husband were MB missionaries to the Old Colony Mennonites at Hague Ferry, Saskatchewan. Finally, there was a fourth group of



Map detail from *The Fehrs: Four centuries of Mennonite migration*; Book review on page 6.



Mennonites I knew of, somehow related to the Old Colony groups, who squatted in shanties on stony crown land along the North Saskatchewan River. In local Low German parlance they were the *Eintsassa* (one-sixers). Apparently they were Mennonite folk who had emigrated from a single Mennonite village in the Chortitza Colony which had the numerical designation of Village 1-6. I was told preposterous stories, such as that some children among them had extra fingers and/or toes because of inbreeding, and that cases of incest and debauchery were common.

As I matured, my childhood impressions were gradually amended, first, in my study of Mennonite History in Bible school, and later, with the increase in my exposure to people of varying backgrounds. I realized that there was a welter of Mennonite groups with wide-ranging differences.

Since my retirement from teaching, about two decades ago, Mennonite history has become an avocation for me. I find, the more I study it, that Mennonite history is not a simple story, as I once believed, but a convoluted and complex one. In an attempt to understand what happened to the Mennonites in Western Canada since the first emigration from Russia to Manitoba in 1874-76, and how in three decades the initial three strands became at least seven, I undertook some research to understand this fragmentation.

Around 1870, the Russian government embarked on a program of "Russification" that would see Mennonites lose some of the special privileges they had enjoyed for 90 years. Though numerous delegations from Mennonite colonies were sent to Moscow to plead for continuation of their special status, the government was adamant, and Mennonites were left feeling frustrated. Besides that, continued land shortages in the colonies were producing a large landless class. The consequent restiveness happened just as the Canadian government was planning to settle the prairie lands recently acquired from the Hudson's Bay Company, and land agents in the US were seeking settlers for the American Midwest after the cessation of the Civil War. Soon Canadian and American land agents, both private and governmental, were combing Europe and Russia for

prospective settlers, including Russian Mennonites. In 1873 three exploratory parties of Mennonites from South Russia were shown around Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Manitoba. When they returned to Russia in the fall of that year with news that vast tracts of arable land at reasonable terms were open for settlement in North America, groups of prospective immigrants congregated and made plans to move. In the following three years, 1874-76, some 14,000 Russian Mennonites crossed the Atlantic to North America, and 6,000 of these found their difficult way to southern Manitoba.

In very general terms, the more progressive Mennonite immigrants chose destinations south of the border, whereas the more conservative elements settled in Manitoba, where the Canadian government had been willing to create specific boundaried land reserves for the new settlers. Nearly all of these Mennonite immigrants represented one of three groups: the *Kleine Gemeinde* (little church), entirely from Borozenko Colony (although 30 families totaling about 100 individuals made a last minute decision to settle in Nebraska); the *Bergthaler*, entirely from the *Bergthal* Colony of South Russia; and *Reinlander*, from Chortitza and the daughter colony of *Fuerstenland*. These colonies, being wary of the winds of modernization that Mennonite statesman Johann Cornies had effected, had resisted his transformative reforms. In fact, two of the leading bishops, Gerhard Wiebe of the *Bergthaler*, and Johann Wiebe of the *Reinlander*, were hoping that by emigrating and settling in Manitoba, they and their followers could revert to an earlier, simpler order and lifestyle that they believed to be ideal.

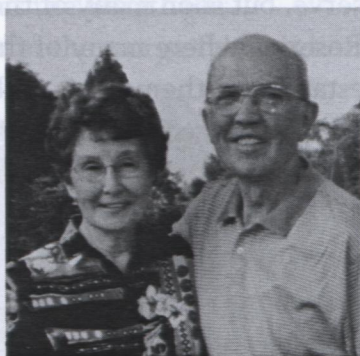
However, it did not take long, after the settlers had sorted themselves out into prairie villages and built their initial dwellings, for internal and external pressures to be felt. Internally there was tension because not all the settlers were prepared to follow their bishops in trying to turn back the cultural clock; while they might have accepted the order of things in the "old country," they were not willing to revert to an older way of life. In all three immigrant groups, progressives and reactionaries were not ...continued on page 4.



# Sara Heinrichs donates Kroeger clock to the BC Mennonite Historical Society

by Robert Martens

In 1804, Johann Kroeger arrived in Rosental, South Russia (Ukraine), where he began making what would be known as Kroeger clocks. It turned into a family business that would last until 1929. Kroeger clocks, solidly and lovingly made, became prized possessions in Mennonite homes, so much so that when Mennonite refugees fled their homes in Russia, Kroeger clocks were sometimes smuggled alongside their meagre goods.



Sarah and Peter Heinrichs

Now one such clock hangs on the wall of the MHS office in Garden Park Tower. It was brought to Saskatchewan in 1925 from Molotschna, South Russia, by David and Katharina Pauls Heinrichs. The family soon moved to Yarrow, BC, where the clock was eventually handed down to Peter Heinrichs, who went on to a career in medicine. His wife, Sara Teichroew, practised nursing from 1955 to 1990, while the couple lived in Burnaby and raised four children.

The Kroeger clock was treasured in the Heinrichs home: "The kids weren't allowed to touch it," says Sara. In 2007, some years after the couple had retired, the clock accompanied them when they moved to Abbotsford. In 2012, Peter died. Sara immediately thought of the Mennonite Historical Society as a new resting place for the clock, and donated it to the Society that same year.

Our thanks to Sara Teichroew Heinrichs for her generosity.

## Editorial - by Robert Martens

You will have noticed that this issue of Roots and Branches is considerably shorter than usual. As a kind of experiment, this year we will be printing four issues rather than three, two of normal length, and two somewhat shortened.

If there is a theme in this issue, it would be what is often called "the Mennonite disease": fragmentation. Wilf Penner writes on the proliferation of eight churches in Manitoba from the original three. The new book, *The Fehrs*, depicts the same problem – but also comments on the saving generosity of Mennonites when they act as a community. And Evan Kreider writes on a Mennonite congregation that crosses denominational lines.

Mennonites have always been a stubborn and independent bunch, and perhaps that's what they needed to survive. However, in this century when denominationalism means less and less to younger generations, Mennonites (and other churches) may need to focus more on what they have in common. Less on creed – and more on grace?

