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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

Contents:

Photos: www.mennonitegirlscancook.ca

Editorial

Mennonites and Food:

Stirring the Pot

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

We may live without poetry,
music, and art,
We may live without conscience
and live without heart,
We may live without friends,
we may live without books,
But civilized [folks]
cannot live without cooks.
(anonymous)

This issue features a theme relevant to all of us. Our relationship with food as physical necessity is undeniable. We cannot survive without it. But while what we eat is crucial to our physical survival, how we obtain, prepare, understand and categorize that food is deeply related to historical and cultural realities just as closely as poetry, music and art are. The history of various Mennonite groups is intimately linked to particular foods and the rituals, traditions and expectations that accompanied them.

Scholars have coined the term "foodways" to refer to"the cultural, social and economic practices relating to the production and consumption of food" (Darnton), that is, "why we eat what we eat and what it means" (Wikipedia). As Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell state, "foodways bind individuals together, define the limits of the group's outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium of inter-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion, and provide a context for performance of group rituals." Thus, examining Mennonite foodways (as Marlene Epp's September lecture will also do) casts light on who we as Mennonites are and why we eat what we do.

This issue, then, focuses on significant aspects of Mennonite foodways and the way they illuminate our understanding of Mennonite history and culture: in a feature article, Robert Martens explores the traditional relationship of Mennonites with agricultural land (and by extension, food production), often developed because of political exigencies, while a companion article explores the efforts of some young Mennonites to resist increasing urbanization in a return to the land. Other articles explore food preparation and its relationships to both local practices and global realities. And in addition to our usual book reviews and genealogy column, several short articles revisit memories of Russian Mennonite food in the Fraser Valley context. Our back cover features the art of well-known Fort Langley artist Barbara Boldt, along with her personal reflection on the significance of blackberry pancakes in her life (*Roots and Branches* will be doing a profile of Barbara Boldt and her art in a later issue).

May we eat well and cherish our culinary traditions.

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Darnton, Julie, qted in Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foodways

Marlene Epp. Photo: www.mhsbc.com/futureevents

Annual fundraising banquet

Mennonites and Foodways: A *Miagrope* of Meaning

Marlene Epp, from Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario, with special music by Calvin Dyck

6:00 pm, Saturday, September 27, 2014
Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 3471 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford, B.C.

Marlene Epp is a professor of History and Peace & Conflict Studies and Director of Mennonite Studies at ConGrebel University College in Waterloo. She teaches courses in Mennonite history, Canadian immigration history, peace history, and food history. Most of her published research is on the history of Mennonite women and includes two books: *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (2000), and *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (2008). Most recently, she co-edited a collection of essays on food history titled *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History* (2012), in which she has a chapter on Mennonite cookbooks. She is married to Paul Born, originally from Abbotsford, and they have two young adult sons.

Are we eating "Just" Food? Reflections on Food, Faith and Culture

Opening paragraphs from an article originally published in the Canadian Mennonite*, based on a talk Epp gave at the 37th annual Kitchener-Waterloo Inter-faith Community Prayer Breakfast, May 9, 2012.*

My partner Paul and I were vacationing in Mexico with friends in February and one afternoon, after a morning of whale-watching in the Bay of Banderas at Puerto Vallarta, we stopped at a Walmart to pick up some groceries.

Wandering through the cheese section, I found, not completely to my surprise, a large display of *queso menonita*—Mennonite cheese. I was not completely surprised because I knew that Mennonite cheese was a popular national foodstuff in Mexico, prized for its soft texture and mild flavour. Ironically, the production of Mennonite cheese in Mexico began when a group of conservative Mennonites in Manitoba chose to leave Canada in 1922 because they wished to remove themselves from a modernizing culture and establish separated communities in a country that more or less left them alone to live out their religious beliefs. Over the past 90 years, their cheese has become renowned in the country.

Here we see food, faith and culture intersect in interesting and perhaps odd ways. A group of people with distinct cultural characteristics and religious beliefs become known for a particular foodstuff that they produce; it is sold at a popular tourist destination, where spirituality is mostly at low tide, and by a corporate giant, Walmart—often critiqued for its "unjust" economic practices and for globalizing western consumerism in a manner viewed as unethical by some.

My mind was momentarily dizzy with the intersection of ideas and images here.

For me, that *queso menonita* was not "just food" that would be tasty melted on a black bean burrito. It represented the faith-based migration and sojourn of a particular people that I consider my "denominational cousins"; it represented a symbol of their cultural and economic success in a context where they are often vilified for their isolation and church-based legalism. Its presence on this occasion in a Walmart at Puerto Vallarta, and priced higher than most other cheeses, made me wonder whether most Mexicans could even afford *queso menonita*.

The phrase "just" food was introduced to me in a travelling art exhibit that was in Waterloo last year in which 13 visual artists from around the world reflected, in their artwork, on the question of food "justice" and the right to food, framed in a human rights context. Sponsored by the Mennonite Committee on Human Rights and curated by Winnipeg artist Ray Dirks, the exhibit prompted a whole range of questions that begged a faith-based response to global hunger.

But another way to think of the phrase is to ask, are we eating "only" food? The short answer here is no. When we eat certain foods at specific times and for particular reasons, we know that food is imbued with cultural and religious meaning. The famous phrase "you are what you eat," or, as one author turned it around, "you eat what you are," says a great deal about the linkages between our self-identity and the food we consume.

A complete version of this article was originally published in the Canadian Mennonite *16:18, September 17, 2012.*

Announcements

Book Receives Honourable Mention

We are very pleased to announce that Ruth Derksen Siemens' book *Daughters in the City* has received an Honourable Mention award in the BC Historical Federation book competition. The award was presented to Ruth on June 6 in Surrey by the Lieutenant-Governor at the Federation's annual meeting. *Daughters in the City*, an account in word and photo of the two Mennonite "Girls' Homes" in Vancouver, can be purchased at the MHSBC office.

Steinbach Mennonite Heritage Village 50th Anniversary:

In 2014 the Mennonite Heritage Village celebrates its 50th Anniversary. We thought we should exhibit our collection of nearly 16,000 artifacts! We're going all out, and we're going to pack our Gerhard Ens Gallery with a pile of great pieces with fascinating stories. After all, this exhibit is about collecting, and we've been doing this for 50 years. We can't fit them all, but we can sure try.

Help Needed with Polish Documents

Some Polish language documents have been donated to the MHSBC archives. These documents need to be translated into English, and at the moment there are no Polish speakers among MHS personnel. We are looking for someone willing to volunteer his/her time and language skills to help us out. Please contact the MHSBC office by phone or email if you are interested.

Mennonites and their Love Af-Affair with the Land

By Robert Martens

Although mainstream Mennonites today live mostly in cities, for centuries it was the norm for them to live off the land. Their predecessors, the Anabaptists, may not have guessed that it would be so. There were peasants among them, but many were urbanized, and made a living as weavers, artisans, scholars, engineers, doing whatever was required to feed a family. However, state and church persecution drove them to safe havens offered by aristocrats, and these havens were almost invariably on the land. Anabaptist-Mennonites were now living on the fringes, away from the cities, not by choice, but by necessity. They became innovative farmers and drainage experts, again by necessity, as the land assigned to them was often inferior soil. Fretz states, "Thus Mennonites have had a reputation of being good farmers because they preserved the productive capacity of their soils for centuries on end" (2).

Mennonites excelled in farming partly because of their large families and intensive family labour. Their success was also a result of well-organized communities centred on the church. With the great exception of the Anabaptist "Golden Age" in Amsterdam and Danzig, when many of them became wealthy in business and trade, the city was often regarded as alien and hostile to community values.

For a time, Mennonites were farming globally. In Russia, they congregated in tightly organized villages, and just when they were beginning to urbanize and assimilate, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 drove many into exile. Russian Mennonite refugees who came to North America generally brought a love for the land with them. The earlier Swiss stream of Mennonites were among the first immigrants to the United States and normally clustered in Mennonite settlements, where farming again became standard practice.

Mennonites from Russia – and some from Eu-

rope – also pioneered farming on the vast Canadian and American prairies after leaving their homeland in the 1870s and following decades. They brought the hard-milling Red Turkey wheat with them, and Mennonites in Kansas helped turn that area into the breadbasket of the United States. Their farms in Kansas, compared to those of their non-Mennonite neighbours, seem to have been "consistently smaller than average, more carefully cultivated, more highly technologized, more highly valued and less prone to foreclosure" (Loewen/Nolt 87). Other Mennonite farmers were, of course, highly traditionalist rather than technologized, but generally speaking, Mennonites on the high as well as low end of technology – and those in between – perceived the land as something sacred. In the early twentieth century, Mennonites had not yet been intimately affected by creeping individualism. Farming was God's plan for his people. Setbacks such as floods and storms were the will of God, a lesson in humility. Mennonites were in fact among the last North American ethnic/cultural groups to leave the land.

Royden Loewen and Steven Nolt have written, "Faith and soil, values and land, memories and nature, were all inter-related" (82). Community and mutual aid were the dutiful response to the divine gift of the soil. Loewen and Nolt also argue that the Mennonite doctrine of nonresistance and the exhortation to humility led to greater respect for God's creation. The Mennonite periodical *Herald of Truth* warned that "things 'created by the Lord' must not be used for 'luxury and self indulgence.' Indirectly, and perhaps only subtly, this sentiment placed a check on the temptation to exploit nature" (Loewen/Nolt 85). Furthermore, the principle of *Absonderung*, living in separation from the distractions of the "world," meant living with less, and therefore leaving a smaller human footprint on nature. Chris Yordy writes that the Old Order Mennonites of Waterloo County in Ontario believe in being "separate and particular as caring communities of Christ's disciples, even if that means renouncing of certain worldly possessions and material things" (3).

This careful stewardship of the land may have been the ideal, but in practice it was not always so. Mennonite farmers were among those who participated in reckless agricultural practices that resulted in the devastating Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Deep ploughing of native prairie grasses meant that moisture was not naturally retained in the soil, and enormous black dust storms hit Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and surrounding states, all the way up to Montana and southern Alberta. In the years following this human-caused natural disaster, Mennonites were avid participants in the reform of agricultural methods. In 1943, A. D. Stoesz, a Mennonite botanist, wrote that "the soil is the life blood of any nation" (qtd in Loewen/Nolt 90). For many Mennonite farmers, the Dust Bowl was a signal of moral wrong-doing, perhaps of the Creator's displeasure. They were among the leaders in a new wave of soil conservation: contour ploughing; fertilizing with lime and manure; mixing crops; and crop rotation, such as starting with a legume like clover or alfalfa, followed by corn, oats, and wheat. In the following years, Mennonites continued to excel in farming, and in agricultural reform, despite their lack of formal college training in agriculture (Fretz 2).

After World War II, North American Mennonites joined the migratory flood to the cities. It was a time "of unprecedented developments: mechanization now included electric and hydraulic systems; scientific discoveries introduced vaccines and herbicides; intrusive governments pushed for ever-

Sawatsky Farm on Huntingdon Road (approximately 1940). Photo: South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren Church

increasing scales of economy; corporate vertical integration brought big business into the farmyard; and easy credit lured farmers to participate in full-scale farm commercialization" (Loewen/Nolt 93). Besides these factors, the cost of land was frequently too high for the younger generation. And, finally, to be a farmer became regarded by the urbanized as being a "hick" and out of touch. Fretz writes that "[u]rban people, including the lowliest laboring men, tended to feel higher in social rank than the farmer" (4). Bill Stauffer, a Mennonite farming advocate from Ohio, remarks "that 'we Mennonites are in danger of losing one of our richest traditions, farming as a way of life' with young people who 'don't want to farm' but only wish to 'make money'" (qted in Loewen/Nolt 92).

