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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

Barbara Boldt, 2004, *Light and shadow*

Mennonites and the Third Reich

Contents:

Editorial

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

This issue of *Roots and Branches* views the past from a number of angles. Our back and front covers feature the art of Barbara Boldt, who in her eighth decade of life is still adding to an already impressive body of art. In a feature article, Louise Price recounts aspects of Barbara's life, from her early childhood in pre-war Germany and adolescence during World War II to her subsequent life and artistic career in British Columbia. In his article on Fraser Valley hopyards, Robert Martens highlights a time when employment in this long-vanished agricultural industry provided valuable cash income for BC Mennonites who had recently arrived in the Fraser Valley. And Vern Giesbrecht poignantly recounts his childhood memories of his father, an ordained minister, who died from cancer at the young age of forty-five.

In addition, a number of articles reflect on the troubling relationship between some Mennonites and the Third Reich, including the "Aryanization of Mennonite culture" by German Mennonite institutions such as the *Geschichtsblätter* and the German Mennonite Historical Society (see the article on Foth), as well as the involvement of individual Mennonites in advancing the Germany nationalistic agenda: for example, Gerhard Fast's involvement with Karl Stumpp in *Sonderkommando Stumpp*, "the semi-military ethnography department" that documented ethnic German villages in Ukraine (see the Stumpp and Fast articles).

In retrospect, it's easy to criticize what we now know to have been short-sighted attitudes towards German nationalism. However, perhaps thoughtful reflection on these misguided allegiances can help to inoculate us against indoctrination, for example, on current ideologies of ethnic exclusion and superiority. And to judge appropriately, we must also acknowledge the historical context in which this affinity with German nationalism developed, including the experience of Ukrainian Mennonites, to whom invading German forces appeared as saviours from the oppression of Soviet communism. As Wilf Hein reminds us in his article, while "it is easy to articulate the shortcomings of individuals ... who ostensibly demonstrated affinity with some aspects of the Nazi regime, … walking in their shoes would have been much more complicated."

One wonders also what historians of the future might say about the relationship of today's North American Mennonites to current First World ideologies of capitalistic excess and militarism. Will we be judged and found wholly wanting? Or will we be viewed more sympathetically as complicit and short sighted, yes, but also as all-too-human products of our time, often unmindful of and caught up in forces greater than ourselves, even as we try to live with integrity?

MHSBC 2014 Fundraising Dinner and Lecture

Reported by Robert Martens

The MHSBC annual fundraiser banquet took place September 27, 2014, at Emmanuel Mennonite Church in Abbotsford. After the several hundred attendees enjoyed an excellent meal, they moved over to the church sanctuary where Marlene Epp, Professor of History and Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Waterloo, delivered a lecture entitled "Mennonites and Foodways: A *Miagrope* of Meaning."

For Russian Mennonites, said Epp, "food obsession" is an ethnic trait that has its origins in the years of famine following the Bolshevik Revolution. "What's for dinner?" she argued, is a serious question, even though in the current affluent economy food issues have become so routine that they are often overlooked. "Food history is a glimpse into the social history of daily life," she said.

Calvin Dyck and his amazing violin performance.
Photo: Elmer Wiens

Epp structured her talk in three basic points. First, food is a part of religious identity. Unlike Judaism and Islam, for example, in which food rituals are prominent (kosher and halal respectively), Christianity has few such rituals outside the communion bread and wine. Mennonites, Epp contended, have created their own customs regarding food. For example, the *Miagrope*, a large cauldron, plays an important role in the stories of Russian Mennonites, especially in those describing the annual pig butchering, a central and unifying event in village life. In this case, the *Miagrope* was used for rendering. Other examples include the watermelon, which was sliced in such a way that everyone would enjoy an equal share, and the *Zwieback* (a bread roll comprised of two pieces), which was often roasted in preparation for travel – including refugee flight. "Giving bread," said Epp, "is the same as giving life." In the famine years, *Zwieback* took on an even greater significance: it was sometimes associated with miraculous moments. "Hunger is linked with despair," argued Epp, and bread with a kind of grace.

Second, food is specifically part of the Mennonite identity in which "religious and ethnic markers sometimes merged." Today, however, when the majority of Mennonites are no longer of European origin, different foods have entered the picture. In southern Ontario, Mennonite Mexican restaurants, Epp said, serve food which bring together Latin and traditional Mennonite cooking. Other ethnic groups, such as Laotians and Congolese who have joined the Mennonite Church in Canada have brought their own traditional foods to the table. Often, said Epp, these newcomers have stories of suffering and food deprivation much like those of Russian Mennonite refugees.

Third, food is linked with issues of gender. Mennonite women were often confined to kitchen duties, and stereotypes abounded: some decades ago, one observer described them as "plump, placid and well-rounded." On the other hand, their culinary ability was highly valued. And perhaps, argued Epp, the labour of cooking for large families helped women keep depression at bay during hard times. In recent years, concluded Epp, some women have celebrated their "liberation from the kitchen."

Epp asserted that food still remains a unifying factor in Mennonite life, and even those alienated from the institutional church can find some common ground with church members in talking about and sharing food.

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC wishes to thank Calvin and Heather Dyck for their enthusiastically received musical performances. We also wish to express our gratitude to Lepp Farm Market and Rossdown Farms and Natural Foods, both local Mennonite-run businesses, for their sponsorship of the evening.

Ground-breaking for the Mennonite Heritage Museum and Agricultural Education Centre

Reported by Robert Martens

From left, Richard Thiessen, Dave Batten, Peter Redekop, Bruce Bannman. Photo: Laura Unger

On September 4, 2014, at 4:00 pm, a significant ground-breaking ceremony took place, symbolically marking the beginning of construction of a large new complex at 1818 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford. The target date for completion of the Mennonite Heritage Museum and Agricultural Education Centre is fall 2015. Besides the museum and a farming demonstration component, the complex will also provide space for the new office and archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC.

Except for a strong breeze that repeatedly knocked down mounted sketches, much to the consternation of those seated nearby, the weather was perfect for a ground-breaking ceremony: warm and sunny. Among those in attendance were representatives from the two major wings of the Mennonite Church (MC and MB), from MCC, and from Columbia Bible College, as well as members of the Mennonite Historical Society and four City of Abbotsford councillors, along with Mayor Bruce Banman.

Richard Thiessen, executive director of the new complex, led off the proceedings with a brief speech. He first acknowledged the Mennonite agricultural heritage, and then moved on to a short biography of Peter Redekop, the president of the museum-to-be. Redekop was born in Chortitza Colony, Ukraine, where he experienced the ravages of Stalinism. In 1943 he fled the Soviet Union with the retreating German army and managed to immigrate to Canada. Redekop then established himself as a major developer, beginning his career in Abbotsford before moving on to the Vancouver area. He currently resides in Richmond.

Peter Redekop himself spoke next, particularly acknowledging the support of Abbotsford City Hall. Abbotsford mayor Bruce Banman concluded the speechmaking by referring to his own split English and Mennonite ancestry.

The speeches were followed by a brief ground-breaking ceremony. Four men put their shovels to earth: Richard Thiessen, Bruce Banman, Peter Redekop, and Dave Batten (director of development at the engineering firm, The Krahn Group).

The museum will tell the Mennonite story through a variety of media and will especially focus on Mennonites who fled the upheavals in Russia/Soviet Union. The building will also be home to a bookstore, gift shop and coffee shop. Adjacent agricultural exhibits will demonstrate the close relationship Mennonites have traditionally had with life on the land.

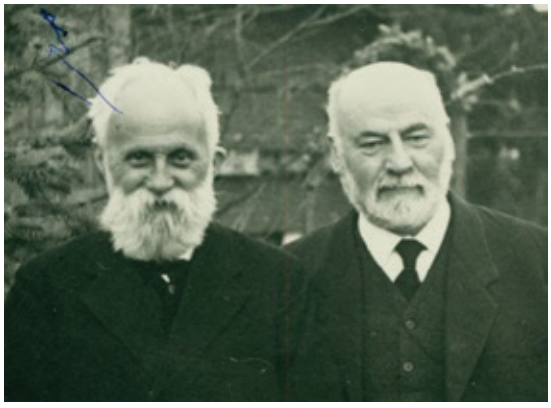
It is hoped that within one year a ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held.

German Mennonites and the Third Reich

By Robert Martens

For decades, the *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* (*Journal of Mennonite History*) has been a force in Anabaptist/Mennonite scholarship. Except for the years between 1941 and 1948, this journal has been published annually from 1936 until the present day by the Mennonite Historical Society (*Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein*) of Germany, and has made strong contributions to Mennonite studies in fields such as theology, culture, genealogy, and literature. In 2011, however, Helmut Foth wrote an article in the *Geschichtsblätter* accusing the journal – and German Mennonites in general – of complicity with Hitler's National Socialist regime. The charges he makes are troubling.

German Mennonites, writes Foth, entered the era of fascism with confidence, loudly proclaiming themselves as a model of Aryan "raciality." In 1933 the Mennonite Historical Society was founded, and its journal soon followed. According to Foth, Christian Hege, editor of the *Geschichtsblätter*, emphasized three distinct motifs in his periodical: a Mennonite history that was adapted to the times; a close interrelationship between Mennonite and German identity; and an increasingly racist genealogy. During these years, Hege and his colleague Christian Neff worked on the excellent *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, an encyclopedia of Mennonite studies begun earlier in 1913. For Foth, however, the question is, why did the Society originate at that particular time? And why did the Historical Society publish its new journal in 1936, with Hitler firmly entrenched in power, when such a journal had not even been previously contemplated?