## Upcoming Events

### Lectures on Russian Mennonite history

MHSBC is co-sponsoring three lectures by Bruce Hiebert. Topics: 1. From Rags to Riches (Feb 18) 2. Religious innovation: the formation of the MB church (March 4) and 3. Surviving Stalin (March 18). Place: UFV Clearbrook campus (behind library). Time: 7pm. Cost: \$15/lecture. Contact UFV's Continuing Studies or visit its website for more information.

### Notice of MHSBC Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC will take place April 4, 2014, at 1:30 pm at ABC Restaurant, 32080 Marshall Road. Please feel welcome to attend.

### The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory, and the Second World War

7pm on Saturday, May 10, 2014, at Bakerview Church. See page 15 for more details.



...continued from page 2.

ready to accommodate each other. Externally, there were other pressures: the desire to settle in a "reserve" was sanctioned by the authorities, but reserves were anomalous to the way the rest of the area was being settled in separated quarter section homesteads. The extension of railroads, the development of trading centres, and the spread of municipal government were seen by church leaders as sources of disruption to the quiet isolation they hoped to maintain – although progressive elements welcomed these developments. Disagreements over these issues, as well as over education and religious practice, were causes for excommunication and shunning. Furthermore, many were disappointed over the uneven quality of land in the East Reserve, resulting in disruptions as groups moved about in attempts to find more fertile acreage.

In the Kleine Gemeinde camp, Bishop Peter Toews (1841-1922) believed that what was needed was a religious revival, and at his invitation, Kansas Mennonite reformer John Holdeman preached a series of revival messages at Kleine Gemeinde churches in 1881-82. The overall effectiveness of his sermons is unknown, but he had one influential convert – Toews himself. Toews was baptized by Holdeman, and led his faithful, about one-third of the Kleine Gemeinde flock, into the Holdeman sphere (the Church of God in Christ Mennonite). The remainder were left to flounder. In 1899 the remnant groups, after much discussion, wrote a document attempting to define themselves. The three "bishops" of the Kleine Gemeinde representing the East Reserve, the Nebraska group and the Morris group authorized a charter that reiterated many proscriptions and added new ones as well. This document that was intended to unify the Kleine Gemeinde "rump group" had the opposite effect, inciting many to leave and join other groups. In Steinbach, a small group of discontented laymen, led by Henry Rempel, invited two evangelists from the Bruderthaler Church in Nebraska to come and preach a more acceptable "gospel" at a series of public services in their town. This led to the establish-

ment of a Bruderthaler congregation in Steinbach in 1897.\*

The Bergthaler group lacked cohesiveness due to geographic distance between the East and West Reserves, and to the widening gap between progressive and conservative wings of the church. The first Bergthaler settlers took up residence in the East Reserve, but soon many of them relocated to the West Reserve, where many of their group had already established themselves on better farmland. In the early days, geographic distance made administration of the churches difficult for the presiding bishop, or *Ältester*, so Bishop Gerhard Wiebe ordained John Funk to preside in the West Reserve. Funk, it turned out, had a much more progressive view of matters, and in the early 1880s welcomed General Conference (GC) *Reiseprediger* (travelling preachers) from the US to preach in his churches. Soon some of the Bergthaler congregations under his jurisdiction were among the most liberal, while in the East Reserve the Chortitzer Church, as the East Reserve Bergthaler called themselves (after the name of the village where their bishop resided), was the most conservative. Those following Elder John Funk retained the Bergthaler name, and became in time the most progressive group of the original three.\*\*

Johann Funk further distanced himself from the Chortitzer, and even more from the conservative elements in the Bergthaler congregations, when in 1889 he opened an institution in Gretna for the training of teachers in Mennonite schools. Opposition was so strong, however, that the school closed after only one year. After a hiatus of a year, the school was reopened with Manitoba government support, and with HH Ewert, a General Conference educator newly arrived from Kansas, at the helm. Conservative Bergthaler congregations in the West Reserve disowned Elder Funk, and called in the bishop from the East Reserve to baptize their youth. When this recurred the following year, Bishop Gerhard Wiebe from the East Reserve ordained Abraham Doerksen, resident in the village of Sommerfeld, to be bishop in the West Reserve. Henceforth, those churches loyal to Johann Funk maintained



the Bergthaler name, while the new conservatives under Doerksen's rule became the Sommerfelder Church.

Thus the largest Russian Mennonite group to settle in Manitoba was splintered into three: the Bergthaler group was the smallest; the Sommerfelder about four times that size; and the Chortitzer about twice as numerous as the Bergthaler.

It may be noted that in the story of devolution within the Kleine

Gemeinde and Bergthaler, there were strong influences from Mennonite groups in the US. Concerning the development of the MB Church of Canada, American influence was especially strong. The first MB activity in southern Manitoba began in 1883, when the MB Conference of North

America authorized two ministers to visit communities in Manitoba: Heinrich Voth from Nebraska, and David Dyck from Kansas. As a result of his visit, Voth baptized eight converts by immersion in 1886, and two years later the first MB congregation in Canada, numbering sixteen members, came into being at Burwalde, north of the present site of Winkler – and well outside the West Reserve.

Here my story becomes a rather personal one. My Grandfather Penner's brother Johann was one of the original Reinlander settlers who took up residence in the village of Chortitza, West Reserve, in 1875; he, his wife, and his growing family resided here until his death in 1911. Meanwhile, my Grandfather Peter Penner, the youngest child in the family, was eking out a living as a hired farmhand in the Yazykovo Colony in South Russia. Through contact with the early MB movement in Russia, he experienced a personal epiphany, and was soon a baptized member of the Mennonite Brethren Church. In

1889 he married a widow and adopted her eight-year-old daughter; by 1891 he and his wife had two more daughters, but financially their future looked bleak. With some help from the Einlage MB Church, and with his brother in Manitoba offering the family temporary shelter, the family left Russia and arrived in Gretna in late spring of 1892. Later that year, Peter D. Penner and his wife, Susanna, joined the Winkler MB Church.



Mennonite housebarn in Neubergthal, Manitoba, now a National Historic Site.