Mrs. Margaret F. Pauls doing the milking on the Pauls' farm on Short Road, Abbotsford. (1942). Photo: South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren Church

In 1975, a study showed that Mennonites in North America were still disproportionately rural – but the old way of life was rapidly passing away. Traditionalist Mennonites responded by moving their communities to such places as Mexico, Paraguay, and northern Alberta and Manitoba, where they could continue to farm in segregation from mainstream Western society. Often they moved onto unproductive land which they reclaimed with fertilization and intensive family labour. A *New York Times* article observed in 1993 that several counties in the state were showing an increase in farming – and it was all due to conservative Mennonite farmers. They were succeeding where others had failed. Amos Horning, a Mennonite who had moved from Lancaster County in Pennsylvania to central New York, said in an interview, "I don't want to brag or nothing, but maybe it's a little smaller way. Some of these extremely big operations may be too much. If you try to have everything at once, it costs a lot to operate" (qted in "Migration").

Although some environmental leaders such as Wendell Berry have praised traditionalist Mennonite farming, others have retorted that Mennonites were no better environmental stewards than anyone else, and that they were driven to farm for reasons of survival and not for any love for the land (Loewen/Nolt 94). It has been alleged that they have been responsible for extensive forest clearing and soil erosion. Paraguayan Mennonite farmers, who after decades of a struggle for existence in the Chaco have finally achieved prosperity, are now being accused of irresponsible deforestation (Romero). Others, however, have responded that traditionalist Mennonite farmers, such as the Old Order of Waterloo County, are "greener" than the mainstream without being consciously so. The truth of the Mennonite love for the land is, of course, hard to discern. Mennonites have been both the most traditional and most advanced farmers on the globe, and have perceived creation in a multitude of ways. For centuries, though, farming was the heart and soul of Mennonite culture, and the past is not so easily dismissed. Is it possible, as has been argued, that Mennonites still retain an ancestral memory, conscious or unconscious, of rootedness to the soil?

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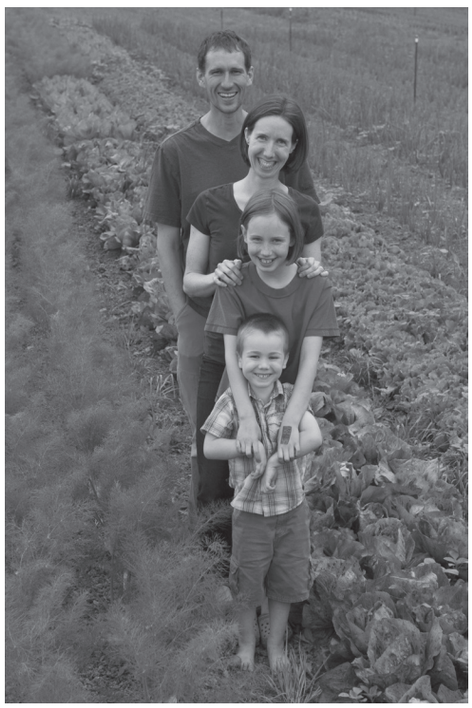
Returning to the Land

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

While the trend to urbanization continues among North American Mennonites, many large-scale farms in the Fraser Valley continue to be operated by Mennonite families; in addition, a significant number of young people with Mennonite backgrounds are returning to their agricultural roots with a fresh vision of living and farming sustainably. Two local farming families illustrate this trend. While not growing up on commercial farms, they have intentionally chosen to devote themselves to a small-scale farming lifestyle, despite its many challenges.



Andy and Cara Abrahams, with Sarah and Jacob. Photo: Amy Odegard

Cara and Andy Abrahams of Abundant Acre Family Farm are "committed to sustainable agriculture and [growing] fresh, flavourful food, vegetables and herbs with organic methods in Greendale" (a historic Mennonite community, just west of Chilliwack, BC). Although their farm "is not certified organic, their farming practic- are shaped by their conviction that farming should contribute to soil health and be in harmony with the natural world" (*abundant*). Andy and Cara, both from non-farming Fraser Valley Mennonite families, work long hours on their farm, their children Sarah and Jacob often at their side. Their vegetables are available through weekly CSA (Community Sustained Vegetable Boxes) or at the Abbotsford Farm and Country Market. After several years of growing crops at various locations in Abbotsford, they are delighted to be setting their roots into their second year of farming the fertile loam of their Greendale Adams Road location.

An excerpt from Cara Abrahams' farm blog, June 2014. *http://abundantacre.wordpress.com/blog:*

When I sat down to start this post Andy was tilling and I had just transplanted cabbage seedlings into one of our hoop houses. Our children were watching our landlord make a trench so we can have power brought to our outbuilding permanently. I often marvel at the changing face of the farm come spring. In one day, we move a greenhouse on its handy track system, take out kale plants and prepare beds. On other days there is the grand shuffle of trays of seedlings from the germination room to the nursery greenhouse, while more mature seedlings get transplanted. The longer days bring growth. The remaining kale and collards bud and then flower. They will be removed soon to make room for different crops. We need to manage the growth of grass and weeds as well. We've thinned and weeded beets and carrots and have moved our big greenhouse for a second time. … The rhubarb we put in just last year has brought us a great crop of long, thick stalks.

The other day Andy and I were talking about values and how that which is seen can often be given a lot of importance. People naturally care about what they can see. That got me thinking about our farm and how we very much care for the often unseen or unconsidered things – like soil microbes, earthworms, birds and animals that call the area in which we farm home. We care to build up the soil so that this particular piece of the planet can be nourished, and people in our area can have good, clean, flavourful, nutrient-rich vegetables grown organically by farmers just down the road. We've been focusing, this winter and spring, on building up our compost supply. We bought a manure spreader in order to make the jobs of transporting manure and turning our compost pile more manageable. We recognize the need to feed the soil that will nourish the vegetables that sustain us.

Another local enterprise featuring weekly CSA boxes, as well as a farm stand, is One Love Farm, operated by Chris Billion and Becky Jantzen Billion at the corner of McCallum and Vye Road in South Abbotsford (another area historically settled by Mennonites). While Chris focuses fulltime on operating the farm, Becky, as is the case in many other small-scale farm families, works at another job (substitute teaching) while helping on the farm when she can. Chris grows the food crops, while Becky's speciality is crops that feed the soul; her flowers are available at the farm stand from early summer on. Chris, from a non-Mennonite background, originally hails from Windsor, Ontario; Becky grew up in Mission on a small acreage where she was immersed in the skills of growing vegetables and fruits and then preserving them for the winter: traditions passed on from her Mennonite immigrant grandmother and gardener mother to Becky.

In naming their farm One Love, Chris and Becky "aim to acknowledge the universal and positive life force of love that can be found in one's respectful connection with nature. We believe that we, all living things - plants, animals and humans - are all connected …. when we are working at our farm we feel this connection the strongest: when we observe a family of grasshoppers swaying in the breeze and looking down on us from our highest dahlia, the hunt of a hawk watched several feet away, a visit from an owl who perches at the top of our greenhouse while we are inside of it, or the crescent moon that softly sheds light during an evening picking of vegetables" (*onelove*).

Becky at the Abbotsford Farmers Market.
Photo: http://onelovefarm.wordpress.com/

Their website outlines their farming philosophy: "One Love Farm believes in land stewardship where we give back to the earth as much as we receive. By helping improve the complex structure and fertility of the land that sustains us, we encourage the development of a diverse and balanced ecosystem. And, by farming organically, we maintain and protect that ecosystem and those who benefit from it. … Farming organically means we don't put harmful chemicals into the soil which can be absorbed by what we grow and then transferred to those who eat it: both humans and animals.... Planning, observation, intuition, and the knowledge gained from our own experience and that of other farmers tend to be our greatest tools."

During spring, summer and fall, you can find these enterprising farm families working hard on their farms or selling the fruits of their labour at the Abbotsford Farmers Market or other local outlets. Unlike some of their Mennonite ancestors, they have intentionally chosen their land-based vocations; like others, they have learned the wisdom of the land by depending on it for their livelihood.

From *Farming in the 1920s:*
Living History Farm website:

It took a farmer an hour and a half to till an acre of ground with five horses and a gang plow. With a 27-horsepower tractor and a moldboard plow, it took only a half-hour to plow an acre and only 15 minutes with a 35-horsepower tractor and a moldboard plow. Today, using a 154-horsepower tractor and a chisel plow, a farmer can till an acre in five minutes.

The First Soviet Tractor and the Mennonite Engineers Who Built it

By Louise Bergen Price

At the end of Russia's civil war, the countryside lay in ruins. Fields were full of weeds. Few horses remained. And people were starving. It was of utmost importance to get fields ploughed and seeded as soon as possible. Realizing this, Mennonites in North America gathered resources and sent about 50 Fordson tractors to Mennonite colonies to assist in reconstruction. Eight of these arrived in Chortitza in October, 1922.

At the same time, Leonard A. Unger and Gerhard Rempel, both of Einlage, were hard at work designing Russia's first "home-grown" tractor that would be reproduced in series. Although sources do not agree on all the details (in some cases even names and places differ), what follows are the basic outlines of the story.

Leonard A. Unger, who would receive credit for the tractor's design, had earned a degree in mechanical engineering from the university in Mannheim, Germany. On his return to Russia in 1912, he began working in his father's factory in Einlage/Kitchkas. The Abram Unger factory, well-known for its production of agricultural implements, already produced two-stroke engines. By 1914, preparations were made to build automobiles, but the war intervened.*

Under Leonard's direction, the factory then turned its energy into producing a prototype of a tractor. This work came to a halt after the *Bolshevik* Revolution when the factory was nationalized, but this was not the end of Unger's tractor dreams. By 1921, Unger had taken a job in Zaporizhia's *Kommunar* factory, a complex consisting of former Hildebrand & Pries, A.J. Koop, and Lepp & Wallman factories, all nationalized in 1915 (many factories had been nationalized during the First World War in order to produce munitions). Here Leonard Unger, together with Gerhard Jakob Rempel, "built a simple tractor without using technical drawings and from parts they had on hand" (Vogt "Über"). In order to avoid the complications of a differential, the tractor had only a single rear wheel and ran on one gear. The motor came from the former *Brüder Sagoreliny* factory in Gross-Tokmak.

The test run for the tractor took place on 12 July, 1922: "At 9:30 the tractor drove out of the former Koop factory to a field 2 kilometres away. In 4 hours, 17 minutes it ploughed 220 square *Sazhen* (about 470 square metres)" (Vogt Über). The officials were satisfied with what they saw, praised the engineers, and asked them to prepare drawings and build a prototype.