Christian Neff (left) and Christian Hege (right). 15 March 1937. Source: Mennonite Church USA Archives - North Newton, #2006-0016.

First of all, Foth writes, it was a chance for Neff and Hege to redeem the besmirched image of the Mennonite church in Germany. It had long been disparaged by the officially sanctioned Evangelical Church (a union of Protestant churches) as a separatist sect, even a cult, that resisted assimilation into the German state. Now the situation had changed. The Mennonites' principles of anti-sacramentalism and of separation of church and state had some similarities with the dogmas of Hitler's National Socialist regime, and the Mennonite church was quick to notice. Pacifist ideals, of course, were not mentioned. Second, the anti-communist sentiments of Mennonites also matched those of the fascist state; Mennonites hoped for the liberation of their brothers and sisters still living in the totalitarian Soviet empire. Finally, fear of Nazi brutality was clearly a factor, though this is not something that Foth dwells upon.

In 1938, while other denominational journals were being censored or banned outright, the *Geschichtsblätter* was growing rapidly. In its pages, the German annexation of Austria and invasion of Poland were spoken of in positive terms: now the scattered Mennonite peoplehood would have an opportunity to be reunited. Mennonites were reinterpreted as a global community that migrated from land to land in order to preserve its German language and culture. Christian Hege, Foth is quick to emphasize, never engaged in overt anti-Semitic propaganda; rather, the *Geschichtsblätter* was used as a vehicle to align Mennonite culture with the Germanic philosophy of the fascist regime. An explosion of genealogical documentation was taking place in order to prove the "Aryan" nature of Mennonite ancestry, and the *Geschichtsblätter* played an active role in the project. Kurt Kauenhouwen was appointed by the Nazis to collect and store Mennonite genealogical data; prominent Mennonite leader BH Unruh worked at his side. This genealogical database, says Helmut Foth, ranks as

the greatest mark of Mennonite/National Socialist cooperation.

After the war ended, charges Foth, statements of regret or apology from Nazi collaborators were nearly non-existent. BH Unruh, who once bragged that he had lunched at Himmler's right side (cited in Foth 67), seems never to have been questioned on his wartime activities. Walter Quiring, despite his enthusiastic endorsement of the Third Reich, went on to become an honoured journalist and scholar, and served for many years as editor of *Der Bote*, the Canadian Mennonite newsmagazine. The time has come, writes Foth, to recognize the contributions of individuals such as these, but at the same time to be honest about their failings. Mennonites in Germany capitulated to a totalitarian regime in a way that their brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union never did. In the "Aryanization" of Mennonite culture by the *Geschichtsblätter* and the Historical Society, concludes Helmut Foth, the genuine heritage was overlooked: the blood of the martyrs of the faith.

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Excerpt from the start of Foth's article

Translated by Joachim Böge.

The confidence with which the Mennonite community acted in Hitler's Germany is baffling. Although in 1934 it skillfully resisted the attempt by the German Evangelical Church (*Deutsche Evangelische Kirche*) to incorporate it into their organization, in 1933 it distanced itself from non-resistant principles and declared its loyalty to the National Socialist (NS) state.

During the time of the Weimar Republic, the Mennonites distinguished themselves neither as democratic nor pacifist. No Mennonite books fell victim to the book-burning of May 1933; no preachers or pastors were interrogated for even one day; not a single Mennonite suffered political revenge after 1933; and no Mennonite officials or high school teachers lost their jobs after the enactment of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service[1]. Dual membership in the Mennonite community and National Socialist Party, *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (State Labour Force), or the *Wehrmacht* (military) did at no place or time lead to a *status confessionis* [confessional status, a term originally used by the Lutheran Church].

The Mennonites were no enemies to the Nazis who had taken power. To the contrary, in recognition of services offered by their German-speaking diaspora, they were showered with praise by the nation. They were themselves convinced – consciously or unconsciously – that they constituted a homogeneous racial group: an advantage that no other church or faith community could boast. In 1936 Christian Neff published the first Mennonite Address Book. In it he disclosed the names of men, heads of households, wives, children, and nearly all addresses and occupations of the Mennonite community. And this not even a year after the decree of the Nuremberg Race Laws of September 1935, so devastating to German Jewry, and the beginning of a human and cultural tragedy on an unimaginable scale.

The Mennonites did not need to hide in the German Reich.

1 This law, enacted in 1933, was partially intended to dismiss Jews from the German civil service.

Joachim Boge (Böge) was born in Ütersen, Schleswig-Holstein in 1965, and immigrated to Canada in 1991. He lives in Yarrow, BC.

A Response to Helmut Foth's Essay, "*Wie die Mennoniten in die deutsche Volksgemeinschaft hineinwuchsen*."

Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter 68 (2011) 59-68.

[How the Mennonites integrated themselves into the German National Community]

By Wilf Hein

Responding to Foth's article doesn't come easily to me, since I am neither a historian nor theologian, nor did I experience the Third Reich as an adult. However, since I was born during World War II and lived in Germany for thirty years, I can share how I perceive the situation and how I believe many German Mennonites would react while reading Foth's article.

Benjamin H. Unruh (1881-1959). Source: Mennonite Life (January 1960)

At the outset it must be said that no excuse can be given for the horrible atrocities of the Third Reich. As a young adult I often struggled over this dark chapter of our German history and could not understand how my fellow citizens could be capable of mass murdering millions of Jews. It was especially difficult for me to understand that this could happen in a country that was the cradle of the Reformation and the birthplace of many outstanding musicians, writers, artists and theologians. I often wanted to ask my dad, where were the peace-loving Mennonites during this time and what did they say and write? But somehow I never got to it – perhaps because subconsciously I felt that it might be a politically incorrect question to ask.

How would present day German Mennonites react to writers like Foth? I believe they likely would recognize that Foth is an eloquent writer whose article reflects his expertise in both history and theology. But they also would be struck with a sense of shame, guilt and embarrassment. This may be one of the major reasons why these questions have not been properly dealt with up to this point. German Mennonites also would judge Foth to be very critical in accusing persons otherwise highly respected in Mennonite circles, not only within Germany but also internationally. These complex questions cannot be answered in just a few sentences without some discussion of the socio-political situation that prevailed more than seventy years ago.

I believe that the outcome of the Versailles treaty in 1919 was a major factor in creating the stage for a dictator like Hitler to arise. Germany was forced to sign the Versailles Treaty and to pay back to the Allies 269 billion gold marks, amounting to 96,000 tons of gold, before the debt was reduced by 1929 to 112 billion gold marks, payable over a period of fifty-nine years. Hence the German people were looking for a saviour who would bring them prosperity, take them out of indebtedness and restore national pride to their country. Hitler's magnetic rhetoric attracted masses of Germans and many of them seemed to accept his ideology. I believe the majority of Germans probably did not realize the extent of the evil goals the Nazi regime would pursue. The tragic result, as everyone knows, was the Holocaust.

The Mennonites were a small minority religious group in Germany, numbering likely from 10,000 to 15,000 members at that time. The majority of them did not remember much of their Anabaptist roots and had blended readily into the German Protestant church. Yes, the nonresistant (*wehrlos*) Mennonites were the "Silent in the Land" (*die Stillen im Lande*), and it was not only a silence of self-serving convenience – many Mennonites seemed to even cooperate with the Nazi regime. One must remember, however, that those who criticized or voiced opposition to Nazi ideology were well aware their lives were at stake.

As mentioned above, Foth is very quick in

criticizing leading German Mennonite professors, theologians and historians of collaborating with the Nazi regime. He hardly mentions anything positive about their great humanitarian achievements. I would like to comment briefly on the accomplishments of Benjamin Unruh and Christian Hege:

***Benjamin Heinrich Unruh* (1881-1959):**

It is true that BH Unruh had close contacts with SS *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, but it must be said that he used his connections reaching into the highest levels of the *Reichspartei* (state party) for the purpose of achieving support and protection from the German government for German-speaking communities in the Ukraine and beyond. Another reason for maintaining good relations with the highest military circles had been his wish to visit German-speaking Mennonite communities in the Ukraine; his objective was to help Mennonites resolve some issues that were causing much disunity in their camp. Friction also existed between Mennonites, Baptists, and Lutherans, and Unruh was calling for unity among these groups. (In fact he tried to bring together *Kirchliche* [Old Church] Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren, and was critical of Baptists sticking their noses into this matter.) In order to travel to the Ukraine, he needed permission from the German government. From his correspondence, we know that Unruh received this permission directly from Himmler, whom he met in person (Unruh 4).

But walking in their shoes would have been much more complicated.

Through his year-long contacts with high government officials, he also was able to obtain concessions for young Mennonites. These concessions centred around taking the oath. Anabaptists and Mennonites had long argued that it was their religious duty not to swear oaths to any power but God. The German state had granted this concession to German Mennonites in the late 1930s, and now it was also granted to the *Volksdeutschen* (German ethnic) Mennonites from the Ukraine.