Thus in three decades the original three groups had become eight distinct churches: Kleine Gemeinde, Holdeman, Bergthaler, Reinlander, Bruderthaler, Chortitzer, Sommerfelder, and Mennonite Brethren. It might be noted that though General Conference Mennonites significantly impacted the Mennonites of Manitoba, no Mennonite congregations there officially joined the GC until 1903,

when the Conference of Mennonites in Middle Canada was formed.

\*In 1889 two groups merged at Mountain Lake, Minnesota to form what was popularly known as the Bruderthaler Church. Officially it was known as the Conference of United Mennonite Brethren in North America. In 1914 the name was changed to the Defenceless Mennonite Brethren in Christ of North America; in 1937 to the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB); and again in 1987 to the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches:

\*\*Only the Reinlander (frequently called the Old Colony Church) retained their original name, though dissatisfied members could and did leave to join other more liberal groups.

#### Sources:

Epp, Frank. *Mennonites in Canada, 1876-1920*. Winnipeg: Kindred Publishers, 1996.

Schroeder, William and Helmut T. Hiebert. *Mennonite Historical Atlas*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

GAMEO. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*.

[www.gameo.org](http://www.gameo.org)

Wikipedia.



# Arlette Kouwenhoven. *The Fehrs: Four centuries of Mennonite migration.*

Translated from the Dutch by Leslie Fast. Leiden, Netherlands: Winco Press, 2013.

Book review by Robert Martens

It was 2010, in the traditionalist Mennonite colony of Sabinal, Chihuahua state, Mexico, and Dutch anthropologist Arlette Kouwenhoven had developed close ties with the family of David and Maria Fehr. Kouwenhoven writes, "At first, conversation was reserved, gradually became a little freer, but was always restricted. In Sabinal there is more silence than speaking, more prayer than laughter. The resignation with which self-imposed restrictions are endured is humbling. The obstinacy with which every expression of childlike enthusiasm is nipped in the bud, and each attempt at accomplishment and excellence is shackled and branded as pride, is rather depressing. Who are these people, how did they come to settle in this place? Where does their zeal come from? Did the Mennonites of the past also live isolated from the world?" (20) David Fehr and his family, Kouwenhoven reports, were feeling restless, sensing the call of the modern outside world. How did this closed community result, wonders Kouwenhoven, when early Anabaptist communities were widely engaged with the society around them?

Arlette Kouwenhoven, author of *The Fehrs*, reports that, to her knowledge, she is not related to any Mennonite anywhere in the world. Yet her interest in the Mennonite/Anabaptist story was piqued by her visit to Sabinal, as well as her affection for the people living there: "Some casual probing strikes a chord somewhere, an unexpected sense of belonging, a nostalgic feeling is awakened that is not based on any apparent shared experience, and yet is so appealing that the idea cannot be abandoned" (20). The idea was to probe the historical background of the Mennonite community by tracing the genealogy of the Fehr family through 400 years of migration. The book that resulted, using the hook of the Fehr lineage, is a wonderfully accessible and warm retell-

ing of the Russian Mennonite story, from its Anabaptist beginnings to its emigrations to North and South America. Kouwenhoven divides her book into historical sections.

## *Amsterdam 1612*

The story begins with the oldest known Fehr, Gijsbert de Veer, born in 1556. Gijsbert grew up when the terror of Anabaptist martyrdom was fading. As a boy in an Anabaptist family, Kouwenhoven writes, Gijsbert had heard the stories of the torture and faithfulness of early Anabaptists, meeting secretly to read the Bible and console each other – apparently over mugs of beer – through years of brutal persecution. It was master organizer Menno Simons who consolidated the small flock of religious rebels. Even so, division was frequent. Already during Menno's lifetime, liberal Frisians and conservative Flemish were attacking each other with great enthusiasm.

At the same time, the Mennonite emphasis on simple living led to monetary savings and ultimate prosperity. In 1578, a bloodless coup by Protestants in Amsterdam had freed the city from the oppressive rule of the Spanish. The Dutch economy soon led the European world. In 1612, Gijsbert de Veer, already a wealthy entrepreneur in the grain trade, moved with his family to Danzig to increase his fortune.

## *Poland/Prussia 1612-1789*

The Dutch were flocking to Danzig (today's Gdansk in Poland), with Anabaptist/Mennonites among them. Soon the Dutch controlled the lucrative trading centre in Danzig; Mennonite businessmen mingled with their Dutch counterparts in the Artushof, a club for rich entrepreneurs, where gambling, drinking, and business dealing ruled the day. Mennonites, though, faced severe restrictions from the locals, perhaps simply out of jealousy; they were barred from city residence and from membership in



the guilds. They became successful, Kouwenhoven muses, perhaps *because of* the restrictions, as they were then forced into creative solutions for success. The suburbs they occupied outside the city were some of the most beautiful locales in the region. The Mennonite-owned Momber *Kaffee-Haus* was a renowned centre for drinking coffee or wine, smoking, discussing business, and reading newspapers. Mennonites became so good at liqueur production that for a time, Kouwenhoven says, "Mennonite" and "distiller" were virtually synonymous. And of course they became famous for dyking and drainage, including in their number the brilliant engineer Adam Wiebe.