Production of the *Zaporoshez* began in September the following year in the *Krasnyj* Progress Factory in Gross-Tokmak. Eventually, between 500 -800 tractors were produced in this series, and the tractor would go on to win the gold medal at the

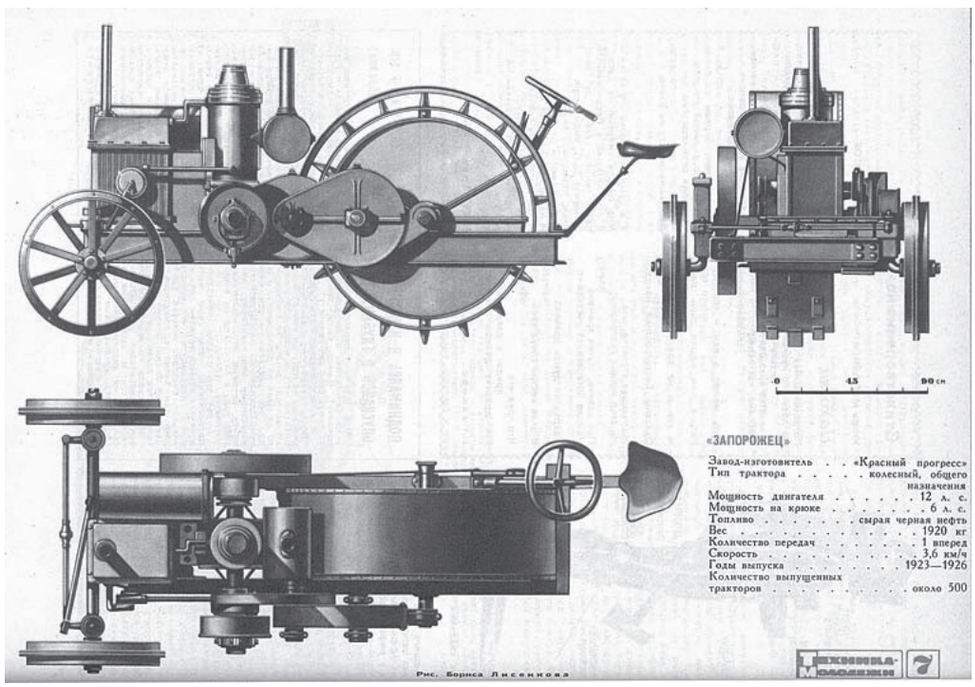
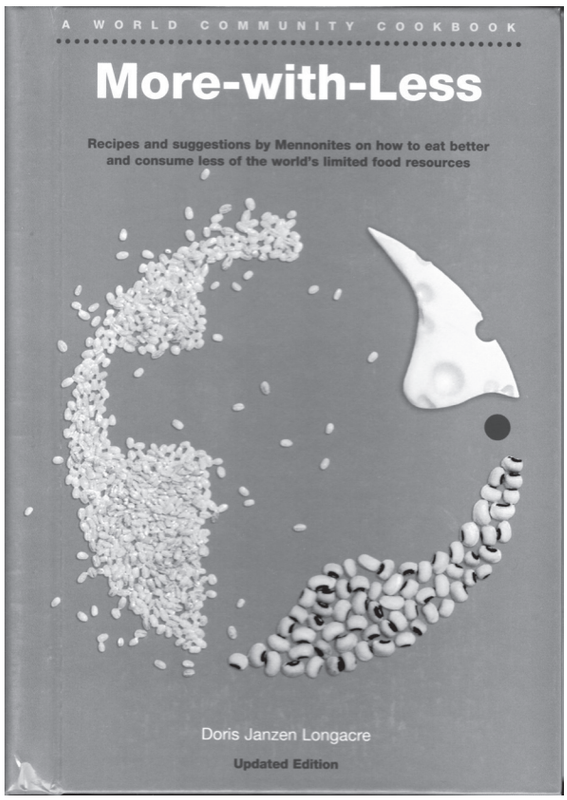


Photo: http://chort.square7.ch/Traktor.htm.

first “All-Russia Agricultural Exhibition” held in Moscow in 1923.

The *Zaporoshez* performed well, capable of ploughing 1.5 to 3 *desyatin* a day (1 des. = 1.09 hectares), depending on how deep the plough was set. Performance would also have depended on whether the land was hilly or flat, since a tractor with a single rear wheel may have been quite unstable on some of Chortitza’s hilly fields.

In Stalin’s Soviet Union, praise and awards given one day did not guarantee safety in the future. Leonard Unger, who later taught at the technical university in Zaporizhia, was exiled in 1933, and died in Siberia in 1941. Rempel was also arrested the same year, but later freed for lack of evidence. He and his family moved to Kharkov where he worked as an engineer at the Ukrainian Scientific Exploration Institute of Agricultural Machinery. He was rearrested in 1937 and accused of spying for Germany. His trial fell on Christmas Day, and he was executed the following day.



*Some accounts state that the tractor was developed in the Koop factory in Einlage, and that Abram Peter Unger was one of the engineers involved.

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American Fordson tractors arriving in Chortiza. Photo: http://chortiza.heimat.eu/BGebCh.htm

Living More with Less: The Doris Janzen Longacre Story

By Robert Martens

Conserving resources at home and taking on economic and political issues are as inseparable as the yolk and white of a scrambled egg. Once you walk into a supermarket or pull up to a gas pump, you are part of the economic and political sphere. Certainly your influence is small. But whether you consume or waste, it is real. Many people using or not using affect things in a big way. Gathering up the fragments of our waste – recycling, conserving, sharing – is a logical and authentic beginning. Such actions are the firstfruits of the harvest of justice. They are the promise of more to come.

(Longacre qtd in Peters).

These words written by Doris Janzen Longacre express the essence of what inspired her to live a life of simplicity and justice – and to publish a cookbook that sold in the hundreds of thousands. Doris was born February 15, 1940, in Newton, Kansas, to John and Helen Classen Janzen. She attended Bethel College, achieved a degree in home economics at Goshen College, and did graduate studies at Goshen Biblical Seminary and Kansas State University. From 1961-63 she worked as a dietician at Hesston College in Kansas. Meanwhile, she married Paul Longacre, with whom she had two daughters, Cara Sue and Marta Joy. And she was involved as well in the institutional world: she served as chair of Akron Mennonite Church (Pennsylvania), and was member of the Board of Overseers of Goshen Biblical Seminary.

But these are the bare bones facts of a very busy and committed life. With the war still raging in Vietnam, Doris and Paul Longacre pointedly articulated their opposition to the conflict by accepting a term of service with MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) in Vietnam between 1964 and 1967. Their two daughters were there with them; and it was there that Doris experienced a powerful sort of revelation. The Longacres went to Vietnam "to witness to the power and glory of a God whose name had been prostituted by illusions of unlimited human power. The flagrant contradiction between these two kinds of power and glory [warfare and God] came home to Doris one day as she was playing the organ in an international church in Vietnam. In the middle of a patriotic hymn mixing unquestioning loyalty to country and single-minded faithfulness to God, Doris was overwhelmed by the lie in which she was trapped. She abruptly stopped playing the organ, left the sanctuary, and retreated to weep alone" (Miller 1). Her deep and sometimes painful inner life, coupled with a faith in a God of compassion, impelled Doris to plunge into service for the poor and disenfranchised.

The Longacres served with MCC once again, in Indonesia, from1971-2. But Doris' endlessly circling and creative mind would ultimately generate a cookbook project that would be the touchstone of her life. How best could she serve? She decided to write a cookbook based on simple foods and simple living, and to allocate all royalties to MCC. It would emphasize whole grains; less meat, dairy, sugar, and saturated fat; and would advocate that feeding ourselves be ecologically responsible. Doris, it seems, was writing a book that was ahead of its time, "green" before the word was widely used. The "greenness" of the book, though, went well beyond care for the environment. It had a core social objective. Janzen Longacre's idea was that if the citizens of the prosperous West would only eat more simply – and perhaps less – the poor nations of the world would benefit. Taking less for ourselves, she argued, leaves more for others.

"Mennonites are widely recognized as good cooks," she wrote. "But Mennonites are also a people who care about the world's hungry" (www.store 1). And she added that Mennonites are gripped with a "holy frustration. 'We want to use less,' they say. 'How do we begin?' " (*Cookbook* 12)

The early 1970s were a time of a global energy and food crisis. The timing for Doris' *More-with-Less Cookbook* seemed remarkably apropos. More

than 1000 recipes were tested by professional home economists, including Evelyn Shaar, head cook at MCC's dining hall. About five hundred were finally chosen to be included in the cookbook, along with practical reflections on how to live simply and well. But there were bumps along the way. Janzen Longacre had written letters to MCC associates around the world, asking for recipes with less meat content. Some reacted negatively, challenging "her assertion that it takes eight pounds of grain to produce one of pound of beef, and said it depends on how cattle are raised" (Byler 2). The Longacre family life was also affected. Paul later remarked, "But it was hard for our two girls – they were seen as the '*More-with-Less*' children. It got to be that they couldn't go into a store and buy a candy bar or chips without someone noticing" (herald/interview 1). On a lighter note, the soufflé meant for the photo on the back cover kept stubbornly falling. Eventually the fallen soufflé appeared on the early edition's cover.

In 1976 the book was published, and the results were astonishing. Eventually about 900,000 copies were sold by Herald Press, and at the turn of the century, *More-with-Less* was in its 47th printing. It had not been at all expected that the cookbook would be so trendy, especially among non-Mennonites. Gayle Gerber Koonz, professor at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, commented, "If you consider the theological teaching and witness of this cookbook, its impact far outweighs that of most Mennonite writings in theology and ethics" (Byler 1).

Immediately after publication, the Longacres requested and received a two-year leave of absence to continue their education at Kansas State University; Doris would study home economics and nutrition. At Kansas State she wrote an essay for MCC that linked good nutrition in the developing world with social justice; she was in demand as a writer and speaker on nutrition issues ("Nutrition"). But it was here that her trials began: she was diagnosed with breast cancer. For a year she underwent chemotherapy, and it seemed that she was cancer-free. But in 1977 she experienced severe pain in her back, and it was discovered that the cancer had spread to her bones. She was given about two years to live.

The Longacres returned home to Akron. In a sermon Doris delivered there, she said, "We intended to go to graduate school. Actually, we ended up going to two schools. One of these was Kansas State University. The other was a school with a much more difficult curriculum – the school for finding God's presence in the experience of having cancer" (herald/sermon 1). In that same sermon, she emphasized her faith and her determination to go on: "While God does not answer our questions directly, especially when we go through periods of suffering, He does offer his presence. ... This has been our experience over the last year and a half" (herald/sermon 1).

Doris Janzen Longacre (1940-1979). Photo: MCC photo; http://gameo.org

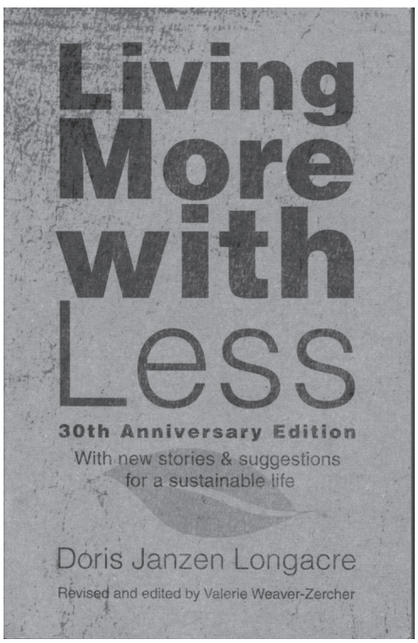
Inwardly, however, Doris' often did not feel the optimism expressed behind the pulpit. Frequently in pain, she knew she needed a project to divert her attention from her suffering, and she chose to write a sequel to her cookbook. *Living More with Less* would be a book of tips and reflections on how to live simply and sustainably. Doris started writing in January 1979. Paul remarked, "Writing the book gave her focus, and a reason to keep going. That's why she started it, even though she knew she probably had only two years to live.