Unruh was an outstanding teacher in Russia, as well as lecturer of the Russian language and literature at the *Technische Hochschule* (Technical High School) in Karlsruhe, Germany. He wrote *Bibelkunde* (Bible studies) for the Mennonite schools of Russia, as well as numerous other articles. He was an adviser to the leadership of the *Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennonitengemeinden* (Conference of German Mennonite Congregations) and sat on the advisory council of *Brüder in Not* (Brethren in Need). He also was a delegate to the Lausanne World Conference for Faith and Church Constitution in 1927. Unruh was recipient of the First Class Honourary Award of the German Red Cross and also of an honourary Doctorate in Theology from the Lutheran faculty in Heidelberg. But most Mennonites know and appreciate Benjamin Unruh for his relentless and self-sacrificing work in helping thousands of Mennonites emigrate from Russia and find a new home in Germany, North America and Paraguay. I am convinced that had it not been for Unruh's efforts, many more Mennonites would have lost their lives in the Soviet Union.[1]

***Christian Hege* (1869-1943)** also falls under Foth's harsh judgment for having "submitted to the Nazi cult," even though Foth admits that nothing anti-Semitic could be detected in his character.[2] Hege was an outstanding Mennonite historian and founder of the German Mennonite Historical Society as well as an editor and treasurer of the *Geschichtsblätter*. He was also financial editor of the *Frankfurter Nachrichten*, a well-respected and widely distributed newspaper in Germany. Hege served as a pastor to Mennonite soldiers and committed his life to helping Mennonites wherever they faced difficulties. He wrote many articles and essays, including "*Die Wehrlosigkeit in der Gegenwart*" (Nonresistance in our Present Time) and "The Anabaptists in the Palatinate."

In 1925 he discovered in Zürich the lost *Vermahnung* (Admonishment) of Pilgram Marpeck, and was responsible for the publication of Pilgram

Marpeck's *Verantwortung* (Responsibility) in 1929. He also published some of his research work about Anabaptist martyr Hans Raiffer, Idelette von Bueren (John Calvin's wife), Pilgram Marpeck's co-workers, and Leupold Scharnschlager. But one of his greatest accomplishments was the initiation of the *Mennonitisches Lexikon* (Mennonite Encyclopedia), which he and Christian Neff co-edited and Gerhard Hein completed. He also was the initiator of the *Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein* (Mennonite Historical Society).

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Foth's essay should not be seen negatively: it teaches us to be on guard, lest we forget. In it we see what happened to people who submitted to the powerful propaganda machine and allowed themselves to be indoctrinated by Nazi ideology. However, I would like to ask Helmut Foth and others who share his critical views what they would they have done had they been adults living during the Hitler years. Would they have been willing to risk their lives as Dietrich Bonhoeffer did? In retrospect, it is easy to articulate the shortcomings of individuals like Unruh and Neff who ostensibly demonstrated affinity with some aspects of the Nazi regime. But walking in their shoes would have been much more complicated.

The lesson to us in our times remains: we also need to be on guard to not let our powerful media influence and control us. This can only happen if we are firmly rooted in the One who said "I am the Truth" and who came to fill our hearts with love, peace and hope.

1. Much of the information on BH Unruh was taken from *Gameo* and the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*. For more current information (for German speakers) see Heinrich B. Unruh, *Fügungen und Führungen Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, 1881-1959. Ein Leben im Geiste christlicher Humanität im Dienste der Nächstenliebe*. Publisher: Detmold: *Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums*, 2009. This text also contains an epilogue by Peter Letkemann.
2. "*Christian Hege betrieb keine antisemitische Agitation. Nirgendwo wurde gegen die Juden gehetzt.*" (Christian Hege did not instigate anti-Semitism. Nowhere [in his work] was hatred of the Jews stirred up.) *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 68 (2011): 69.

Wilf Hein was born in Germany and immigrated to Canada in 1970. He is married, with 3 married sons and 7 grandchildren. He is a multiple award winner in the pharmaceutical industry; since retirement he has been a student at Briercrest Distance Learning. He is a member of Bakerview MB Church. Gerhard Hein was his father.

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Who Was Karl Stumpp?

By Robert Martens

One afternoon, while I was doing volunteer work at our Society office, a message in my inbox caught my attention. The 8x11 sheet of paper contained photocopies of a studio portrait as well as of a three-paragraph biography of a man named Karl Stumpp. Alongside was a note from a MHSBC volunteer, suggesting that perhaps the biography was a bit too long to be included in our InMagic computer database (in which our archival holdings are catalogued), and could I edit it down a little?

Karl Stumpp is an important name at the MHSBC archives. The map cabinet in the archival room – the "cold room" kept at the optimum temperature for preserving fragile documents – contains a large number of "Stumpp maps" that document expatriate Germanic villages globally, and especially in Russia. A brief biography of Stumpp was needed as a header in the InMagic database, where the maps would then be catalogued with links to Karl Stumpp for easy search and access. However, the photocopied three-paragraph biography left in my inbox had clearly been written by someone before Karl Stumpp had died, and the information was sketchy. I went to the Internet to learn more about this man. What I found there was shocking.

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Karl Stumpp was born in 1896 in Alexanderhilf, today Dobroolexandriwka, near Odessa, South Russia (Ukraine). He studied at the *Gymnasium* (high school) in Odessa, and then moved on to higher education in Tübingen, Germany, where, clearly already obsessed with the study of Germanic settlements, he founded an organization dedicated to research on German villages near the Black Sea, the area in which he had been born and raised. But the Russian Revolution intervened, and Stumpp was unable to return home to the Ukraine. As an alternative, he moved to Bessarabia in Rumania, which neighboured his former home. Here he taught at a *Mädchenschule* (girls'school) from 1922 to 1933. However, Stumpp's job may well have been secondary to his driving passion: during this time he documented the history of expatriate Germans living in Bessarabia, drew up sketches of the region, delivered lectures on German village life, and established a German bookstore in Tarutino, where he was teaching. It seems that he accomplished much if not all of this on his own time and at his own cost.

In 1933, the year Hitler came to power, Stumpp returned to Germany, where he served as business manager until 1938 of the *Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland* (People's Association of Germans Abroad). Then the Second World War engulfed the globe, and for Stumpp, it arrived as an opportunity. In 1941 he was directed by the Reich ministry to carry out ethnological and genealogical investigations of German populations living in occupied Ukraine. Stumpp led an eighty man unit called *Sonderkommando Dr. Stumpp* (Special Squad Unit Dr. Stumpp) which seems to have been half military, half academic. Accompanying him were a couple of Lutheran pastors, as well as a Mennonite named Gerhard Fast (see Louise Price's companion article). Stumpp's accomplishments were brilliant: over the next two years more than three hundred Lutheran, Catholic and Mennonite villages were surveyed and documented. But at what cost?

Stumpp was forwarding his demographic, cultural and "racial" reports to his immediate superior, Georg Leibbrandt, who was to remain a close associate for the rest of his life. Leibbrandt was present at the Wannsee Conference in 1942, where the "final solution" for the extermination of Jews was heatedly discussed. Stumpp's reports laid the basis for a new Germanic regime in Ukraine, in support of the Nazi state. But he may have been guilty of much more than that. Stumpp has been accused of providing lists of Ukrainian Jews to the German authorities; of providing them with research for "cleansing" German areas; and finally, of being personally complicit in the murder of Jews. In his diary entry of August 6, 1941, Stumpp speaks of "the freeing of Germany and Europe of the Bolshevik-Jewish plague" for which German soldiers are offering their lives (Wiki, trans. by RM). In 1937 he had written,

Dr. Karl Stumpp outside the Stumpp Museum, Rugby, North Dakota. Photo: North Dakota State University German Russian Collection.

"Every pet owner is proud to know his dog's or horse's pedigree. ... The coming generation will scarcely be able to understand why the highest creature – humanity – left unobserved their own pedigree, which is so important a thing for a people" (Zinner 6). It would seem that Stumpp was a dedicated fascist, and that his extraordinary research was essential to the Nazi cause. Or was it a cover? Was his passion for German ethnology so great that he disregarded the political implications of his work?

In March of 1943, *Sonderkommando Dr. Stumpp* was dissolved because of SS rivalries. Stumpp shipped his documents to Georg Leibbrandt, but many were lost during transport. He returned to his wife and family in Tübingen where he resumed earning a living as a teacher. Stumpp also served as chair of the *Landsmannschaft der Russlanddeutschen* (Association for German-Russians) and edited its monthly periodical, *Volk auf dem Weg* (People on the Way). He was never prosecuted for war crimes. In fact, in 1966 the German government awarded him the Distinguished Cross of Merit, First Class, in "recognition of services performed on behalf of the state and the people" (Zinner 7). Stumpp continued his friendship with Georg Leibbrandt, and the pair worked together to repatriate scattered documents on Germanic settlements to a central location in Koblenz.

In a 1974 lecture, Stumpp recalled his wartime foray into Ukraine with nostalgia. He praised his comrade Gerhard Fast. He spoke casually of compiling statistics regarding Jews and those of "mixed race." Karl Stumpp died in 1982 in Stuttgart, Germany.