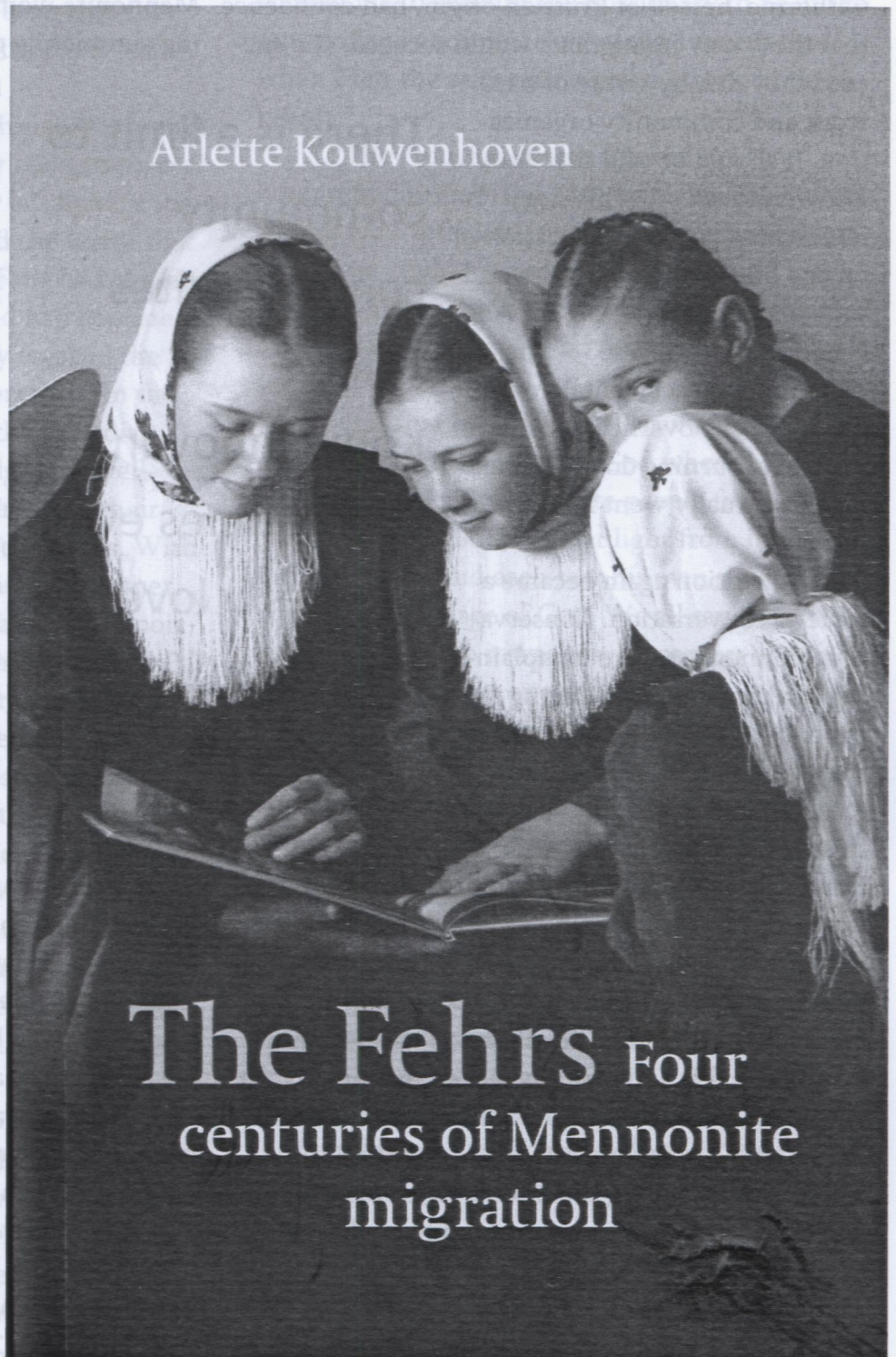
But Mennonites were also famous for mutual aid. Support for the poor, even for those outside their own religious/ethnic group, became part of their tradition, and has endured to this day. Generous giving was as much a necessity as a virtue, because Danzig was in decline: plague killed tens of thousands, recurring wars devastated the land, and finally in 1749 severe legislative restrictions on Mennonite business drove many to poverty overnight. Mennonites moved en masse into the Polish *polder*, the drained delta to the southeast, and there excelled once again in farming, dyke management, windmill and fire insurance organizations, and, of course, mutual aid. Literacy was part of their success, as it was considered vital for children to learn to read the Bible.

But talk of migration was soon once again in the air. In 1772 Prussia took control of the *polder*, and it wasn't long before the Prussian authorities were demanding full integration of all citizens into

the state; this included military service. Mennonites, writes Kouwenhoven, have traditionally resented state intrusion into their lives, and in 1789 many of them, at the invitation of Tsarina Catherine the Great, emigrated to the Russian empire. *New Russia 1789-1874*

Prince Potemkin, friend and lover of Catherine, was placed in charge of "German" immigration. In his dealings with Mennonites, Kouwenho-

Arlette Kouwenhoven



## The Fehrs Four centuries of Mennonite migration



ven writes, Potemkin probably engaged in a double-cross: the land they were promised was declared uninhabitable and dangerous, and Mennonites were forced to settle in the region of Chortitza, land owned by Potemkin himself. They received special guarantees from the state, eventually formalized in the *Privilegium* of 1800: military exemption, tax breaks, government loans, and special dispensations on the production and sale of beer and liqueurs. Catherine, herself of Prussian origin, had confidence that these new immigrants would succeed, and succeed they did, by virtue of hard work and community organization. It should be said that Arlette Kouwenhoven tells this story vividly, with a poignant evocation of village life, loves and deaths, and such incidents as the Big Fire of Neu Osterwick in 1863 – Mrs. Teichröb who accidentally set the fire when she overheated lard on the stove, burning down 70 buildings, eventually went insane with the guilt.

Migration again became a topic of conversation. Conservative Mennonites were complaining of a moral decline among their people; for example, the youth, they declared, had learned to drink as hard as the Russians. Was this moral decline a reality, asks

Kouwenhoven; or perhaps conservative reformers were just now recognizing vices that had long been part of Mennonite life? Another factor in talk of migration was the education reforms of Johann Cornies, who pushed traditionalists too hard, claims Kouwenhoven, and severely lacked in empathy. In any case, in the 1870s Mennonites were again moving en masse, this time to Canada and the United States. Not all among them were rigid traditionalists, writes the author; many were simply landless and needed to move.

#### *Canada 1874-1922*

Canada was offering better guarantees than the

US on military exemption and community control of education. Soon Mennonites made the prairies blossom in the East and West Reserves of Manitoba, sometimes in areas considered hopeless by other immigrants. Mennonites shortly abandoned the village system they had developed in Russia and adopted the open single farm arrangement more practical for raising wheat. But technology soon invaded their simple lifestyle; Kouwenhoven tells the story of a Mennonite woman dreadfully burned by an exploding automobile gas tank. And then the Canadian

government broke its own promises, demanding government control of education and imposing restrictions on military exemption. The authorities, Kouwenhoven writes, simply pushed too hard. Traditionalist Mennonites again decided to move on, this time to Mexico.