She felt she had more to say – just not as much time as she wanted to say it all" (herald/interview 1).

The writing must have been immensely difficult, but it hardly shows in her book. Doris was bursting with her message. "The trouble with simple living is ... that it isn't simple," she wrote. Simplicity involves a "hundred small decisions every day that, if you stop to think about what causes what, become maddeningly complex" (*Living* 30). On the other hand, she said, we have teachers of simple living: the poor in the developing world, our grand- and great-grandparents – and Scripture.

During this time, Doris was keeping a journal. Her entries speak to her deepening struggle:

Jan. 10, 1979: This morning I want to begin writing the opening chapter on my book. ... Lord God, unless you write the book, I write in vain. Unless it's your message, why should we bother typing, editing, going through months of work and piles of paper – then publishing and selling? Another thing, God. Something in me rebels at reading and writing more exploitation stories – more stories of suffering and repression. I want stories of love, hope, goodness. ... Let me be willing. I can't write this book without being willing to enter in some way into the suffering of your people.



Oct. 6, 1979: Enough for now, I'm tired. But Lord, these are days of aliveness and I thank you for them. Keep my family in your love. Keep my book on your timetable. Keep me patient.

Oct. 12, 1979: God, what do you want of me? I do not understand the events into which I am plunged. Third lung X-ray today – unchanged. Probably that means no going home from the hospital tomorrow. And I'm so near to finishing my book. If I could have just six weeks of good health, I could finish.

Oct. 18, 1979: I confess to impatience, discouragement, and fear. Fear that my lungs won't 'open up' again. Fear that for weeks and weeks I won't be able to work on my book. Lord God, if it's not too much to ask, by your grace relax these fears and give me daily signs of hope, for I have an impatient nature eager to be about your work.

Nov. 4, 1979: I so much want to complete this book, one of the creative works of my life. But weighed in the balance against more time with [family] Paul, Cara, and Marta, the book is like a dry dandelion ready to blow. But I shouldn't have to make such choices. If I get well enough to work on the book, I will have time to spend with my family.

Doris Janzen Longacre died, in the company of her family, on November 10, 1979. She was 39. Her husband Paul completed the final two chapters of the book.

In the following thirty years, 115,000 copies of *Living More with Less* were sold, again with royalties going to MCC. The book seemed ahead of its time, and a thirtieth anniversary edition, updated and edited by Valerie Weaver-Zurcher, was published in 2010. Rossi writes that "[a] reader noticing the reissue on a store shelf might assume that the book is new, the latest in the growing genre of green, sustainable, simple-living books" (1). Janzen Longacre's vision seems as fresh as ever, connecting frugal living with the alleviation of global poverty. But frugal living was not meant by Doris to be some kind of penance, according to Paul: "Doris would have wanted her readers to feel and live more simply as a discipline," he writes, "but as a discipline of creativity and joy rather than one of drudgery and guilt" (herald/interview 2).

Perhaps it's fitting to conclude with words from Doris herself that express her quirky sense of humour and joy in living:

Life is too short to ice cakes; cakes are good without icing.
Life is too short to read all the church periodicals.
Life is too short not to write regularly to your parents.
Life is too short to eat factory baked bread.
Life is too short to keep all your floors shiny.
Life is too short to let a day pass without hugging your spouse and each of your children.
Life is too short to nurse grudges and hurt feelings.
Life is too short to worry about getting ready for Christmas; just let Christmas come.
Life is too short to spend much money on neckties and earrings.
Life is too short for nosy questions like 'How do you like your new pastor?' Or – if there's been a death – 'How is he taking it?'
Life is too short to be gone from home more than a few nights a week.
Life is too short not to take a nap when you need one.
Life is too short to care whether purses match shoes or towels match bathrooms.
Life is too short to stay indoors when trees turn color in fall, when it snows, or when the spring blossoms come out.
Life is too short to miss the call to worship on a Sunday morning.
Life is too short for bedspreads that are too fancy to sleep under.
Life is too short to work in a room without windows.
Life is too short to put off Bible study.
Life is too short to put off improving our relationships with the people we live with (herald/Longacre 1).

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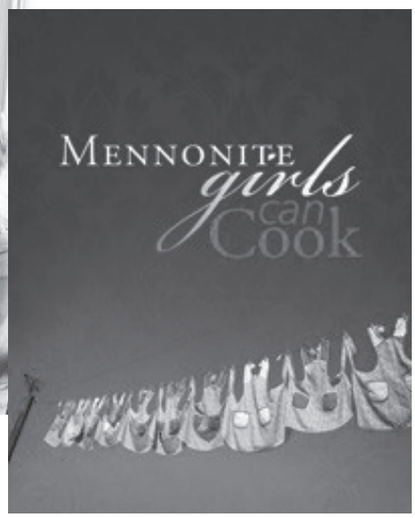
The *More-with-Less Cookbook* and *Living More with Less* are available at the MHS library.



An Update on *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*

By Dolly Martens Peters. From an interview with Lovella Peters Schellenberg.

We are a group of ten women who share recipes and our faith, with the purpose of inspiring hospitality, while using our resources to help needy people around the world. A simple recipe blog started in 2008 to document our family recipes has resulted in two cookbooks (*Mennonite Girls Can Cook*).

The recipe website *Mennonite Girls Can Cook* was founded in the belief that "food is the catalyst that draws in conversation; relationships are nurtured and stress is released when a meal is shared." The ten women involved in the website and cookbook are convinced that Mennonites have traditionally given generously and have inspiring stories to tell. Therefore this unique website includes a diverse index, including "History and Stories," in which women chronicle their personal memories: "Cooking is made personal with interesting tidbits."

The dream of these ten women to feed hungry children with proceeds from their venture became a reality when Menno Media (Herald Press) negotiated with the group to publish a cookbook in 2010. The women began their search with MCC for projects they could support, pledging one hundred percent of the royalties from their first cookbook, *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*, to the chosen project.

At the time, Ukraine was in economic crisis with high unemployment and poverty, and children were consequently being abandoned. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Good Shepherd Shelter had been founded in Mekeevka, Ukraine, a coal mining town near the provincial capital of Donetsk. The fact that Ukraine is part of the ancestral history of the Mennonite Girls group was a motivating factor in their decision to support the shelter. The group also committed to funding the construction of a greenhouse on its property; this building has become a source of healthy food for the children in the shelter, as well as for the surrounding community. Meanwhile, the children learn invaluable skills as they work in the nursery.

The follow-up cookbook, published in 2013, was entitled *Mennonite Girls Can Cook Celebrations*. This book – again 100% of royalties are donated to a humanitarian project – is a compilation of savoury recipes, personal stories, and pictures of each woman in the group. One member had travelled to Kenya, and during a visit to a school there, recognized the vital importance of clean water. The group then selected the WASH program to be the recipient of the royalties from the second book: WA – for water; S – sanitation; H – hygiene.

WASH was founded in 2010 at Menno Kids Academy, Nairobi, in order to combat the often fatal consequences of diarrhea caused by bad drinking water. The problem is acute in Kenyan slums, where it is estimated that 6,000 children die daily from dehydration caused by diarrhea. Through a process

called Solar Water Disinfection (SODIS), water can be rendered safe. Plastic bottles filled with water are placed in sunlight for 6 to 8 hours while ultraviolet rays kill the waterborne microorganisms that cause disease; easily available materials assist in the cleansing process. Each student receives 4 bottles of clean, safe water daily. In addition, the teaching of personal hygiene and cleanliness has resulted in healthier families and a dramatic improvement in school attendance.

Any earnings not specifically from royalties, however, go to local causes. The group has decided that donations received in their home area of the Fraser Valley will support Matthew's House (a respite care home for children in Abbotsford) and local food banks. For example, when the women received several hundred dollars for a speaking engagement at the Chilliwack Alliance Church, those proceeds stayed in the community. Royalties from the sale of the first book continue to be designated for the Ukraine shelter.

When I first interviewed Lovella (my sister-in-law, who is also the administrator of the group) in 2009, the website was receiving 2000 hits per day; this has now grown to 7000 daily. The women have been guests on both national and provincial television, and profess that promoting the cookbooks has resulted in some very positive experiences.

Each Easter, I "enlighten" my family with *paska* (sweet Easter bread), made by following the recipe from *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*. The ten women involved in the website and cookbooks have not only fulfilled their personal goals of supporting hungry children, but have delighted thousands of families with their scrumptious dishes and personal stories. They are a passionate group of women who practice the theme of their blog – "What Matters Most": "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

The greenhouse at the Good Shepherd Shelter built with the proceeds from the first cookbook.
Photo: http://www.mennonitegirlscancook.ca/

Stories from "Berry Flats": The Wedding

By Helen Rose Pauls

One last time, Margeret Geddert surveyed the arrangements for her daughter Dorothy's wedding. "Too bad I didn't plant more gladiolas," she thought, "but at least we have enough dahlias." An aura of excitement and anticipation hung over the room: another wedding was about to begin!

The dahlias were the color of autumn: bronze, orange, lemon yellow, golden: like huge exotic coins foretelling a prosperous future. They had been arranged by the nimble fingers of Hulda Enns into enormous sprays together with white gladiolas – with yellow candles to match.

"Candles!" the bride's future mother-in-law had gasped in her highly-accented English. "You are having candles? You are having candles in the Berry Flats Mennonite Brethren Church? *Einfach Katholisch* [downright Catholic!]!" But her words were lost in the excited bustle of preparation.

Dorothy examined the princess-style green and gold *peau de soie* bridesmaid's dresses that her mother had somehow managed to sew after long days of work sorting apples in the cannery. The dresses fell to the ground in sleek lines – matching Dorothy's own slender white gown, which trailed behind her, the train stitched with *guipure* lace, rich and thick.

How patiently she and Rudy Friesen sat in the

joined wooden chairs, trimmed with green myrtle boughs from Hulda Enns' hedge. Yes, sat through two sermons, one in English and one in German, the latter to satisfy Rudy's family, more recently arrived from the German speaking villages in Russia.

A solo by Diane Wieler, speaking more to Mrs. Wieler's need to have her daughter's talents recognized than to a friendship with Dorothy, had been arranged by the two mothers at the cannery. The rendition was sung with flourish and gusto; and then the lovely candle lighters sang so beautifully, "*O leg aufs Haupt uns deine Segenshände*" (Oh Lay Your Hands of Blessing upon Us), bringing tears to Mother Friesen's eyes. The same song had been sung at her own wedding gathering in Russia. A poem by sister-in-law Lisa then wished one and all a wonderful day and the couple a wonderful future.