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After learning all this about Stumpp on the Internet, I discovered that the photo and three-paragraph biography had been photocopied from the jacket of a book, *The German-Russians*, which had found a place in the library of the Mennonite Historical Society. Karl Stumpp published the book in 1964; originally in German, it was translated into English, and also marked Stumpp's seventy-fifth birthday. *The German-Russians* is a coffee table book, accessibly written and jammed with archival photos, including depictions of Mennonite sites such as Halbstadt and Chortitza. Stumpp outlines the two major waves of German immigration to Russia: the first, an influx of professional elites beginning as early as the reign of Ivan the Terrible; the second, the mass immigration of Lutheran, Catholic and Mennonite farmers on the invitation of Catherine the Great. He points out that the only available denominational census of German-Russians is that of 1897, in which Lutherans numbered 76% of the total, Catholics, 13.5%, and Mennonites, a mere 3.7%. "Jews and non-Christians" totalled 1.3%.

The book idealizes German-Russians both in picture and word: "Everywhere the German villages with their attractive houses stood out like oases in the vast plain. Everywhere the church steeples towered above the one-storied colonial houses" (Stumpp 42). Mennonites, who influenced Russia far beyond their numbers, receive attention from Stumpp, but not always favourably. For example, he notes, "Klaus Mehnert reports that while he was visiting a Mennonite village ... he asked the children: 'Do you still speak German?' and got the answer: 'No, we speak Mennonite.' ... [T]he teachers repeatedly com-

plain that the German children speak in a dialect difficult to understand, and that this makes it very difficult to speak High German with them in school" (Stumpp 40). Russian Mennonites were actually primarily of Lowlands or Dutch/Flemish heritage, and spent only a few years in Prussia before moving on to Russia, but Stumpp never regarded them as anything but German.[1]

Who really was Karl Stumpp? How devoted was he to the Third Reich's racial cause? Was he so obsessed with his studies that everything else seemed insignificant? Due to the cold and dispassionate nature of the man, it is hard to tell. Stumpp was a great systematizer but showed little empathy for others. In his life story, "he never mentions Nazi atrocities, never apologizes for them, and in his memories of the war, the greatest emotion he showed was fondling and kissing each and every one of his books after being reunited with them after the war. He is strangely silent on any emotion regarding his being reunited with his wife and daughters after the war. He seems to have been almost exclusively preoccupied with books and statistics and to have been without regard for or awareness of the effects of his Nazi-era activities on human beings" (Zinner 8). It is often asked, how can good people do bad things? In Stumpp's case, the question might be inverted: how did a bad man do good things?

The evidence of these "good things" can be found at the Mennonite Historical Society Archives. Several of Stumpp's books are in the library, and his superb maps can be found in the archival room.

1 Mennonites had lived in the Vistula Delta for decades and had eventually adopted the local dialect, *Plattdeutsch* (Low German). It was only in 1762 that the first German sermon was preached in a Mennonite church (in Danzig) and this provoked an uproar, as previously Dutch was the language of the church. In 1772 much of the area was ceded to Prussia. German eventually became the official Mennonite church language, but in 1789, when Mennonites began emigrating to Russia, the transition to German was not yet complete.

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Announcement from the Mennonite periodical, *Der Bote, 1973**

Translated by Robert Martens

During the months of June and July, Dr. Karl Stumpp will be doing a lengthy lecture tour through Canada and the United States. At 8 pm on Thursday, July 5, he will address a public gathering in a room of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, across the street from the Hudson's Bay parking area.

Born in the Odessa region of Russia and currently residing in Tübingen, Dr. Stumpp is the acknowledged expert not only in the history of German emigration to Russia, but also in the current state of Mennonite locales in the Soviet Union. He is editor of the monthly periodical, *Volk auf dem Weg* [People on the Way], co-editor of the *Heimatbuch* [literally, Home Book], produced by Germans who once lived in Russia, and author of the new book, *Die Auswanderungen aus Deutschland nach Rußland in den Jahren 1763-1862* [The Immigration to Russia from Germany in the Years 1763-1862]. (This book costs $16.50 and is available from V. Peters, 234 Oak Street, Winnipeg.)**

Dr. Stumpp's lecture tour will take him across Canada. The speaking engagements are being arranged by Pastor Glöckler from Kelowna. The Winnipeg Committee is comprised of the following individuals: Ernst Hansch, Dr. Adam Giesinger, Heinz Mayer, Dr. Jack Thiessen, and Dr. Victor Peters.

In the United States, the Association of German Russians has organized a three-day celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the immigration of German Russians to America. This will take place in Bismarck, North Dakota. At this conference, Dr. Stumpp will be both honoured guest and keynote speaker.

On behalf of the Committee: Mrs. Gerda Hansch, Mrs. Elisabeth Peters.

* No. 21, May 22, 1973, p. 3.

** Please note that this information is from the original document.

Into the Open: Gerhard Fast and the Last Days of Chortitza

By Louise Bergen Price

In 1973, Gerhard Fast wrote a book that would "bring into the open" events in the former Mennonite colony of Chortitza during the German occupation of 1941-43. *Das Ende von Chortitza* (The End of Chortitza), based on his diary, is supplemented with eyewitness accounts. Yet bringing "into the open" is a somewhat tricky term, and Fast seems to have had difficulty in deciding which events he was willing to highlight and which should remain in the dark.

Born in 1894 in Lugowsk, Samara, Fast moved to Siberia with his parents when he was fifteen, attending *Zentralschule* (secondary school) in Orenburg, followed by a teacher training school in Tomsk. His teaching career took him to Kleefeld, where he married Elisabeth Siebert. In 1930, he and his wife and young son were among a group of people trying to flee the Soviet Union from Moscow. For this offence he was arrested, and sentenced to five years' hard labour in a Siberian concentration camp on Northern Dvina River near Arkhangelsk. After only two weeks in the camp, Fast made a daring escape, stowing away in a freighter bound for England. From there, he was allowed to immigrate to Germany, where he taught school and worked for the missions organization, *Licht im Osten* (Light in the East). Four years later, his wife and son, still in the USSR, were allowed to join him. Fast's book, *Im Schatten des Todes* (In the Shadow of Death), provides a graphic account of his imprisonment, exile and escape. It is little wonder that he was immensely grateful to the Germany government for granting asylum to him and his family.

In February 1942, when Fast was called up to serve in the *Wehrmacht* (German armed forces), he convinced the authorities to send him on assignment to the former Mennonite colonies. Here he would work for the semi-military ethnography department, documenting ethnic German villages under the command of Dr. Karl Stumpp.

On March 24, Fast spoke to a crowded meeting at the church in Osterwick where he described the assignment of *Sonderkommando Stumpp*: "We will be preparing a report on each village, including the year it was founded, the place in Germany where the villagers originally lived, and their cultural and economic circumstances. We will gather statistics on population, mixed marriages, acreage, and so on. Each report must include an accurate village map. Further, we need genealogy reports from each family, going back as far as possible ... perhaps even Germany or Holland, the ancestral homeland of most of us" (Fast *Ende* 15).[1]

Gerhard Fast seems to have worked feverishly, visiting dozens of villages, meeting with mayors and colonists. Peter Braun, a boy of eleven at the time, remembered the day a "Golden Pheasant" – a nickname villagers gave to German officers for their brown uniforms with gold trim and their strutting walk – visited their home in Schönwiese. Later, he heard his parents discuss the visit, wondering why this former acquaintance had returned to Ukraine as a German officer (Braun 150).

Fast seems to have been a conscientious man, a loving husband and father. He was a man who loved nature and often went for long walks in the countryside. Acting on information provided by his contacts in *Licht im Osten*, he gave much-needed clothing to Soviet Mennonites living in abject poverty. He treated Russian and Ukrainians with the same respect he gave his co-religionists.

Fast's contacts were not solely with his co-workers and colonists. In June 1943, Alfred Rosenberg, head of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, arrived in Zaporozhye. Fast was invited to attend functions with the Reich dignitaries and spent several days visiting various sites with the group. In Halbstadt, they had lunch at the Willms mansion; later there was a large outdoor gathering of "German colonists" from the surrounding areas. Fast states with amusement that local party officials tried in vain to get German villagers to cheer but "only weak 'hurrahs' resulted. The Germany colonist is not used to that sort of thing" (Fast *Ende* 81).

In addition to his village reports, Fast's work

included providing documentation for ethnic Germans so that they could be naturalized as German citizens. He interviewed numbers of "*Mischehen*" (mixed marriage couples), ethnic Germans who had married Russians or Ukrainians. If both parents and children spoke German, they were treated like other Germans. If one spouse was not fluent, citizenship would be conditional on that spouse learning German within ten years.

In late August, Fast was requested to take over the position formerly held by Stumpp and relocate to Dnepropetrovsk at the beginning of September 1943. Fast agreed, rather reluctantly, but only a few short weeks later, his *Sippenkunde* (ethnography) work came to a sudden end with the German army's retreat.

The last section of *Das Ende von Chortitza* contains eyewitness reports of the flight from the Mennonite villages of Rosengart, Chortitza, Einlage, Osterwick, Neuhorst, Nieder-Chortitza, Blumengart, Adelsheim, Neuendorf, Schönhorst, Kronstal, Schönberg, and Einlage. Fast ends the book with an exhortation for Mennonites who escaped to keep telling the story of how God delivered them from the Soviet regime, and to remember those who remain in places like Siberia, Karaganda, and Turkestan.

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Fast's book is a valuable resource, and the author does indeed, bring many things "into the open."