#### *Mexico 1922-2011, and beyond*

The northern Mexican state of Chihuahua was chosen for its isolation, and for the challenges involved. Hardship brings the community together, says Kouwenhoven; and technology is only rejected among traditionalist Mennonites if it will damage the community. Under incredibly difficult conditions, however, Mennonites managed to eventually succeed and even prosper. But conditions have deteriorated

in recent years. Education among Mennonites has remained so substandard that the surrounding Mexican population has surpassed them. There is again the problem of the landless. Drug cartels have made everyday life a dangerous affair. The young are attracted to a more comfortable lifestyle in the cities. And so traditionalists once again talk about moving on, away from “the world,” with all its seductions of technology and easy living.

#### *The way of the cross*

There is a limit to community control, writes Arlette Kouwenhoven: “Sometimes even brotherly love loses out” (213). Throughout her book, the au-

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thor has been tracing the Fehr family line, and finally, here she is with her restless friends David and Maria Fehr in Sabinal, as they push the boundaries of the *Gemeinde* (community). How, she asks, has a "traditionalist" community moved so far from its actual origins and traditions? "The Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century was a colourful mixture of individuals of various kinds, each with his or her place in the broader society in which they fully participated. It was on a voluntary basis that they joined together and chose to be re-baptized" (214).

#### *Alternate ways*

Are there alternatives to traditionalist communities that can still display integrity and generosity? Earlier in her book, Kouwenhoven briefly tells the story of the Russian Revolution and the terror that followed. Brothers CA and AA de Fehr had chosen not to leave Russia in the 1870s, and had become prosperous businessmen. After they escaped the Soviet regime in the 1920s, losing everything in the process, the de Fehrs ended up on the Canadian prairie. Here new Mennonite immigrants, well-educated and ambitious, quickly surpassed their compatriots who had emigrated in the 1870s. With the help of a German friend and business partner, CA de Fehr established a leading Canadian importing and sales firm. AA de Fehr's son Art created Paliser Furniture, Canada's biggest furniture manufacturer. During his lifetime, CA helped with the Canadian Colonization Board and the resettling of Mennonite immigrants, participated in the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University), and was involved in the creation of MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates). Art de Fehr intentionally hires immigrants in his plants, has worked for the MCC, and has represented the United Nations in refugee work in Somalia.

Is this an alternative model for traditionalist Mennonites, asks Kouwenhoven. She gives no definitive answer. Instead, she closes her remarkable book by dedicating it to David and Maria Fehr of Sabinal: "Who knows, perhaps in ten years I will write a sequel about what awaits them in the future, a future that hopefully looks brighter than much of their past" (240).

# One New Village

by Z. Marwa Kisare, Tanzanian  
Mennonite/Anabaptist (1984)

At first I could not accept that God wanted me to become the brother of the missionary, that God wanted me to account the missionary to be of the same village with me. How could I accept that, when I felt the missionary's own ethnic pride so keenly?

The Holy Spirit also showed me that I must honour and respect the Luo people on the Shirati station who were not from my father Kisare's village. How could I accept to do this when I knew all about the gossiping and hypocrisy which stood between us as we struggled for place with the missionaries?

But that evening we all saw Jesus. By that I mean the crucified Lamb of God whose blood removes the walls that separate people from each other and from God. A great light from heaven shone upon us and each saw his own sin and each saw the new village of God. We all saw this revelation together, so it was easy to confess to one another and to forgive one another.

We now saw each other in a different way. Earlier such things as theft, adultery, lying, malicious gossip, and jealousies were not so bad if they were directed against people of another village. But if all were members of the same new village, then we needed to hold the character of each other person as sacred. We needed to ask forgiveness and make things right even with those of a different ethnic background. (43-44) ✨

Kisare, Marwa Z. "One New Village." *Readings from Mennonite Writings New & Old*. Haas, J. Craig, ed. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1992.



# The Way We Were

## Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship

by J. Evan Kreider

Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship (PGIMF) was inter-Mennonite from the beginning: it included individuals who grew up in General Conference, Mennonite Brethren and Old Mennonite churches. We were brought together by a shared interest in helping Mennonite students make the transition from fundamentalist-leaning home congregations to the wide-open secular university. By late summer of 1986, two new projects were finally taking form. The Pacific Centre for Discipleship Association (PCDA) was applying for charity status so that it could purchase and operate a residence for students attending Vancouver's universities and colleges. At the same time, an inter-Mennonite fellowship which could use language and concepts from the world in which university students and professionals live was envisioned.

PGIMF held its first Sunday morning worship service on September 7, 1986, during the waning days of Expo 86. Many of the 20 or so attendees were also involved with the PCDA, which had just purchased the convent at 4000 West 11th Avenue in Vancouver (a 15-minute bike ride from UBC and Regent College), reopening it as the Menno Simons Centre on September 1. In order to help the Menno Simons Centre financially, PGIMF rented the Centre's chapel. By not hiring a pastor, the fellowship's attendees were able to direct much of their tithing to support the Centre, which became the primary focus for attendees' volunteer work for the coming decades.

In 1988 the two BC conferences generously provided support so that Palmer Becker could be a

UBC chaplain and PGIMF's part-time pastor. But in 1991, after Palmer had left to serve in a much larger church (and eventually teach at Hesston College), and after our next pastor, Murray Phillips, departed unexpectedly, PGIMF returned to being a lay-led fellowship, which it remains to this day.

The times of worship have often been wonderfully crafted by our members: the four-part hymn singing is skillfully led by our musicians, and many attendees have been willing to lead morning

meditations, usually based on one of the morning's lectionary texts. Other speakers include people invited from neighbouring congregations of various denominations, visiting church workers, and Christian professors teaching at UBC, Regent or Trinity Western. PGIMF has particularly enjoyed offering young Mennonite students opportunities to give sermons and then receive useful feedback.