Wedding of Mary Krause & Alfred Hamm, 1944. Photo: *Yarrow Pioneers and Settlers*: http://www.yarrowbc.ca/

Throughout the long service, the rich aroma of coffee, brewed to perfection according to Hulda Enns' secret recipe – some said egg shells and salt were the hidden ingredients – had tantalized the wedding guests. Hulda Enns, who had never known a husband herself, although cannery gossip had it that there had been a love lost amidst the violence of Russia, was the official organizer of every detail the many wedding receptions held at the village church.

Mouth-watering confections tempted one and all: towering Angel Food cakes baked and frozen in advance were iced with Seven Minute Frosting and presented one per table. The chocolate cakes cut into diamond shapes, and the butter horns drizzled with walnuts had been ordered from the bakery in Abbotsford. Rich yellow cheddar came from Neufeld's General Store. Mother and Father Geddert had prepared chopped chicken sandwich spread and ham fillings which were spread on open-face buns by the church ladies as fast as they were eaten. *Zwieback* with raspberry jelly, were in plentiful supply, and mountains of home-made dill pickles were arranged decoratively on serving plates according to Hulda Enns' precise instructions.

White linens glistened and fell evenly from the table, Hulda's yardstick having verified that tablecloth and floor were equidistant at all points around the tables. Polished cutlery and gleaming white dishes with golden rims, purchased after much negotiation by the Ladies' Aid committee, shone in perfect symmetry.

Acting as a modern-day Yenta – the matchmaker in *Fiddler on the Roof* – Hulda Enns had paired up the youthful servers on a list mounted on a pillar in the church basement. Although Ernest Kroeker yearned to be serving with the vivacious Martha Lenzmann, challenging the arrangement would not have occurred to him, and he took up his assignment at the far table with big Bertha Plett, her work-hardened hands reaching for the coffee cups. All he could do was gaze wistfully as Billy Harder led Martha to the head table. Richard Wieler accepted his assignment – the Postum (a coffee substitute) kettle – with dismay, wondering when he had crossed Hulda Enns. This job, for some reason, did not merit a female partner, and he watched Selma Dick being led to the side Sunday school classrooms, full of diners as well, by his rival, Victor Lenzmann.

Diane Wieler in her dark circle skirt dress and three-inch high heels could hardly keep up with the tables she and Freddy Driediger had been given. She quaked at Hulda's displeasure at the discovery of an empty butter dish, a cake plate with only two pieces remaining, and a coffee cup less than half full – not to mention Freddy's mortification when he let a saucer slip out of his grasp, wincing helplessly as it smashed to bits on the painted concrete floor. She cringed at the momentary halt in conversation.

Along with the rich smell of coffee wafted the ever-present scents of the dairy barn, of Camay soap purchased with berry savings by frugal teenage girls, of Olde Spice aftershave, of Wildroot hair ton-

ic, of manure, of barn cleaner disinfectants and strong homemade lye soaps, of Evening in Paris perfume purchased in its wee blue bottle, of Topaz from Avon lingering around Diane Wieler, as well as the two drops of vanilla dabbed behind the ears of Selma Dick, who couldn't afford anything else.

Hulda Enns ruled over the electric atmosphere in the room. The clatter of cups and saucers, the slurps of thirsty farmers swallowing their coffee, the crisp crunch of pickles, the muffled sound of cakes being chewed blended with joking and laughter as old friends and relatives from far and near reminisced. Young eyes glowed as hands touched under a saucer being served, or gentle pressure was exerted on a slim waist as a young man led a girl to their post of duty. The spirit of a wedding's joy, the mystery of what was to come, caught the young servers in its embrace. A breathtaking intensity developed that saw many a love match won and lost over coffee cups.

Gracefully, Miss Enns steered the crowd of guests and the waiters through three and four place settings. So tactfully and efficiently was this done that the wedding guests were hardly aware they were being pushed through the basement reception hall at an alarming rate to make room for the host still waiting outside: relatives were always first, visitors second, locals third, and last, all the children, together with the youth who had worked so hard to make the occasion a success.

Cabbage Borscht (above) and Bean Soup (above right).
Photos: http://www.mennonitegirlscancook.ca/

Soup Story

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

Bohnensuppe, Borscht, Hühnersuppe. Tasty, savoury, traditional Mennonite soups. Whenever I prepare one of these, I remember my childhood on a Fraser Valley dairy farm and the wonderful concoctions simmering on the sawdust-burner kitchen range on cold winter afternoons when I arrived home from school. It was wonderful to be greeted by the scent and taste of a warm bowl of soup: after-school comfort food. Or my memory takes me back to warm summer days spent running barefoot in our orchard, when the noon meal might feature bean soup or *borscht* made from vegetables growing in the garden mere minutes before.

Growing up on the outskirts of Greendale (a mostly Mennonite community a few miles east of Chilliwack, BC), I attended an elementary school in which children of recent Mennonite immigrants were a minority. I often felt different, wishing I could blend in without being marked as Mennonite by appearance and restrictions; this feeling drove my persuasive appeals to my parents that I be allowed to cut my long blonde braids into a more contemporary hair style and to be dressed in more stylish clothing. That I could not participate in dance lessons during PE classes only made me feel more isolated, wanting to distance myself from my Mennonite parents and culture.

But I never felt that way about the wonderful soups my mother produced on a weekly basis. While I foolishly preferred butter from the store to my mother's home-churned version, and along with my siblings begged for pasty McGavin's white bread to be put on the grocery list (while still acknowledging that my mother's fluffy *Bulki* was beyond compare), I never desired the insipid soups that came from cans, no matter how appealing the labels.

My mother's bean soup (*Bohnensuppe*), made from home-cured ham, garden-fresh or canned green beans, and seasonal or dried summer savory always met with my approval, as did *borscht* brewed

from a heady combination of homegrown cabbage, dill, potatoes and fresh or canned tomatoes. And *Hühnersuppe* (chicken soup), a waste-not flavourful concoction of homemade noodles and stewed worn-out laying hens, was a welcome antidote to winter colds and chills and easy on an upset stomach. The *Sommer Borscht* (summer *borscht*) that my mother concocted for herself each spring was not – with its bland colour despite its infusion of *Süaromp* (sorrel) and other greens, as appealing to my youthful palate – but I've come to appreciate this spring tonic later in life.

I realize now that many of these soups were economy dishes, designed to provide satisfying and filling one-pot meals on a shoe string. They used what was available in season and what could be put away from a summer's crop by canning, and in later years, freezing. "Salt of the earth" peasant dishes.

But to me the taste and smell of these home-made soups are still outstanding. They were also traditional foods that satisfy the current mantras of local and natural. They contained no chemical-laden monoculture crops or hormone-infused, factory-farmed meat. They were the real deal: local, natural, wholesome, a big part of the original hundred mile – or should I say hundred yard – diet.

You may want to revisit some of these simple culinary pleasures this summer. Here are recipes for *Bohnensuppe* and *Borscht* from the *Mennonite Girls Can Cook* website, as close to my mother's versions as I could find: best made with vegetables fresh from the garden.

Recipes from the Mennonite Girls Can Cook website (http://www.mennonitegirlscancook.ca)

***Schaubel Zup* (Green Bean Soup or *Bohnensuppe*)**
from the kitchen of Anneliese, posted January 2009

Ingredients:
1 lb smoked ham hock
½ dried red hot pepper
10 black pepper kernels
1 bay leaf
1 1/2 tsp salt
1 large onion, chopped
2 - 3 carrots, chopped
2 medium potatoes
6 cups chopped (frozen or fresh) green beans
summer savory
1 bouillon cube (chicken or beef) if needed, for extra flavor

Cover ham bone with about 8 cups water in large pot. Tie spices into cheesecloth and add to pot. Bring to boil, take off scum, and simmer about 1 hour. Take out ham bone. Add vegetables and cook another hour. While vegetables are cooking and after ham has cooled somewhat, remove ham from bone, chop into bite size pieces and return to pot. About ½ hour before it's done, add a handful of summer savory, tied together for easy removal. If you can't get summer savory, use a tiny sprinkle of thyme. Add ½ cup sweet cream or sour cream, before serving. Enjoy a trip down memory lane.

Cabbage *Borscht*
from the kitchen of Judy, posted January 2009

Judy writes,
The Ukrainians made *borsch*...and the Mennonites of the Ukraine borrowed the soup...but substituted cabbage as the main ingredient rather than beets, and called it *Borscht*.

My *Borscht* is much like the soup my mom cooked...for which there never was a written recipe. But it goes something like this...

Ingredients:
2 lbs. soup bones, with lots of meat
8-10 cups water
2-4 carrots, sliced
4 medium potatoes, cubed
1 large (or 2 medium) onions, chopped
1 medium head cabbage, chopped fine
2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 whole red chili peppers (dried)
fresh dill (a handful or to taste)
2 tins tomato soup
2 cups diced tomatoes (optional)
Cover soup bones with water and simmer until meat is tender (several hours).
Remove the bone and shred the beef. Add more water to make 8-10 cups of stock before adding the vegetables.
Add vegetables and seasonings (put chili peppers and dill into a spice cup or cheesecloth), and cook until vegetables are tender.
Add tomato soup, diced tomatoes, and shredded beef...and bring to a boil.
Serve with sour cream.

Hans Werner Lecture

by Robert Martens

On May 10, 2014, about 65 people gathered at Bakerview MB Church in Clearbrook, BC, to hear Hans Werner speak on his recently published book, *The Constructed Mennonite*. The book is an attempt to discover the truth behind the stories that his father, John, told him about his life (see the book review in this issue).

"My father told stories without end," Werner said. When visitors arrived, within minutes John Werner's conversation would turn compulsively to his past life. "These stories are one reason I've become a historian," Werner remarked. His father's life was such a strange one that "[he] wondered, is it even possible that these stories are true?" Hans went to work, matched sources such as military records against his father's account, and the results were mostly positive: "I was amazed at how he told the truth."

Telling the truth would not have come easy for John Werner. He had served in both the Soviet and German military during World War II, and ultimately had to justify his past when he immigrated into a pacifist Mennonite community in Manitoba. His son Hans remembers his experience of attending Remembrance Day services with his schoolmates: "We were not the same. … My father was *not* to be remembered on Remembrance Day." As a child, Hans was forced to negotiate this complex and difficult situation.

His book is not meant as a judgement on his father, Werner said. In fact, his intention was quite the opposite. Nevertheless, Werner said he still asks himself the question, "Did I honour my father in this book?" Readers of his superb "memoir" can judge for themselves.

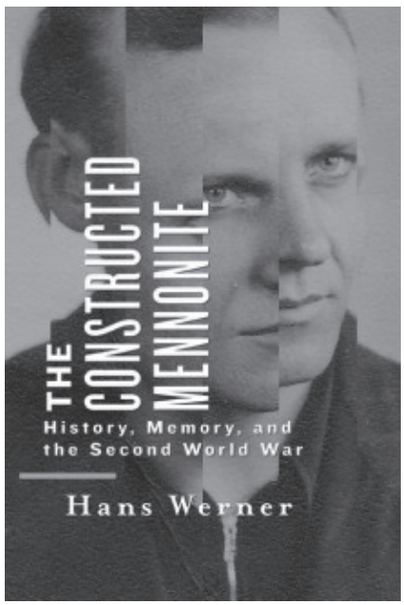
Hans Werner at Bakerview Church.
Photo: Elmer Wiens

Book Reviews

Hans Werner. *The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory, and the Second World War*. University of Manitoba Press: Winnipeg, 2013.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

Mennonite memoirs, Royden Loewen has remarked, are not written by those who perceive themselves as failures. Rather, they follow a script of a life that begins in ignorance and poverty and ends with an acquired wisdom and relative prosperity.* In other words, the remembered life is "constructed" into a story that realigns and modifies the "facts" in order to create an overriding theme to that life. Hans Werner's recent book, *The Constructed Mennonite*, is an attempt to understand his father's stories about his life, particularly those of World War II, as a constructed narrative through which his father tried to make sense of that life. "The stories my father told had a life of their own," writes Werner in the book's introduction, "and the following pages are also about the way he told them" (5).