And yet Fast's open-faced countenance hides a secret. Nowhere in his account do we learn what is happening to Chortitza's Jewish population. The following village report for Rosental-Chortitza, prepared for Karl Stumpp with statistics gathered by Fast, tells its own mute and horrifying story:

	Germans		Ukrainians		Russians		Jews		Others		Totals	
	a[1]	b[2]	a[1]	b[2]	a[1]	b[2]	a[1]	b[2]	a[1]	b[2]	a[1]	b[2]
Persons	2178	2022	11507	6180	-	-	402	-	5	3	14092	8205
Families	586	557	3507	1521	-	-	100	-	3	2	4206	2080

a[1]) = before June 1941 b[2]) = today [1942] http://chortiza.heimat.eu/Stumpp/Dorfber.htm

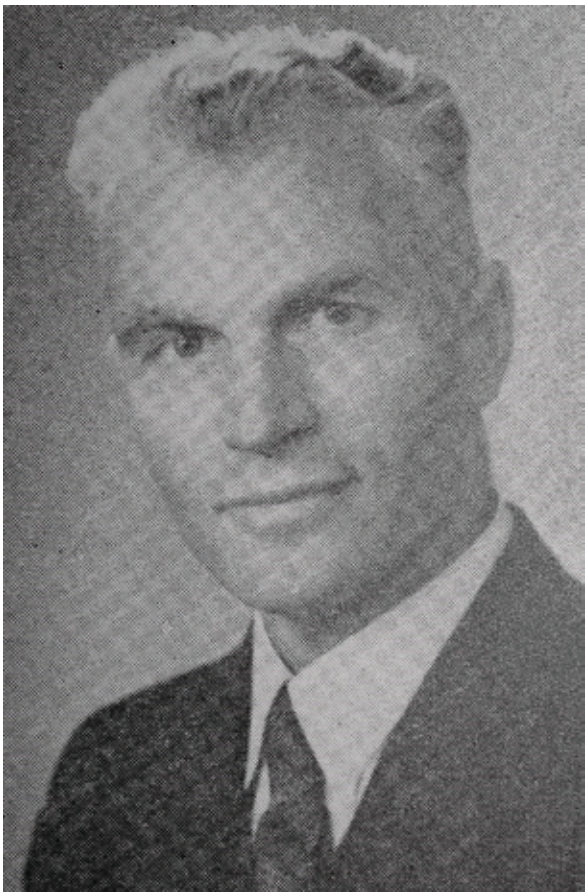
Certainly many of the Jews had fled eastward with the advance of German army in June 1941, as is mentioned in a personal account by Anna Sudermann (and included in Fast's book): "In July the first refugees came through Chortitza. That will soon be our destiny, we thought. The refugees were Jews from Bessarabia (now in Moldova). They came on wagons, and were still well provisioned and bought bread at our markets. They wanted to buy without waiting in line, which caused a lot of conflict" (Fast *Ende* 19).

Not all Jews departed in anxious haste. Some remained behind, convinced that since they had done no wrong, they would be unharmed. In "Mennonites and the Holocaust," Gerhard Rempel quotes the same Anna Sudermann: "One day we saw how Jews, about 50 men, women, and children, were marched down the street. They were all shot outside the village, including half-Jews. ...The rural constabulary was ordered to carry out these actions" (Rempel 529). According to Rempel's sources, these killings continued through the fall of 1943, and took the lives of more than 44,000 Jews in the Zaporozhye district (531).

How much did Gerhard Fast know about the killings? He leaves behind virtually no clue in his writings. In only one sentence, in connection with a rather trivial matter, he states, "If one is mobilized, one will be commanded and one must obey" (Fast *Ende* 79)

In "Mennonites of the Ukraine under Stalin and Hitler," written for the April 1947 issue of *Mennonite Life* (an American Mennonite journal begun in 1946), Fast tries to distance himself from the Nazi regime, casting himself as someone merely "travelling and observing." He states that the Mennonite colonies entrusted to Himmler's SS soon realized that they would be forced to give up their beliefs and adopt a new faith based on ethnic background and homeland: *Blut und Boden* (blood and country). "In March, 1942," he writes, "when I came to Chortitza, I told our people, 'If Ger-

many wins we cannot stay, because she will not tolerate our religious views. ... If Germany loses, there will be no room for us in that collapsed country. Thus, there is only one hope – to find a new home in America'" (Fast *Mennonite Life* 21). It is a curious statement, for nowhere in *Das Ende von Chortitza* does he mention a concern about the future of religion under the Nazi administration, let alone talk of emigration to America. In fact, it is impossible to imagine that an officer of the Reich would dare to speak of matters such as this except to a very trusted friend – certainly not to "our people."



Gerhard Fast.
Source: Fast's book *Im Schatten des Todes*

In 1952, Gerhard Fast immigrated to Canada, settling in Ontario. The following year, he travelled through the country, collecting material for *In den Steppen Siberiens* (In the Steppes of Siberia), a book which includes many eyewitness accounts of life in Siberia, as well as Fast's own experiences growing up there. From 1954 to 1959 he held a job as bookkeeper for the Canadian MB Conference in Winnipeg. Following that, he returned to Ontario where he spent his remaining years, taking an active part in church life as pastor and Sunday school teacher.

Fast's admiration for his former boss, Dr. Karl Stumpp, did not diminish with the years. In 1973, when Stumpp was about to go on a lecture tour of North America, Fast wrote an article for *Der Bote* (Canadian Mennonite newspaper, 1924-2008) praising Stumpp and referring to the "research work" done under Stumpp in the German colonies during the Second World War. "And this Dr. Stumpp," he exults, "is coming to Canada for one month at the end of May" (Fast *Bote* 3-4).

Gerhard Fast was seventy-nine years old when he published *Das Ende von Chortitza* in March, 1973. He died the following year, and was mourned by a large congregation; his obituary stated that "the many flowers and mourning guests testify to the love felt for this servant of the Lord" (Friesen 7).

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Fast's *Mennonite Life* article closes with a challenge for readers to help "hounded, homeless" Mennonite refugees in Europe. Fast urges readers to "join with those who say with Joseph: 'I seek my brethren.'"

In a terrible irony, his use of this biblical allusion to highlight the plight of Mennonite refugees contrasts starkly with his silence about the "hounded, homeless" condition of Joseph's true brethren, the Jews of German-occupied Ukraine.

1. All translations are by the author.

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Ex-Mennonite, Near Mennonite: Liturgical, Non-denominational, Secular: Conference Impressions

Reported by Helen Rose Pauls

Every year the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg hosts an academic and community education conference. The 2014 event, entitled "Ex-Mennonite, Near Mennonite: Liturgical, Non-denominational, Secular," was held October 3-4 and explored "the process by which Mennonites have become non-Mennonites, either as individuals or groups."

Historically, churches and conferences have been eager to chart the growth of the Mennonite church. Seldom have we examined how and why Mennonites leave the church. Formerly, in our rural Mennonite villages, leaving the church had dire consequences in terms of community and belonging, mutual help, and even economic wellbeing. I remember well my father's difficulty with rigid thinking and sermons, but we remained in our village for the sake of acceptance in the community. Some people, especially those who married *Engländer* (literally, "the English" – but among Mennonites this term often referred generally to anyone of the mainstream North American culture) left the Mennonite church because of its resistance to changing language usage from German to English. Others left when higher education meant that new questions needed answering. Many of the four thousand Canadian Mennonite men who joined the army during wartime were not well accepted when they returned because of their violation of the norm of non-resistance and sometimes moved to other church communities or dropped out of church life altogether.

During the conference, participants heard of the various ways and means by which Mennonites have become ex-Mennonites. For example, Altona United Church was formed after World War Two, when Mennonite soldiers were asked to apologize to their congregations for their military service and, feeling unwelcome, subsequently left the Mennonite church. Fourteen families found affiliation under the United Church of Canada umbrella.

Recently, some Mennonites are gravitating to other denominations and other approaches to worship. Apparently St. Margaret's Anglican Church in Winnipeg is called "the fastest growing Mennonite church in Canada" as many mostly younger folk flock there for liturgy and a "high church" experience. A former Mennonite from Ontario told conference attendees of joining the Catholic Church where he felt he could worship in a new way, and where he was confirmed on the basis of his Amish baptism. In addition, thousands of Mennonites in Winnipeg and Steinbach are attracted to huge non-denominational youth-oriented churches, some of which preach a prosperity gospel that "prays the promises" for economic wellbeing and seeks "divine health."

Conference attendees also heard of those who have felt shunned for their gay lifestyle; of an individual who left the church to become Muslim after marriage to a student from Pakistan; of another who left conservative Mennonite roots in southern Saskatchewan to become the leader of the Canadian National Baptist Convention. Another person was cast out of the Holdeman fold (Church of God in Christ, Mennonite) over an accusation of fraud. Others from this group have been asked to leave church and the security of family because of divorce or over their dissatisfaction with perceived legalism. Many of them have reconnected on a Facebook page called "The Shunned." One young conference presenter reported that he had left the Mennonite church to lead the Atheist Club in his university. "Does believing in God make us good?" he asked. The club encourages community for like-minded people, but according to him, its members "have no agenda."

The official presentations generated informal coffee-break discussions about related issues. For example, some participants raised concerns that some of the largest Mennonite Brethren churches in BC are abandoning "Anabaptist values," and emphasizing a "New Calvinist" or "neo-Calvinist" theology of predestination (God wills everything) as well as

exclusively male leadership.