Over the decades, the most rewarding aspects of our worship have included four-part singing of hymns, hearing multiple voices and points of

view from the chapel's floor-level homemade pulpit, and having people sit in a three-quarters circle so that we can more easily sing, pray and share together. We enjoy potluck meals at the end of each month; a BBQ welcomes students to the Centre in early September; and we use the chapel's walls as a gallery for our fellowship's gifted artists. But most of all, we look forward to the 20 minutes of sharing immediately following the sermon, a time when anyone can offer additional reflections on the morn-

**We remember that even though the disciples sharply disagreed with each other and occasionally Jesus, they still managed to find ways to work and worship together.**



ing's scripture readings or meditation, ask questions, or mention relevant ideas encountered in reading, life experiences, or research.

Some outside observers have expressed surprise that PGIMF has managed to worship together peacefully while discussing things openly, even when, naturally, there are differences of opinion.

Since PGIMF began as an inter-Mennonite fellowship (and people from other denominations have also joined us), we knew from the outset that people would be bringing different traditions, assumptions and ways of thinking to our gatherings. We therefore made a con-

scious effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to speak to each other constructively, to work by consensus, and to try to understand varying faith journeys. We remember that even though the disciples sharply disagreed with each other and occasionally with Jesus, they still managed to find ways to work and worship together.

Nobody is paid to do any of our lay-led fellowship's tasks, but there always seem to be volunteers willing to step forward. All attendees (including males) belong to one of the food groups which look after weekly coffee and monthly potluck meals. Our congregational administrators give their time freely, people agree to speak and lead worship, and a number of individuals are asked to look after pastoral concerns, marriages and memorial services. Our fellowship's board meets about every two months, and has congregational meetings three times a year (following a pizza lunch after a worship service).

PGIMF has always delighted in having young people and young families attend. But students and young professionals invariably find it difficult to become established in Vancouver, where housing prices have become prohibitive. Consequently, like many other city congregations, PGIMF

sees its young adults come and go, while an older contingent provides the fellowship's stability. For years, PGIMF has thought of itself as a place where interested young people can develop skills in public speaking, whether during discussion time or from the lectern, so we consciously include interested young people on our roster of speakers and worship leaders.

During some of our years, church growth was particularly encouraged by all the conferences. While we have not grown numerically, we have had a faithful and dedicated core which has influenced several hundred young people over the past 27



years. Our departed alumni include scientists, doctors, teachers, architects, professors, pastors, the current president of CMU, nurses, theologians, department heads, professional musicians, carpenters, accountants, people working abroad, librarians, mechanics, a poet, engineers, activists, computer programmers and the like. Although we miss these many friends, we enjoy hearing them report how their time in our lay-led fellowship encouraged their personal growth in faith, understanding and even ministry. We have also enjoyed having nuns occasionally return to worship with us, visit their former convent and tell of the work they used to do, and how they worshipped in the little chapel they so lovingly built.

Evan grew up in Goshen, IN, graduating from Goshen College before studying at Indiana University where he obtained the Ph.D. in musicology. He was Research Associate for the New York Pro Musica before teaching music history at the State University of NY at Geneseo. He and Janice moved to Vancouver in 1975, where they both worked at UBC. With many others, they helped found the Menno Simons Centre and the Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship. Evan sings in *Abendmusik* and the Vancouver Cantata Singers, and is an active photographer (<http://kreiderskorner.blogspot.com>).



# Squeah – The Birth of a Bible/Retreat Camp

by Art Hoock

On July 21, 2012, Camp Squeah, located just south of Yale, BC, celebrated its 50th anniversary. While I was attending that day's festivities, I was reminded of our family's connections to the camp.

My father Nick and his brother Otto framed the Edelweiss Hall. When our children were young, we attended church retreats at Squeah, and later camped there in our travel trailer. As camp representative for Bethel Mennonite, I organized volunteers to build the main lodge.

I am immensely proud that all five of our grandchildren, Bonnie, Joshua, Adam, Colin and Elizabeth, have volunteered at the camp, the fourth generation of Hoocks to be involved there.

## *Purchase of the camp*

On Canada Day, July 1, 1961, after years of searching for a suitable site for a summer camp, the British Columbia Mennonite Youth Organization (BCMYO) council visited a 133 acre property just west of Yale and adjoining the Fraser River. Dick Rempel remembers that the German Shepherd dog belonging to the owners did not take kindly to the intruders. Nevertheless, on August 21, the BCMYO council recommended purchase of the property. This decision was affirmed by delegates to the BCMYO general assembly on September 28. The offer to owners Martin and Anne Strange would be \$15,000 with a down payment of \$6,500, with the remaining sum to be paid annually over three years at 4% interest.

## *History of the area*

The camp property and the surrounding area had once been inhabited by what is now the Yale First Nations Band. After the discovery of gold at Emory Creek in 1858, about 500 miners, including a number of Chinese people, descended upon this area. When the gold ran out, most ventured north to the Caribou. A few Chinese miners remained.

The Cariboo Gold Rush of 1862 turned Emory Creek into a hub of activity. Paddlewheelers from the coast unloaded goods and took back gold and orders for more supplies. Entrepreneur and veteran gold miner Frank Laumeister and his partner Charles Gowan spent \$6,000 importing 23 camels to this area for packing goods into the Cariboo. This was not successful. The camels spooked pack horses, and mules tore their feet on the rocky trails.

In spring of 1879, the Oppenheimer brothers purchased the land around Emory Creek from a Mr. Walker, who had owned it since about since 1860. That fall, the Canadian Pacific Railway determined that Emory Creek would be its western terminus. The Oppenheimer brothers auctioned off 400 lots in 1880, and a town with 13 streets was born. Services included a newspaper, many shops, a sawmill, 9 saloons and a brewery. At its peak, the population of the town reached 15,000.

The first CPR locomotive arrived by paddle-wheeler in 1881 and was unloaded on the west bank of the Fraser River, perhaps at what is now Camp Squeah property. By 1885, with the completion of the railway to the Pacific coast, Emory Creek was virtually abandoned.

The BC Provincial Government allegedly granted title of the Squeah property, adjacent to the town, to two Scotsmen. Later, it came into the hands of a Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Simpson. In the 1930s, nickel was discovered in the mountains behind the property by a man named Carl Sofka, who had defected from the Buffalo Bill Circus and had gone into hiding there. The Simpsons built stables to house the 100 pack horses needed to carry supplies to the mine site. Many of Camp Squeah's hiking trails were once used by pack horses.