Werner's father went through four name changes that corresponded to four radically different periods of his lifetime. He was born as Hans Werner in Nikolaipol, western Siberia, in 1917: the year of the *Bolshevik* Revolution. Because of the intense turmoil of that era, young Hans learned nearly nothing about either his ancestry or the Mennonite faith. His life was difficult from the start. His birth father died of cholera when Hans was only four. Hans' stepfather from his mother's second marriage was an abusive drunk; and when his mother married for a third time, the father-son relationship didn't improve much. And then there was the Soviet-inflicted suffering: collectivization of the land, hunger, arrests. Hans' family participated in the panicked flight of 18,000 ethnic Germans to Moscow in 1929, desperately seeking to emigrate. The family was forced back home by Soviet police, just before some thousands of Mennonites received permission to leave the Communist state. Hans' stepfather, Johann Froese, could not endure the misery. About a month after being forced back to his village, he hanged himself.

The stories told in this book are interspersed with reflections by the author on the meaning and deeper truth of those stories. Usually, Werner writes, "childhood memories follow the lines of patterned scripts: school, neighbourhood, chores, and other domestic routines. My father's scripts were seriously disrupted by the waves of instability brought on by the cholera epidemic and the suicide of his stepfather" (30).

During his school years, Hans became Ivan, a Soviet student loyal to the state and with declining interest in his home life. He became a talented machinist, and was even honoured with an award for excellence in his chosen profession. Ivan's faith in the state was not even shaken by Stalin's Great Terror of 1937-38. "Although he was not a political person," writes Werner, "[my father] must have quietly shaken his head at the 'old ways' of people such as his stepfather and uncles. ... The faith of his Mennonite forebears seems to have been far from his mind" (47). And then in 1938, Ivan was drafted into the Soviet army.

Joining the military forced Ivan Werner to leave a wife he later would rarely mention: "My father seemingly could never find a narrative that included the story of his previous marriage without destroying the 'myth' he was creating about himself. In 1990, I was not sure even my mother knew" (44). Leaving his bride, speculates the author, must have left Ivan with considerable guilt. Whatever the circumstances, however, Ivan was swept up by the enormous political forces of the time. He was assigned to a tank corps, participated in battle against the Finns in the Winter War of 1940 in which he

was wounded and promoted to officer. His faith in the state, however, began to waver. Ivan had developed a fascination with aircraft, but when he applied for pilot training, he was turned down when it was discovered that he had relatives in Canada. Ivan was considered a flight risk. "Up to that time," he later said, "I had always felt like a full-fledged Russian citizen, but then I started to doubt" (73).

And so it happened that, when German forces invaded the USSR in 1941, Ivan jumped from his tank and surrendered to the *Reich*. At this point he became Johann. He was examined in the nude by a panel of seven doctors to certify his racial purity, and thereafter was a German citizen, a member of the *Volk* (people). Johann was drafted as a mechanic, and there follows in the book a vivid and exciting account of his wartime activities. Much of his military career was spent as driver of a *Zugmaschine* (one quibble here: there are problems in the book with German spellings), in this case a machine that specialized in hauling cannon from one battle site to another. In the disastrous frenzy of the next few years, Johann was shot down over the Mediterranean, was wounded by partisans in Venice, spent time in Holland and Czechoslovakia, and ultimately ended up participating in the Battle of the Bulge, the costly engagement that was a major factor in ending Hitler's *Reich*. He would later insist that he had helped Jews whenever he could, and there is some evidence of that.

However, the war memories of Johann, writes Hans Werner, are rather confused. Why? First, because of the bewildering theatre of war, especially bewildering to the individual who is caught up in it. Second, because Johann would repeat his stories over the years without relying on collaboration from other eyewitnesses. The truth became personal and was unquestioned. Third, because Johann was attempting, later in life, to gloss over certain incidents in his service as a soldier for the Third Reich. Finally, his unrevealed first marriage left gaps in the narrative.

"Now finally you were a free person," he later said, "and you didn't know what to do with yourself."

In 1945 Johann surrendered to American forces. Contrary to popular mythology, prisoners of war were often brutally treated by allied forces, and thousands may have simply starved to death. Johann managed to survive by volunteering to work as a truck driver for the US Army. Life finally entered a kind of routine. "Now finally you were a free person," he later said, "and you didn't know what to do with yourself" (129). It was in 1947 in Bamberg that Johann attended his very first Mennonite church service: "The other Mennonites were a little perplexed at his name, since the Werner surname was uncommon among Russian Mennonites. However, his fluency in Low German sealed his identity – he was clearly Mennonite" (131).

It was at this Mennonite congregation that Johann met his second wife, Margarethe, who appears rather suddenly late in the book. Her story is radically different from that of Johann. She was born as Sara Letkeman in 1921 in Osterwick, Ukraine, in the midst of revolution, civil war, and famine. Unlike young Hans Werner, Sara grew up in a steadfastly faithful Mennonite family, and her trust in God never wavered. Sara endured the Stalin-engineered Great Famine of the 1930s, hid with her family to escape Soviet deportation eastward in the face of advancing German forces in 1941, witnessed the atrocities of the German SS, was evacuated to Poland when the German invasion collapsed, married Peter Vogt there, lost him to the draft, and gave birth during a shelling attack. In a further evacuation, she managed to save her infant, but her daughter died shortly afterwards. Additionally, she lost all contact with her husband. Her sufferings seemed endless.

In spite of all this, Sara endured, sometimes defiantly. She joined with other refugees in refusing repatriation (which meant death or exile) to the Soviet Union. When Reich authorities deemed the name of Sara too Jewish, and decided she would henceforth be known as Frieda, she resisted and chose to be Margarethe. Nevertheless, she was al-

ways grateful for the German troops who had "liberated" her from the Soviets. And she developed a faith of complete resignation: "In situations like that," she later said, "the person just thinks about today and tomorrow, you don't think any further. ... If you are living, you don't know anything, you are just alive; about tomorrow, you know nothing; it gives you an entirely different feeling" (150).

Despite their missing first spouses, Margarethe and Johann were married in 1951. CF Klassen and MCC eventually helped them navigate the endless international bureaucracies and immigrate to Canada. They ended up in Steinbach, Manitoba, where Johann became John. He revelled in the new experiences of an intriguing new land; she did not. Margarethe would not feel at home in North America until late in life.

The life stories the couple told in Canada felt very different, writes Hans Werner. John's narrative was that of an epic hero, fighting, surviving, rescuing; it was an odyssey. Margarethe told her story from the vantage point of helpless victim, at the mercy of monstrous forces but redeemed by the grace of God. And both narratives were coloured by the fact that they were related in the context of the Cold War, and modified to accommodate the current political climate.

In a sense, Hans Werner's book is two volumes in one. The first is biographies, accessibly and vividly told. The second, smaller in scope but equal in importance, is the interspersing of reflections upon those biographies, and the academic language occasionally used here might deter some readers. In addition, Werner's relationship with his father is never made clear. There seems to be a reluctance to expose the self.

Nevertheless, Werner has written a remarkable book on the nature of memory and oral history. Sometimes, he concludes, we need to distance ourselves from the usual documents and just listen. Oral histories, he writes, spring from the perspective of the marginalized, the little ones caught in the ebb and flow of history. Despite their inaccuracies, he says, they provide a valuable counterpoint to the dominant narrative of leaders and states.

*See his "Presenting Promise: The Mennonite Memoirs of Yarrow, BC" in *First Nations and First Settlers in the Fraser Valley (1890-1960).* Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2004.

The Constructed Mennonite can be purchased at the MHSBC office at 2825 Clearbrook Road.

Esther Epp-Tiessen. *Mennonite Central Committee: A History.* Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2013.

Report and review by David Giesbrecht

On sale for $30 at the MHSBC office at 2825 Clearbrook Road.

On Saturday, February 1, 2014, the Mennonite Historical Society of BC sponsored an evening featuring Esther Epp-Tiessen in the launching of her new book on the first five decades of Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCCC).

Esther Epp-Tiessen with her history of MCC book. Photo: www.winnipegfreepress.com

Epp-Tiessen, born in Altona, Manitoba, is the daughter of Frank Epp, and sister of Marlene Epp, two well-known Mennonite authors. In 1980, Esther wrote her MA thesis on the origins of MCC. It fired in her a life-long passion for the organization. She has been a service volunteer in the Philippines, and is a long-time employee of MCC Canada. In order to research and write this anniversary book, she took a two-year leave of absence. The project was commissioned by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada under the direction of Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. For her primary sources, Esther relied on MCC archival materials. She also interviewed about 100 people associated with MCCC and drew from published secondary materials.

In her presentation, Esther described her re-

sponse to the research material as being both *ecstasy* (many stories of faithful service and faithful servants) as well as *agony* (failing people and failed projects, or MCCers who died in the line of duty); she concluded that MCCC represents "a many-splendored thing."

Esther summarized the MCCC story from 12 perspectives:

1. MCCC represents a people of profound generosity in their giving and going, both at local congregational levels and overseas.

2. MCCC has impacted North American Mennonites by shaping a greater inter-Mennonite peoplehood. In a variety of ways MCC has served to connect Mennonites of various backgrounds through working together in thrift shops or relief sales – or even intermarriage. As young Mennonites from many backgrounds worked together, they sometimes fell in love and married, inspiring a vision for more nuanced inter-Mennonite peoplehood.

3. MCCC has served to build relationships across some very large divides. Esther described Mennonite voluntary service people working among Indigenous people as representing one of those divides. She also told of a recent meeting of Moslem and Mennonite women who met to quilt blankets over *borscht* and *baklava*.

4. MCCC has been a source for discovering deeper Christian formation. When MCC volunteers spend time among impoverished people, they discover a more personal, relevant Christ. Such meeting places Esther described as "holy ground."

5. MCCC has been for Canadian Mennonites a window of international understanding. International MCC volunteers bring home with them stories of domestic or international awareness that popular news sources do not cover.

6. MCCC has been a force for social change. Esther set the context of this contribution inside prison ministries. She narrated how pastor Harry Nigh in Ontario organized a Circle of Support for a sex offender released from prison. The concept of Circles of Support has been so successful in assisting former prisoners that Corrections Canada has incorporated it into its working practice.

7. MCCC is an advocate for disadvantaged people. MCCC staff persons such as Henry Enns, himself wheelchair confined, have become powerful and effective voices for the removal of psychological and physical barriers, allowing persons with disabilities greater access to meaningful living and social participation.