Another observation made at the conference was that BC churches have led the way in Canada in changing the words "Mennonite Brethren Church" to "Community Church" or merely "Church." Although they are still under the MB umbrella, one would be hard pressed to find the word "Mennonite" on any of these churches' websites, although sometimes "MB" appears when, for example, references are made to MB Missions or the MB Biblical Seminary.

BC participant Carrie Hinterberger in conversation with Jon Isaak from the Winnipeg MB Archives. Photo: Vi Chappell

It was also suggested that some Mennonite church conferences no longer preach the breadth of the gospel, and are avoiding the subjects of atonement, repentance, and regeneration. From the 1950s on, the "Anabaptist" teachings of John Howard Yoder, Harold Bender, and J. Denny Weaver, which emphasized nonviolence, peace, service, humility and community, apparently changed Mennonite church theology significantly. Whole conferences have left the Mennonite fold, two of which have renamed themselves Evangelical Missionary Church and Fellowship of Evangelical Churches. In BC, at least two congregations chose to leave Mennonite Church BC when that conference chose a gentler approach toward the issue of gay inclusion.

In addition, Quebec was cited as a place where the Mennonite church now has a very tenuous hold, even though many Quebecers joined the MB church during the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s (a time of secularization, an expanding welfare state, and growing nationalist politics), when traditionalist Catholic Church control was on the wane. In Quebec, hostility toward the organized church, which is perceived as dogmatic and repressive, has grown; this increasing secularization has resulted in decreased growth for Quebec Mennonite churches.

Abroad, Mennonites have left for differing reasons. The work of Mennonite missionaries in India produced many converts among the Dalit or "untouchable" community. For economic reasons, some of the Dalit now are asking for letters to prove they are not registered church members, since Christians do not qualify for special services the government has established for the Dalit.

In contrast, *"Bist du Gläubig* ... are you a believer?" is the big question among the *Aussiedler* Mennonite community in Germany (*Aussiedler* are ethnic Germans who have emigrated since the 1970s from Russia to Germany; a fraction of them are Mennonites). Their church affiliation in Russia often came under the Baptist umbrella but many consider themselves to come "from Mennonite roots."

We all have ex-Mennonites in our lives whom we know and love. Two communities in our province where ex-Mennonites seem to feel accepted and at home are Mennonite Central Committee and the Mennonite Historical Society. Perhaps, when one realizes that John Howard Yoder's book *The Politics of Jesus* was a bestseller that sold 100,000 copies and that the *More with Less Cookbook* has sold over 800,000 copies, one might better appreciate what really unites us as a Mennonite family: seemingly not worship styles or theology but shared values and practices.

Seeing Things the Way They Are: The Art of Barbara Boldt

By Louise Bergen Price

To me, Art is more than painting, it's a way of thinking, a way of life. It is finding meaning, and searching for the essence in existence. I am a realist in many ways, seeing things the way they are. (barbaraboldt.com)

Barbara Boldt on her 80th birthday, July 2010.
Photo: Kelly Pliner

Barbara Boldt, one of BC's most respected artists, was born in 1930 in Germany to parents Marie-Luise and Rolf Hartmann. Her early years were spent in an idyllic park-like setting at Stiegenhof where she lived surrounded by parents, siblings and extended family. It was a place to stimulate the senses: outside, the beauty of woods and gardens; indoors, paintings by family members going back for generations.

This world collapsed with the onset of the Second World War in 1939. By 1941, Allied bombings made life precarious, and Barbara and her siblings were sent to children's camps in safer surroundings. They would spend the remainder of the war living in various places, separate from each other and their parents.

Barbara remembers that one night, before supper, their teacher told them they were about to meet a group of poor, hungry children and their mothers, and that they were Russian German refugees. (Barbara wonders now if these refugees could have been Mennonite.) Her teacher suggested that each student choose one item from her dinner plate to give away. Barbara struggled with the decision – although at that time there was always some food to eat, her stomach never felt full. In the end, she placed a bun from her plate into the hands of a hungry child.

After the war ended, Barbara learned about starvation firsthand, for the Allies wanted to punish all Germans for the sins of those responsible for Nazi atrocities. On one occasion, after Barbara and her brother had stood in line for hours for a loaf of bread, American soldiers took the bread away and tossed it around before grinding it into the dirt. Barbara and her brother salvaged what they could, bringing the dirty crumbs home to their family. Starvation has left an indelible imprint in Barbara's life, and each Christmas she contributes generously to Feed the Children (a non-profit organization founded in 1979 and based on Christian values).

In 1952, the Hartmann family emigrated to Canada, first to Sherbrooke, Quebec, then to Vancouver. The long years of separation during World War II had left their mark, and Barbara found it hard to rekindle the bond she used to share with her brothers, especially since they soon brought their German fiancées to Canada to join them.

The following year, while working at Simpson Sears on Water Street, Barbara met Peter Boldt, a handsome young man who worked on the same floor of the store. Barbara remembers the long trip from Vancouver to Yarrow on the Fraser Highway to visit Peter's family. After the turbulence of her own youth, she was attracted to what she saw as the family's solid foundation. "They were faithful people," she says. The German language was familiar; even the table grace was the same she'd grown up with. After a short engagement, the young couple got married in Yarrow's Mennonite Brethren church with Pastor Herman Lenzmann officiating.

Although Barbara and Peter moved around a lot, family life provided the stability Barbara needed, and she threw herself into the busy role of wife and mother. There was little time to reflect on the rich artistic heritage of her ancestors. After her children, Dorothy, Michael and Kenneth left home, Barbara knew she needed an outlet for her creative abilities. When she saw an advertisement for art lessons, she signed up.

Before long, Barbara realized that she had inherited the gift passed down through the generations. Yet, although talent is essential, it must be developed by the individual, her teacher Aeron McBryde explained. Barbara agreed, and tackled this new venture with all the energy and enthusiasm she possessed.

After her marriage ended, Barbara determined to make a living as an artist, something few painters in Canada have accomplished. This she has done, completing an average of one painting a week. She has had numerous exhibits, and her paintings are found in many collections. Over the years, hundreds of students have learned to paint under her guidance.

Barbara's home is filled with paintings, her own as well as art by her ancestors and by her children and grandchildren. Her paintings mark the journey of her life from her home in Stiegenhof to the pastoral beauty of the peaceful acreage near Fort Langley where she now resides, as well as many of the places where she has lived in between. Each painting reflects the world as seen through her own eyes, and is based on photographs she has taken. Many feature the natural beauty of trees, flowers, mountains and rivers of Fort Langley and the surrounding area.

Barbara's fascination with intricate patterns sculpted by wind and water on stone has led to her *Earth Pattern* series, with paintings such as *Stone Song*, *Evolving*, *Dragon's Eye* and *Passion in Stone*. These paintings, inspired by visits to BC's Long Beach and Gulf Islands, "illuminate a world that seems static but catch a moment in time, a fleeting quality of light, a place on the cusp of change" (Watt 103).

Other paintings bear witness to great personal loss: the death of son Ken in a tragic road accident in 1990, and of her daughter Dorothy, to cancer in 2000. Both Ken and Dorothy are constantly in Barbara's thoughts. Her *Heart* series, with its broad strokes and abstract shapes, is radically different from Barbara's other work, depicting a mother's anguish at losing a beloved son. Dorothy's death, though less sudden, robbed Barbara of a kindred spirit who was a fellow artist as well as a daughter. Recently, Barbara has begun a series to honour her daughter. Based on Dorothy's photographs, it is entitled, *Daughter's Eyes; Mother's Hands*.

For many years, Barbara hoped that she would one day be able to share the journey of her life and art with others. Two years ago, this dream became reality when she and K. Jane Watt collaborated on a book of memories, photos, and artwork called *Places of Her Heart: the Art and Life of Barbara Boldt*. Designed by William Glasgow of Abbotsford, this richly illustrated memoir contains over two hundred of Barbara's paintings as well archival photographs and sketches.

Barbara's paintings reflect a person who has come to a place of peace. She begins each day gazing out at the maple trees in her yard, observing the beauty around her, and offering a prayer of thanks: "In spring, the rhododendron blooms underneath, and the fresh little maple buds are growing. In summer I marvel at the huge ceiling of green leaves, the birds and squirrels moving about. In the fall, like right now, the yellow and gold of the changing leaf

colours urges me on to my painting!! In winter, the bare, strong trees reassure me that in spring they will green again.

I give thanks for the peaceful, green environment I am privileged to live in. I give big thanks for my own life, my health, and the talent given to me, to create and make a living with my art. I give thanks for my precious, wonderful children, my strong and wonderful son Mike! and for the years I have had with my Dorothy and Ken, who now are deceased. I give thanks for the food on my plate, and the ability to have food any time I need it!" (Boldt email)

Barbara welcomes visitors to her gallery, but asks that they please call ahead at 604-888-5490. Her studio is located at 25340 84th Avenue in Langley's Glenn Valley. Small group lessons are available for oils. Copies of her book are available at the studio, through bookstores, or at amazon.ca on the Internet. A copy is also available at the MHSBC library.

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From the Archives: New Books and DVDs for sale at the MHSBC office

A more complete list can be accessed on the MHSBC website.

1. *Mennonites in Ukraine amid Civil War and Anarchy (1917-1920)*. A collection of documents translated and edited by John B. Toews. Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2013. 198 pp. $20.