After the mine development era, the Simpsons turned the property into an auto court, hoping to

Many of Camp Squeah's hiking trails were once used by pack horses.



attract American tourists, and named it Lincoln Park. As they got older, and the work became unmanageable, the Simpsons wished to turn over their property to the government for a park, but this did not happen.

In time the property was sold to Martin and Annie Strange who once more operated Lincoln Park as an auto court, renting out the modest cabins to lovers of the great outdoors. When they, in turn, needed to sell, they were glad their somewhat neglected operation would be developed into a Bible camp for youth. In the sales agreement with the BCMYO, it was stipulated that Martin and Annie Strange would be allowed to live in their home on site for as long as they wished.

#### *Developing the camp at Yale*

Now that the property was purchased, the pressure was on to get the site ready for the summer 1962 retreat season. When I researched BCMYO and BC Conference files, I found little information about the actual hands-on physical work of getting the camp property ready for the first season. Fortunately many of those involved in the early days are still alive, and were able to provide information.

Werner Bartel, with the help of volunteers, coordinated much of the clean-up and preparation of the grounds to make room for buildings and recreation areas. Bulldozers were used to deal with overgrown areas, derelict buildings and abandoned logging equipment. Bartel recalled that, because the drinking water stream went underground after the spring

melt, a number of barrels were hauled up the hill to capture and hold the water. Later, a larger, used wooden stave tank was installed, which lasted about ten years, after which a more durable concrete reservoir was built.

The natural setting and view speak volumes about God's wonderful creation.

Helmut Lemke designed a dining/recreation hall, making use of roof trusses found in a salvage yard, and incorporated an existing building into the design for a kitchen. Brothers Nick and Otto Hooch from Aldergrove lived in one of the existing cabins while preparing the dining hall footings and framing the structure. Jake Baerg, who donated the lumber, mentioned that my Dad (Nick)

had remarked that the wood was excellent and of better quality than generally available in the Fraser Valley. (This hall, the Edelweiss, is still in use for many activities.)

To speed up construction of the four new cabins needed in time for the first season, Jake Janzen of Abbotsford pre-cut much of the donated lumber stored at "Johnny's Lumber." The cabins, built mostly on Saturday work days, were gradually completed over the summer. Indoor washrooms and showers were not available until the second camping season in 1963.

The existing swimming pool was in poor shape. Werner Bartel and others tried to reinforce the split open corners and other cracks in the walls and floor. This made it useable but it required a constantly running hose to keep it full. In 1966 the pool was partially painted and a filtering system





added. Years later, a new pool was built complete with solar heating panels.

The "BCMYO Camp at Yale" was officially dedicated July 1, 1962. It had a new multipurpose hall, salvaged existing cabins, sleeping tents mounted on new cabin floor bases, outhouse toilets and shower tents.

In 1964, BCMYO President Marvin Kehler announced that the camp would now be known as "Camp Squeah Bible Camp." *Squeah* is a Salish First Nations word meaning "place of refuge." By 1965, 335 summer campers attended Camp Squeah.

#### *Further expansion of Camp Squeah*

Over the years Camp Squeah continued to grow in size and Christian outreach capabilities. On November 11, 1978 (at which time I was the camp representative for the Aldergrove Bethel Mennonite Church) the main lodge was dedicated. Helmut Lemke sketched up the preliminary concept and Rudy Reimer produced the final drawings. Henry Bartel supervised its construction, much of it done by volunteers. Today this building continues to be the centre of Camp Squeah's activities and is the main dining hall.

Since then, many smaller facilities and improvements have been made, the latest being the construction of two motel style lodges, Emory and Fraser, in 2009. These facilities are particularly suited to seniors with mobility problems.

#### *The Hermitage*

In 1969, Clarence Bauman, professor of theology and ethics at Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, sent the following request to Jacob Tilitzky, Chairman of the BC Conference: "We wish to make a unique contribution to the Conference by building an attractive little cabin on a remote corner of Camp Squeah. The cabin would be donated to the Conference in exchange for the privilege of our occupying it in the Summer (June, July, August). For the remaining nine months of each year it would be administered by the Camp Committee and Director to be used at their discretion."

The letter goes on to describe the location and structure, and states that it would be used as a quiet retreat for study, writing and occasional seminars.

As anyone who has seen this "Hermitage" will attest to, the architecture and workmanship of this site are truly inspiring. The natural setting and view speak volumes about God's wonderful creation.

Clarence Bauman and his wife Alice, also an academic, spent many summers at the Hermitage, away from their busy life in Elkhart. Clarence contracted Parkinson's Disease, which he battled for about the last 20 years of his life, resorting to lying on a cot to teach his classes. He died August 20, 1995.

A tragic incident involving the Hermitage occurred when Camp Squeah's "Trail Blazer," David Ens, was asphyxiated while spending the night there November 9, 1983. Dave loved the outdoors and was responsible for developing most of Camp Squeah's extensive trail system. He was deeply missed; his death left a void that was difficult to fill.

#### *Endnotes and gratitude*

Some of the records of bygone years have gone astray, leaving many questions unanswered. Often there was little written back-up for memories going back some 50 years. I apologize for where I got things wrong or forgot to mention important details. I asked a number of people for photos of the early years of camp development, but without success.

I would like to thank the many individuals I talked to who are still alive and who shared memories of camp development back in the 1950s and 1960s, including Jake Baerg; Peter, Siegfried and Werner Bartel; Carl Durksen; Victor Dyck; Gilbert Epp; Les Friesen; Jake Janzen; Peter Kehler; Waldy Klassen; Helmut Lemke; Linda Mills; Henry H. and John H. Neufeld; Abe Pankratz; John Peters; Dietrich (Dick) Rempel; Jake Tilitzky; and Ike Wiebe. Some could contribute little about those bygone years; others had vivid memories. A heartfelt thanks to all!

*A more detailed account, including conference reports and names of those involved in early planning stages, can be found on the MHSBC website.*



# Roots and Branches

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## Hans Werner lecture at Bakerview MB Church

7pm, Saturday, May 10 at Bakerview MB Church,

2285 Clearbrook Road. Hans Werner will be speaking about his book, *The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory, and the Second World War* (University of Manitoba Press, 2013).