8. MCCC is a laboratory or incubator for new ideas that address human needs. Esther recognized the contributions of Art DeFehr and Dave Hubert. Art was instrumental in the vision for an MCCC Foodgrains Bank, which has now become a major interdenominational resource for famine relief. Dave Hubert's curb-side recycling project in Edmonton has been the catalyst for recycling used plastic containers.

9. MCCC functions as a counter-cultural force. Esther noted the huge impact of Doris Longacre's book, *More-With-Less*, which has now sold nearly 1 million copies. This and similar MCCC publications have inspired many towards more responsible use of natural resources and the production of less waste.

10. MCCC has been a keen shaper of a peace witness. Over the years MCCC has given a strong voice to an Anabaptist witness for peace as staff and volunteers have addressed issues pertaining to war, abortion, domestic violence, or irresponsible mining practices that are often pursued by Canadian companies working internationally. Esther noted an MCCC pin logo that reads, "To remember is to work for peace"; the pin is still in great demand.

11. MCCC is a vanguard for justice awareness within Mennonite churches. Sometimes MCCC has led in directions that many church members have not been comfortable with, such as the apology to Japanese-Canadians in 1985 to which John Redekop gave strong leadership. MCCC not only apologized to Japanese people for the wrongs perpetrated on them during World War II, but also continues to offer two university scholarships annually to deserving Japanese-Canadian students.

12. MCCC has been a leader in refugee sponsorship. The sponsorship agreement signed with the Canadi-

an government permitted Mennonite congregations across the country to become involved in sponsoring refugees from around the world. And Mennonites have responded generously. Epp-Tiessen concluded her presentation by quoting Orie Miller, "MCC is God's miracle among us."

The book itself is organized chronologically, with each chapter more or less devoted to a decade. The first section, "Gestation and Birth," covers the story of MCC before 1963, the year that the Canadian wing was founded. The author recounts MCC's early years, graphically describing how 20th century political and humanitarian tensions – and particularly the travail visited upon Russian Mennonites during the first several decades of the 20th century – galvanized North American Mennonites into a corporate response. Epp-Tiessen's readers will also be indebted to her analysis of the delicate inter-Mennonite sensitivities which needed to be mollified before a Canadian MCC could be established. Appropriately, Esther credits the diplomatic skills of leaders like William Snyder in the US and John M. (JM) Klassen in Canada for establishing an understanding that a strong office in Canada would augment MCC ministries rather than threaten those which already existed.

A further theme that Epp-Tiessen carefully develops pertains to the increasing contacts between MCCC and the Canadian government. Some Canadian Mennonites were incensed by this, charging that MCCC was compromising the traditional Anabaptist separation between church and state. It took time for the constituency to accept that the pursuit of peace and justice sometimes required direct communication with government officials, including "leveraging CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) funds."

Part II, "Growth and Maturation," expands on the themes of MCCC's identity, the search for relevant ministries, and ultimately, the inescapable need to adapt to large-scale social and cultural changes. It did not take long for MCCC to determine who its Canadian "owners" were. By 1964 eleven Canadian Mennonite conferences were sending representatives to sit on the board of the new organization. More challenging were the details of working out the relationships with the various provincial MCC organizations, and the all-important agreements on revenue sharing. Given that provincial MCCs were rapidly expanding their own ministries, the question was advanced: how should money raised in the provinces be shared with MCCC; and beyond that, with MCC in Akron?

It took time for the constituency to accept that the pursuit of peace and justice sometimes required direct communication with government officials...

Many readers will appreciate Esther's gift for storytelling as she chronicles the formation of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, the critical role that MCCC played in negotiating a refugee sponsorship agreement with the Canadian government, and the considerable effort invested by MCCC staff in advocating for handicapped people. More difficult to accept for some MCCC supporters were the two apologies offered by MCCC: to Japanese-Canadians in 1985, and to Aboriginal people in 1992. As Esther notes, "some constituents reacted sharply," especially to the latter apology.

In the last decade, MCCC board and staff have invested much thought and labour in keeping the organization focused on its mission without losing contact with its constituency.

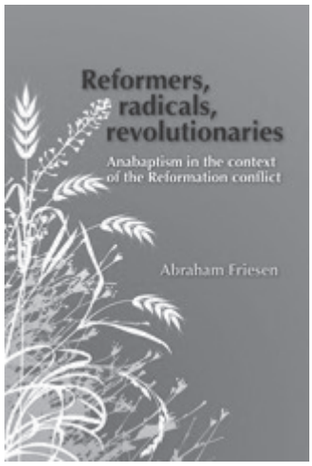
Esther has in the main told a good newsworthy story, but wisely has also included some difficult moments. For instance, the dismissal of volunteers in the Middle East resulted in much internal tension, causing a Palestinian wryly to observe that if MCCers cannot sort out such small personnel issues, what credibility does it have in speaking to the contentious Israeli/Palestinian conflict?

This book is commended to all who wish to understand more of the critical role that MCCC fulfils for Canadian Mennonites as a respected international relief and development agency.

Abraham Friesen. *Reformers, radicals, revolutionaries. Anabaptism in the context of the Reformation conflict.* Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. (*KJ, Matt. 13:24-30*)



Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (*KJ, Acts 2:37-38*)

Today, these two biblical passages might not be pulled from Scripture for special consideration, and in fact would appear rather innocuous. But in the years of the Reformation, writes Abraham Friesen in his book, *Reformers, radicals, revolutionaries*, these words were argued over to deadly effect. As a result, Anabaptists died by the hundreds at the hands of both Roman Catholics and Protestants. How could the nuances of Scripture be of such enormous political and social importance? In the five essays that comprise his book, Friesen analyzes some of the great scriptural debates of the Reformation era, and reaches some surprising conclusions. The book is scholarly, and assumes that the reader knows something of the history of that time: it is not for beginners. Those willing to be challenged, however, will be rewarded by Friesen's creative and provocative thinking – as well as his fearlessness in making ethical judgements based on the historical data.

Friesen's five essays essentially attack the same issues from different perspectives, but also stand alone. They might best be summarized individually:

1. Erasmus, Reformers, and the Anabaptist "Third Reformation"

Until the Reformation years, the traditional translation of Scripture, the Latin Vulgate, was Church sanctioned, and hence, it was argued, infallible. But the clamour was rising that scriptural interpretation was being used exclusively to justify the "System" of orthodox doctrine. When the great scholar and humanist Erasmus* published a revised Latin translation of the New Testament, he did so under clouds of controversy. A key moment occurred with Erasmus' retranslation of Acts 2:37-8. Whereas in the Vulgate, Jerome had interpreted Peter's injunction as "Do penance and be baptized," Erasmus wrote, "Repent, and be baptized." Why would the modification of a few words make such a difference? Because, Friesen writes, "do penance" was related to the rituals of the medieval Church, while "repent" implied a free and individual choice that would result in transformed lives.

At first Martin Luther welcomed Erasmus as a fellow reformer, and based his attack on the sale of indulgences (essentially, the prevailing practice of paying for one's salvation – the Church was in need of money) on Erasmus' translation of the Acts passage. Increasingly, however, Luther grew hostile to his former ally, disliking Erasmus' emphasis on "good works," and eventually broke with him completely. Not so the Anabaptists. Erasmus was writing that baptism that is not followed by a life of love is meaningless; that ceremonies in themselves are in-

adequate; that nonviolence is integral to the Christian life; and that Peter's command to repent, indeed his entire sermon of Acts 2, was based on Christ's Great Commission: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations ... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19-20) Finally, Erasmus interpreted his translation of Acts 2 in the light of the Sermon on the Mount. All of this was deeply attractive to the emerging Anabaptists, and they continued to cite Erasmus – who remained in the Roman Catholic fold – long after the early Reformation years were over. Friesen concludes, "Therefore the original Swiss Brethren were not merely 'radical Bible readers' ... They were very much a part of the intellectual world of the early 'Erasmian' reformation in the South" (61).

Erasmus, like the Anabaptists, emphasized the priority of the New Testament over the Old. The magisterial Reformers – Lutherans and Catholics – had also been admirers of Erasmus, before their break with the Anabaptists. Now, in their public debates with the Anabaptist rebels, they were forced to admit that New Testament teachings were very likely on the side of the Anabaptists, and subsequently turned to the Old Testament for confirmation of their beliefs: for example, infant baptism, they argued, was similar to the practice of circumcision in the Old Testament, a ritual sanctioned by tradition and by God. The result, concludes Abraham Friesen, was that Lutherans and Catholics reestablished a "territorial church," sanctioned by the state, and including all the people of a given area. The ensuing corruption, writes Friesen, was quite predictable.

2. Purity versus Universality

While the Catholic opponents of Anabaptism were debating doctrine on the basis of tradition, and the Lutherans and Calvinists on systematic theology, Anabaptists clung to doctrine *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone. A key principle for them was the purity of the church, based on choice and rebaptism. The case for a universal church by the Roman Catholics was based on statements of Augustine made around 400 AD. A group of dissidents, the Donatists, in response to the growing corruption of the universal church in which membership was based on simply on birth, were crying out that the weeds (tares) be rooted out of the church. Augustine replied that, since nearly the whole world was presently Christian, what Jesus meant in his parable in Matthew was that the wheat and tares were both now part of the ecclesial community. Thus, ignoring the fact that Jesus had referred to the tares as the "enemy," that is, "the world," Augustine contended that the Holy Spirit had guided the evolution of a universal church, and that the tradition of a universal church now had priority over Scripture.

The Protestant Reformers themselves subsequently took up the cause of a universal church. Such men as Zwingli, Luther and Calvin reacted brutally to the upsurge in Anabaptism. In coming years, their followers would lament the corruption and dissolute Christendom of their own territorial churches. It was, argues Abraham Friesen, the victory of the church of wheat and tares.

3. Anabaptist Origins and the Early Writings of the Reformers

During the early years of the Reformation, Anabaptists and Protestant reformers had common cause in their new theology. Friesen points out that the Anabaptist Schleitheim Confession of 1527 contains no theology at all, because it assumes the same as the Anabaptists' Protestant allies; the document is concerned only with the implementation of such practical issues as baptism, the sword, the ban, communion, the oath, and so on. It was not long, however, before the Protestant reformers broke with the Anabaptists. The reason, apparently, was quite simple: fear. In 1522 Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony, passed the Nuremberg Edict which stated that secular authority stood above "the Word of God," and that the mass was to be immediately reinstated in Protestant churches. Clearly neither Luther, Zwingli, nor Calvin had any wish to suffer the fate of Anabaptist dissidents: torture and execution. So they compromised. The result was the impurity of the territorial church – but, asks Friesen, could the Reformation have succeeded at all without compromise?

4. Visions of the End of the Age

Anabaptists have often been dismissed, says Friesen, as violent revolutionaries, given the chance. But is this true? Europe was in the throes of change. By the time of the Reformation, the Catholic Church had been thoroughly discredited as an institution of moral purity, and rebellion was in the air. In addition, the rise of a money economy, creating great inequalities, was disrupting European society. All this fuelled visions that the End Times had arrived. When the Donation of Constantine – a purportedly fourth century document "that asserted the papal claim to temporal rule in all of Western Europe" – was exposed as a forgery, Luther declared the pope to be the Antichrist (161-2). He also apparently saw himself as God's chosen defender, and likely predicted the end of the world would occur in 1524. His pronouncements added to the general hysteria. Violently inclined revolutionaries, such as Thomas Müntzer and Jan van Leyden, were drawn to the community of Anabaptists, and the suffering church was transformed into a church of vengeance. Luther himself, Friesen contends, was responsible for unleashing a chain of violence with his apocalyptic visions. On the other hand, he says, the Anabaptists were nearly the only group of its time to preach peace.