2. *Letters of a Mennonite Couple, Nicolai and Katharina Rempel. Russia: War and Revolution*. Edited by Teodor Rempel, translated by Teodor Rempel with Agatha Klassen. Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2014. 246 pp. $25.

3. *Red Quarter Moon: A Search for Family in the Shadow of Stalin*. By Anne Konrad. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 356 pp. $35. (This book was reviewed by John B. Toews in *Roots and Branches* June 2012.)

4. *Path of Thorns: Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule*. Memoir written by Jacob A. Neufeld, first published as *Tiefenwege* in 1957. Edited by Harvey L. Dyck. Translated by Harvey L. Dyck and Sarah Dyck. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. 444 pp. $38.

5. *Six Sugar Beets, Five Bitter Years*. Novel by Erica Jantzen, based on actual events. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2003. 186 pp. $22.

6. *Among the Ashes. In the Stalinkova Kolkhoz (Kontinuusfeld) 1930-1935*. Edited and translated by Peter Rahn. Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2011. 299 pp. $30. (This book was reviewed by Ed Janzen in *Roots and Branches* June 2012.)

7. *Unspoken: an inheritance of words*. Poetry by Connie T. Braun. Vancouver: Fern Hill Publications, 2014. 81 pp. $20.

8. *Russian Mennonite Source Materials from Ukrainian Archives*. DVD of documents: birth records, Chortitza and Gnadenfeld, 1897-1920; Dutch lineage certifications, 1921-1922; Mennonite emigration application forms, 1927-1928; and Molochna agricultural census, 1811. Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2012. $20.

9. *What You Get at Home*. Collection of short stories by Dora Dueck. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2012. 178 pp. $20.

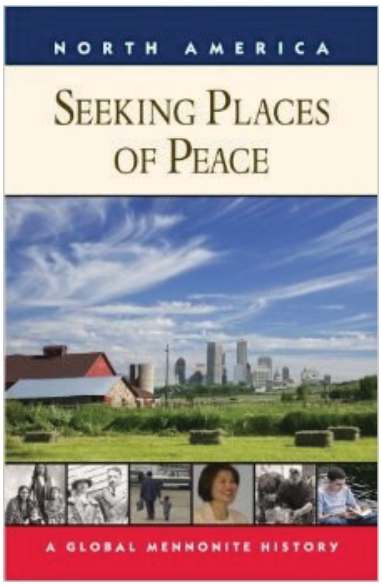
10. *Seeking Places of Peace.* Royden Loewen and Steve Nolt. *Global Mennonite History Series: North America*. Intercourse, PA and Kitchener, ON: Good Books and Pandora Press, 2012. 399 pp.

Book Reviews

Seeking Places of Peace.

Royden Loewen and Steve Nolt. *Global Mennonite History Series: North America*. Intercourse, PA and Kitchener, ON: Good Books and Pandora Press, 2012. 399 pp.

By Robert Martens



By the mid-1990s, the global shift in the Mennonite Church was clearly apparent. The majority of Mennonites/Anabaptists now lived in less developed countries, and churches in the wealthy West were growing slowly or even not at all. Mennonite historian Wilbert Shenk remarked that "a global church requires a global history" (v). Out of this growing consciousness of an international Mennonite church emerged the Global Mennonite History Project, commissioned in 1997 by the Mennonite World Conference. The idea was that representatives from regions such as Asia, Africa, or Latin America would tell their own stories, from their own perspectives: new narratives that would reflect a new order. The first volume in the series appeared in 2003, and others in 2006, 2010, and 2011. *Seeking Places of Peace*, focusing on North America, is the final book in the series. Interestingly, it is a "social history": that is, a grassroots history, a story told "from below," in which the names of leaders and institutions are radically de-emphasized.

The book begins, though, with a more traditional retelling of the early Anabaptist/Mennonite story. After the initial severe persecution, Anabaptists scattered, but somehow remained connected: wealthy Dutch Mennonites were soon sending relief to Swiss Mennonite refugees. North America, with its limited government and seemingly unlimited lands, attracted thousands of Mennonites, and mass migrations occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to both the United States and Canada. From the start, the border dictated differences. American Mennonites viewed themselves as citizens of a state, with all the rights and responsibilities that entailed; Canadian Mennonites perceived their status as being subjects of the Crown. Communities were also shaped differently. While American Mennonites generally lived on isolated farms, their Canadian counterparts preferred to gather in communities. Because Mennonites stubbornly clung to the ideal of congregational autonomy, disputes and schisms were common. The General Conference was formed in 1860 to provide an umbrella organization for the more progressive churches. But traditionalist groups were also alive and well. Between the 1860s and 1890s, there was a dramatic shift among some Mennonites to assimilate into the mainstream while drifting into conspicuous consumption. One response to this – or perhaps a rebuttal – was the creation of the Old Order, with its simple lifestyle and detachment from the "world." In the end, though, war and a booming economy profoundly changed the way Mennonites lived. The generation of the 1930s would be the last "in which a vast majority of Mennonites in North America were able to build farm-centered, closely-knit rural worlds in which to live out their Anabaptist faith that answered the great questions about existence, but also provided guidance for their everyday lives" (80).

Mennonites, write authors Loewen and Nolt, have always had a special, even spiritual, relationship with the land. Soil was seen as a divine gift from God, and constant admonitions on humility and stewardship may have helped prevent excessive exploitation of the land. Large families made it possible for Mennonites to work small farms and still make a profit. Nevertheless, the Dust Bowl that coincided with the Great Depression was a tragic indictment of faulty farming techniques. Mennonites subsequently provided leadership in soil replenishment and new methods of farming such as contour

strips and crop rotation. At the same time, Mennonites were rapidly urbanizing. Some saw this as an opportunity to create missions for the urban poor; others, as simply a better way to make a living. By 1986, the majority of urban Mennonite Brethren were "non-ethnic."

Changes were occurring at an astounding pace. On the one hand, fundamentalism materialized as a weapon against excessive legalism; tent evangelist George Brunk was a great proponent. On the other wing of the Mennonite community were individuals like John Howard Yoder and Harold Bender, calling for a life of Christian activism. Mennonite families were changing too. Traditionally, children were meant to be quiet, and even pregnancies went unmentioned until the day of birth. Now, however, children were becoming "adolescents" who insisted on speaking for themselves, and youth had to be coaxed to remain within the church. Marriages that were once based on "mutual benefit," that is, on roles played within the economy of the farm, became marriages of "mutual love." And where aging parents had historically been cared for by their children, now homes for seniors were being built. Some objected that this new development would cause children to neglect their parents.

In general, Mennonites were rejecting the siren song of modernism, but traditions of mutual aid did become institutionalized under the pressures and increasing complexity of contemporary North America. Deacons had once served as financial advisers to local congregations; financial advisers now took their place. Life insurance became a popular option, over the objections of traditionalists that this constituted a commodification of human life. And while Mennonites had generally strongly denigrated individualism, entrepreneurship flourished. The rise of Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) was one way to affirm the role of men and women in business.

North American worshipping communities were also in flux. Mostly small, they were amazingly diverse, and it remains a challenge even today to state what connects them all. The position of bishop disappeared; salaried ministers became the norm, in place of the traditional lay elder chosen by vote or lot; the charismatic movement became a source of controversy; and music changed from congregational hymns in four-part harmony to bands and overhead lyrics. And when congregations began to grow beyond the point of intimate community, the "small group" movement was initiated in the 1970s.

After a chapter on the growth of the arts among Mennonites (an interesting chapter but somewhat sketchy, with even a few spelling mistakes of artists' names), *Seeking Places of Peace* addresses the theme of global community. Mennonites began to ask the question: are we citizens of the state or of the globe? Paradoxically, while Mennonites were affirming the transnationalism of the Christian message, they were simultaneously increasing their emphasis on nationalism: Canadians and Americans were quick to distinguish themselves from each other. But it was increasingly recognized that North Americans were no longer at the centre of things. Mennonite world conferences "were occasions for honing a Mennonite transnational identity, a heightened awareness of global poverty, a forceful reminder that the 'Kingdom of God,' for all the Mennonite idealism, had not yet been built" (330).

Seeking Places of Peace sets a new standard for the history of North American Mennonites. It is on sale, for a modest price, at the MHSBC office.

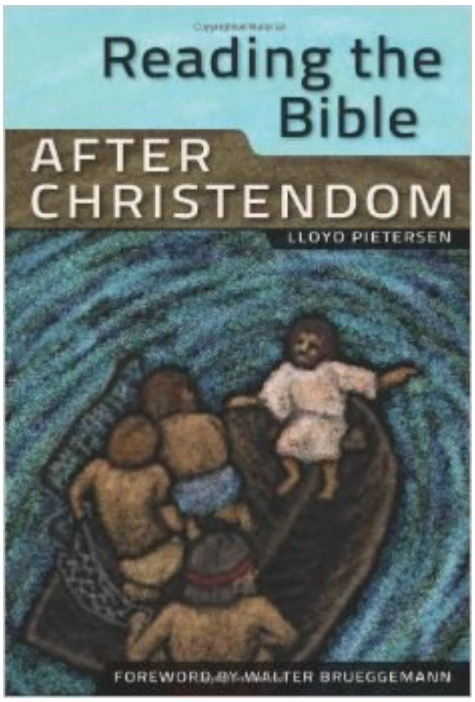
Reading the Bible after Christendom.