By Louise Bergen Price and Robert Martens

Hans Werner's father, Johann, was born in the Soviet Union and served as a Red Army soldier in World War II. After being captured, he was drafted into Hitler's army, ending up as an American prisoner of war before finding a home in Canada.

### *Excerpts from Book Reviews*

"*The Constructed Mennonite* is a unique account of a life shaped by Stalinism, Nazism, migration, famine, and war. It investigates the tenuous spaces where individual experiences inform and become public history; it studies the ways in which memory shapes identity, and reveals how context and audience shape autobiographical narratives." ([www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)).

"...this was a most enjoyable read and one that has me mulling over memory work in my personal and family experience." (Dora Dueck. [doradueck.wordpress.com/](http://doradueck.wordpress.com/)).

### *Author's Biography*

Hans Werner was born in Saskatchewan to immigrant parents who came to Canada after World War II. After raising his family on a potato and cattle farm, Hans developed an interest in history that resulted in his return to academic studies. In 2002, he earned a PhD in history. His dissertation, which examined the integration of Mennonite and other Protestant immigrants who came to Winnipeg, Canada, from the Soviet Union via Germany in the 1950s and of those who came to Bielefeld, Germany in the 1970s and '80s, was recently awarded the University of Manitoba Distinguished Dissertation Award.

Hans has served as Interim Chair of German Canadian Studies and member of the History Department at the University of Winnipeg. He has been active in the Steinbach Village Museum Board and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. He and his wife Diana (Suderman) live in Winnipeg and are members of the Bethel Mennonite Church.

Excerpted from [www.mennonitestudies.uwinnipeg.ca](http://www.mennonitestudies.uwinnipeg.ca)

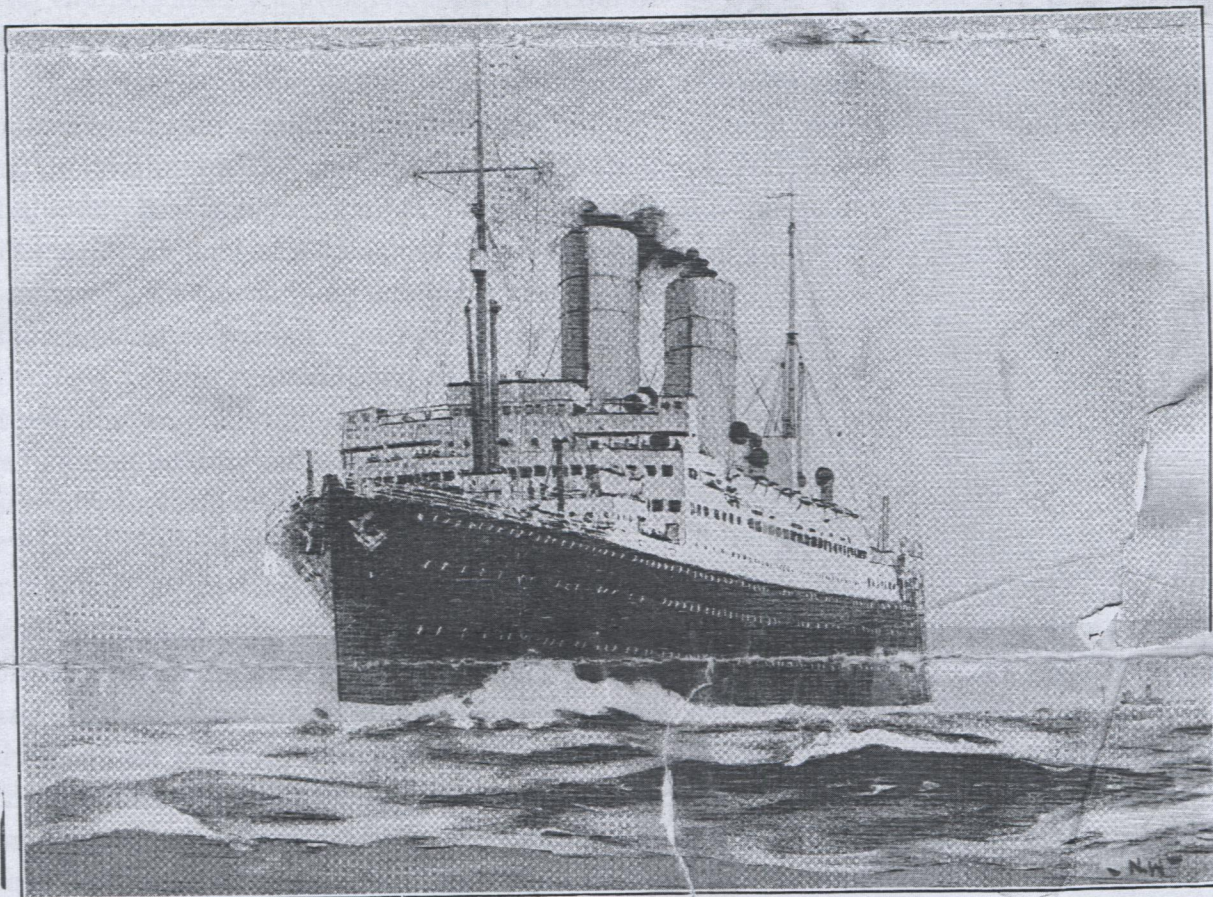


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## Canadian Pacific Steamships

In the early 1920s, in reaction to the catastrophic situation for their brothers and sisters in Russia, Mennonites approached the Canadian Pacific Railway with a proposal to transport Russian Mennonite refugees over the ocean to safety. David Toews will always be remembered for spearheading this effort. The CPR accepted the proposal, and from 1923-29 over 21,000 Mennonites sailed to North America on company ships.

The incurred travel debt became a major responsibility – and sometimes headache – for the new settlers. It was finally paid off, however, in 1946, just before the death of David Toews.

The above poster artefact, housed at the MHSBC Archives, reads, "From Europe to Canada with the Canadian Pacific. Powerful, modern and fast steamships. Only 4 days on the open sea. The only Canadian ship travel business."