5. Catholics, Protestants, and Mennonite "Distinctives"

Mennonites have often been analyzed by historians as a group having much in common with Catholics and Protestants; the principles on which they differ are referred to as Mennonite "distinctives." The Anabaptists, argues Friesen, would never have used such a term. They regarded themselves simply as an authentic church: there were no secondary "distinctives."

During the centuries of medieval Europe, the monastic orders had perceived themselves in the same way. With their vows of poverty, refusal to use violence, and initiation rites that were considered a rebaptism, the orders were defined as ideal or true Christianity. In fact, some individuals were now describing the universal Catholic Church as the "world." The Anabaptists were following in the path of the monastic reformers. They never, argues Friesen, saw nonviolence as a "distinctive," but rather as the authentic command of Christ to his followers. The Anabaptists, he says, now became to Protestants what the monastic orders had been to a corrupt Roman Catholic Church: an "ideal" Christianity. "[T]he Anabaptist radicals," Friesen concludes, "wanted no halfway measures, no compromises with theologies that had grown out of the accommodation of God's Word to the fluctuating customs of history. They desired a radical reorientation on the basis of Christ's teachings alone. That desire proved costly. But then a radical stance always does" (212-13).

*Erasmus' masterpiece, *Praise of Folly*, is featured in *Roots and Branches* April 2008.

The Ties that Bind: Genealogy Column

Researching Paraguayan Mennonite Roots

By Marv Rempel

Who am I?" "Where do I come from?" These basic questions, asked by nearly everyone at some stage in life, are also the ones that drive a genealogy quest. I had asked these questions since I was a teenager, but the answers had left me unsatisfied. I was told that maternal and paternal grandparents had left Russia and come to Paraguay in about 1929. Why had they left Russia, and under what circumstances? How and why did they migrate to Paraguay? The answers I had found were too vague to be of any value in my search.

I find this situation to be not that uncommon. Perhaps memories were too painful to repeat; perhaps there is lack of interest, or incomplete information; but many Paraguayan Mennonites have little or no understanding of their family history. So how does one begin to learn more about his or her background?

The following provides a brief summary of Paraguayan Mennonite history gleaned from GAMEO (see below) articles: The first Mennonite settlement in Paraguay was established by Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan who had left Canada in late 1926 and arrived in the heart of the Chaco. The harsh,

dry climate, deemed unsuitable for European habitation, would lead them to refer to the region as "the Green Hell." Menno Colony was established here in April 1928. By 1930, the population reached 1,800.

In the spring of 1930, a new colony, Fernheim, was established nearby. Over seven months at least five German ships arrived with Mennonite refugees from Siberia, the Caucasus, Crimea, and Ukraine. These refugees, who had fled Russia in late 1929 via temporary German refugee camps in Hammerstein, Prenzlau, and Mölln, hoped to immigrate to Canada. When these hopes were quashed, they were assisted by MCC, the German Red Cross and the German government to settle in Fernheim, bringing its population to approximately 1,600.

While some Mennonites fled Stalin's Soviet Union via Europe, others escaped over the frozen Amur River to Harbin, China, in 1928. The initial Harbin groups were settled in the United States, primarily in California and Washington. Of those remaining, 375 were settled in Fernheim; the others, in Brazil.

Because of disease, water shortages, extreme heat, famine, malnutrition and untimely death in the unfamiliar climate and geography of the Chaco, approximately 140 families decided to move to eastern Paraguay, where they established the Friesland Colony in 1937. The final wave of Mennonite refugees from the USSR and Eastern Europe arrived in Paraguay after World War II. With the assistance of MCC, they were settled in two new colonies: Volendam (named after their refugee ship, and located near Friesland), with an initial 1,100 settlers, and Neuland, near Fernheim, with 870.

Economic progress in Paraguay was slow, so when Canada and Germany eased their immigration restrictions in the 1950s and '60s, a significant number of the former refugees chose to leave Paraguay. As a result, the history of many Canadian Mennonites is directly connected with Paraguay.

Researching your own story: the process

Once you have a basic understanding of the Mennonite Paraguay migrations, the next challenge is how to unlock this Paraguayan history and its connections with Canada and Russia. As with all genealogical research projects, the first place to start is with family stories and documents. In my case, the life stories, the genealogies prepared by unknown cousins, and the pictures kept in a scrapbook by my grandmother were still available to me. They ended up forming the basis of my genealogy project.

The principles and resources involved in researching a Paraguayan family history can be summarized as follows:

1. *Family stories, photograph albums and documents*.

- While stories may contain errors, they often contain a seed of truth. The challenge is to separate fact from fiction.
- Use a genealogy program to collect and organize your material.

2. *General resources to get a basic understanding of your family story and to flesh out the details*.

- The GRANDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) CD is a Mennonite genealogy database containing well over 1 million Mennonite names that was produced by the California Mennonite Historical Society. (My experience has been that the genealogical information in GRANDMA should not be trusted until it is verified. Unverified information, however, can be used to continue further research.)
- The *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, 2nd edition, written and compiled by William Schroeder and Helmut T. Huebert, is a strong reference source for basic history, with maps and text for Mennonite colonies and villages in Europe, Russia, Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Latin America. Be aware that Mennonites have a habit of reusing names! For example, Blumenort is found in several colonies in Paraguay, Mexico, Russia, and Canada.
- GAMEO (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online) is the online version of the four-volume *Mennonite Encyclopedia* published from 1955 to 1959. It has been updated and extended with new articles, including a number on Paraguay.
- Mennonite Historical Society of BC. Wednesdays and Fridays are the best days to visit the Historical Society for any genealogical assistance with accessing these resources.

3. *Internet resources*.

- http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/latin/ *Mennonite Genealogical Resources Latin America section*. …continued on page 31.

Update from the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine (www.mennonitecentre.ca)

February-May 2014: Ukraine in Crisis

A regularly updated open letter to donors and friends from Ben Stobbe, Chair of the parent Canadian funding agency

Sunday's national Presidential election in Ukraine was a fitting way for Alvin and Mary Suderman to finish their spring term of service as Canadian Directors. They entered Ukraine in March with considerable trepidation and can leave on Wednesday knowing that the work at the Mennonite Centre continued without disruption in spite of the recent crisis. They also leave knowing that the election results give hope for a return to normalcy and beginnings of good governance.

The voting process in Molochansk and Zaporozhye appears to have gone very smoothly. Interestingly, the polling station Molochansk was at the *Zentralschule*, the former school for future teachers in Halbstadt and a secondary school. In Soviet times this building was used by the local party headquarters. Now the building is used by the local people to give them a voice in choosing their leaders.

Some voting requirements are different than what we have in Canada. Apparently just because you live in a village doesn't mean that you can vote in that village. The question is in what village are you registered. If, for example you have land in a different village you will probably be on the voters list in the village where you own land.

There appeared to be no line-ups in the villages. However in a major city such as Kiev where people not only voted for the President, but also for a Mayor you had a very long ballot that took time to go through. Here you could expect line ups.

Oksana Bratchenko, Mennonite Centre financial officer, holds the May 25 Presidential Election Ballot in Molochansk

It appears that the people in the former Mennonite villages felt very relieved that the election did not require a run-off and was conducted for the most part without disruption. For many this appears to be an encouraging sign. It was also suggested that having an election that is seen to be fair adds legitimacy for the government. This is critical for a country that needs to deal with corruption.

The Sudermans said their time in Ukraine seemed very short. At a staff farewell someone said "thanks for coming and not running away." Our physical presence there, though stressful at times, is very much appreciated.

Mary (third from left) and Alvin Suderman (far right) in a last round of farewells before returning to Canada. All photos: http://www.mennonitecentre.ca/

Roots and Branches

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Your contributions are needed to further this work!

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- Mennonite Passenger Lists for Refugee Transport to Paraguay in 1930 are of great use to those with roots in Fernheim and Friesland.
http://chortiza.heimat.eu/Dok/Par1948.htm (*Willi Vogt site*). In German. Useful particularly for those with ancestors from Chortiza colony, but also contains scans of passenger lists from the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and the Weierhof Research Centre in Weierhof, Germany.
- Internet search engines, i.e., Google.

4. *Other archives*.

- Canadian Mennonite archives, in particular the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Archives in Winnipeg and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies Archives in Winnipeg, are useful for accessing family histories, reference and library books, memoirs, newspapers, etc.
- Paraguay archives have church records, colony history books, memoirs.
- Archivo Fernheim
- Menno Colony Museum and Historical Archives in Loma Plata
- Friesland Colony archive
- Paraguay archives have church records, colony history books, memoirs.
- Weierhof Archive and Research Centre in Germany. More information can be found at www.mennonitischer-geschichtsverein.de/forschungsstelle.html.
- Mennonite Church USA Archives in Goshen, Indiana, have information on the MCC transport of refugees to Paraguay. C.F. Klassen and Peter and Elfrieda Dyck were involved with the migrations of post-World War II refugees to Paraguay.
- MCC archives in Canada and the USA contain information on MCC involvement in refugee work, especially transport to Paraguay.

If you require further assistance with any of these tools and resources, please feel free to drop by the Mennonite Historical Society of BC office, especially on Wednesdays and Fridays.

The principles, tools and resources used to research Paraguayan ancestry can be applied and extended beyond Paraguay to family history in Canada, the USA, Latin America, and Russia. With enough interest and perseverance, researchers can begin to understand their own unique Mennonite story – who they are and where they come from. They can begin to understand how world history has left its indelible mark not only on their family history, but also their current life story.

Blackberry Pancakes

By Barbara Boldt, used with her permission from her website at www.barbaraboldt.com

My father and my oldest brother, both members of the defeated German *Wehrmacht*, were still unaccounted for in August 1945, three months after the end of the Second World War.

My brother, 13, and I, two years older, had found my mother and my little sister unharmed in Bohemia, where we had all been living separately in evacuation camps.

Now we were home again in West Germany, thanks to the efforts of the American Occupation Army. We were trying to live off our ravaged, war-torn land. During the after-war time food was extremely scarce. We scrounged and cheated, begged and traded valuable heirlooms for scraps of anything edible. Guests for dinner were not welcome, unless they came with provisions. Hospitality was dead.

One evening during that first summer, my young brother and I were preparing blackberry pancakes from a week's ration of flour, sugar and fat, and from the first crop of berries from a well-guarded patch at the end of our large property. I was cooking outside on a little brick stove we had constructed. This was our only facility, since strangers had taken over our house during the last days of the war.

My brother kept a watchful eye out for intruders. His warning shout made me grab the fry-pan and run indoors. Through the peephole in the door we watched the limping, but steady approach of a bearded, ragged individual. His long army coat was muddy, revealing toeless boots and dirty feet.

He knocked, and on opening apprehensively, we found ourselves in the arms of our unrecognizable, weeping father.... home from the war.

Barbara Boldt is an accomplished artist who lives and paints in Fort Langley.

Blackberries, Barbara Boldt, 1996, Watercolour and ink, Erika Bradley Collection.