Lloyd Pietersen. With a foreword by Walter Brueggemann. Herald Press: Waterloo and Harrisonburg, 2012. 259 pp.

By Robert Martens

No one told me I was to contend with consuls and prefects and the most illustrious generals, who hardly knew how to relieve themselves of their abundance of possessions. No one told me I was expected to put the treasuries of the church to the service of gluttony, and the poor-box to the service of

luxury. No one told me I must be equipped with superb horses and mounted on an ornamental chariot, and there would be a great hush during my solemn progresses, and everyone must make way for the Patriarch as though he were some kind of wild beast, with the people opening out in great avenues to let me pass, as I came like a banner from afar. If these things offended you, then I say they all belong to the past. Forgive me. (Gregory of Naziansus, qted in Pietersen 43)



With these words, Gregory of Naziansus quit his posting as bishop of Constantinople in 381, not even sixty years after the Council of Nicaea. His disgust with the ostentation and corruption of the official Church of Rome is obvious. In *Reading the Bible after Christendom*, Lloyd Pietersen argues that the early church was gradually sucked into the realms of power and became something else: Christendom, in which belief and orthodoxy were imposed from above, in radical contrast to the teachings of Jesus. Today, Pietersen says, Christendom is dead, and we should count ourselves fortunate. The end of official political religion could mean the return to a theology of the poor and dispossessed, to an authentic Christian life based on Jesus' countercultural message.

In Pietersen's view, the early Church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen argued vigorously with each other as they tried to hammer out a foundation for Christianity, sometimes under conditions of persecution. The gospels were multiple; beliefs were not consistent; creeds were written and dismissed and written again. In 325 AD, the Roman emperor Constantine decided that the chaos had to be regulated. He summoned 220 bishops to Nicaea, where they debated, quarrelled, and threatened until the famous Nicaean Creed was drafted as a compromise. Christianity, Pietersen writes, became an official bureaucracy: "This is a far cry from the church wrestling with issues by debate and exercising its own discipline in the spirit of Jesus. ... Instead orthodoxy is deeply implicated in the power politics of imperial decree" (49).

Constantine ordered his favourite historian to produce a new official canon, a Scripture which would be changeless; eventually, only a professionalized clergy were permitted to interpret it. This development moved the Church away "from the Pauline ideal of every member of the congregation having something vital to contribute to the life of the community as a whole" (57). Edicts were proclaimed against heretics; orthodoxy was no longer a way of faith, but an imposed belief system. Christendom finally became all-embracing some 275 years after the Council of Nicaea, when Justinian decreed it illegal *not* to be Christian. Pietersen writes, "The origins of orthodox, creedal Christianity with its canon of Scripture are thus inextricably bound up with issues of coercion, power politics, and violence" (57).

Christendom began to break down with the Protestant Reformation, and Lloyd Pietersen, who is treasurer for the Anabaptist Network in Britain, argues that Anabaptist theology was one of the strongest voices in the countercultural reinterpretation of Scripture. Anabaptism, he writes, remains vitally important for its rejection of the alliance between church and state; for its principle of scriptural interpretation by the community; and for its defence of the poor and persecuted. Pietersen finds six main principles in the Anabaptist reinterpretation of Scripture:

1. Christocentrism: following the example of Jesus.
2. A firm commitment to both Word and Spirit.
3. Communal reading and discussion of Scripture.
4. Obedience and ethical living.
5. The clarity of Scripture, which speaks for itself.
6. Devaluation of the Old Testament.

Pietersen accepts the first four principles as essen-

tial, though flawed. He does not accept the last two, arguing that Scripture does benefit from historical and critical thinking, and that the Old Testament is an important component of the Scripture's full vision.

Pietersen begins his redefining of Scripture with a new picture of Jesus, interpreted from an Anabaptist point of view. Traditionally, Jesus has been characterized as prophet, priest, and king, thoroughly biblical terms "too often viewed through the lens of Christendom" (88). Pietersen proposes that Jesus be viewed as a prophet who raises consciousness, energizes the community, and criticizes the existing order; as a pastor who "combines teaching, care, relationship, and protection" (92); and as a poet who speaks in parables. Some of Pietersen's readings are quite controversial. The parable of the mustard seed, he writes, should be interpreted not essentially as the growth of something tiny into something large, but according to the fact that "the mustard plant, although beneficial, quickly gets out of hand and tends to take root where it is not wanted. ... Jesus is much more likely to be emphasizing the problem the kingdom of God poses to the establishment. It tends to flourish precisely where it is not wanted and attracts undesirables (as far as those in control are concerned)" (96).

In the following chapters, Pietersen rather quickly reinterprets the entire Scripture, and finds meaning in every book of the Bible. He writes that the creation story of Genesis, for example, is a direct response to the violent Babylonian creation myth, in which murder and dismemberment play a large role: "In stark contrast, the Genesis creation account poetically portrays the creation of the cosmos by the speech of God and the text subsequently denounces violence in the strongest terms" (111). Pietersen moves on from the sometimes brutal Yahweh of the historical books to the prophets, who proclaim the oneness of Creation: "The Old Testament reveals God as one with a dark side and a violent past, as well as a God of compassion, love, and passionate concern for social justice" (149). Pietersen's analysis of the Gospel and letters in the New Testament sometimes struggles, as he himself admits, with academic language. He ends, however, with the apocalyptic vision of Paul. Revelation, he writes, is an appropriate conclusion to Scripture, but Paul has already proclaimed the same message. In the Roman Empire, where it was decreed that the emperor was God, Paul preached a gospel of a loving community that resisted the powers: "Various powers are named in Paul's letters: law, flesh, sin, world. His whole thought is geared to encouraging believers to embrace their inheritance in Christ and thus no longer live as those enslaved to cosmic powers" (182).

Reading the Bible after Christendom concludes with the problems of reading the Bible spiritually and missionally. "Spirituality" is an overused word in today's world, says Pietersen, that, however, rarely includes the Bible. His own Bible study group involves close reading of the text and asking how that text speaks to our relationship with the world. As an example of how to read Scripture spiritually, Pietersen comments on four biblical encounters with God, moving from Moses' vision of Yahweh's back "as the awesome Other," to Elijah's meeting with God "in profound stillness," to the transfigured Jesus seen by the disciples as "God with us," and ending with Paul's idea that Moses' unique vision is now open to all: "believers' transformation into the image of God" (212).

Missionally, writes Pietersen, the contemporary church finds itself marginalized in ways similar to the early church. And, like the early church, we find ourselves battling the ancient gods of power. Mission is justice, non-consumerism, a fight against the god of money, Mammon. Mission is peace, a struggle with Mars, god of war. And mission is community, reflection, and prayer, as opposed to the god of self-indulgence, Dionysus. The Bible, read "from the margins," Pietersen suggests, is an apocalyptic theology beginning with disunion and ending in the victory of the divine cosmos over the hostile Powers. And the Bible, read "in community," prophecies the healing of the cosmos, subverts the domination system of the Powers, and sustains with nourishment for the journey.

Die deutsch-völkische Zeit in der Kolonie Fernheim, Chaco, Paraguay 1933-1944. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der auslandsdeutschen Mennoniten während des Dritten Reiches.

Peter P. Klassen. Bolanden-Weierhof: *Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein* e. V., 2001.

[The time of the German *Volk* in Fernheim Colony, Chaco, Paraguay 1933-1944. A Contribution to the History of Expatriate German Mennonites during the Third Reich]

By Wilf Hein

Peter P. Klassen was born 1926 in the Chortitza Colony in South Russia. He was able to escape Bolshevism in 1931 when he immigrated with his parents via Germany to Fernheim Colony, Paraguay. Here he grew up and took up teacher's training. In 1953 he received a scholarship from Mennonites in North America, enabling him to continue his studies for two years in Switzerland and Germany.

In his well-researched book, *Die deutsch-völkische Zeit*, Klassen describes in detail the differences that existed among Mennonites in Paraguay with regard to their support of or opposition to the National Socialism of the Hitler regime. Writing in excellent German, Klassen clarifies the underlying causes of these great disparities and tensions in the Mennonite camp during the time of the Third Reich. Some Mennonites were interested in seeing how far they could go in supporting the National Socialism of Hitler's regime.

Klassen keeps the reader's interest high in wanting to know the outcome of these conflicts. He divides the Mennonites in the Chaco into three main groups:

(a) *Die Mennonitengemeinde* (MG) who supported National Socialism (NS); they also called themselves *Völkische* (untranslatable; but loosely meaning "of the German people") Mennonites. Among the most influential people in this group were Dr. Fritz Kliewer and Professor Benjamin H. Unruh; the latter lived in Germany and corresponded with the Paraguayan Mennonites. Unruh was highly appreciated among the Mennonites because he had helped them come out of Russia and find a new home in Paraguay.

(b) The Mennonite Brethren (MB) who were divided among themselves on the question of support or non-support of the Hitler regime.

(c) The Evangelical-Mennonite Brethren (EMB), also called "pacifists" (*Wehrlosen*) or sometimes "conservatives" (traditionalists), who opposed the National Socialists and the *Völkische* group of Mennonites. People of influence belonging to this group were Nikolai Wiebe, Wilhelm Klassen, Gerhard Balzer and most MCC delegates and workers (44).

Supporters of National Socialism

The MG members were thankful to their German "motherland" which had helped them escape Bolshevism, taken them up as refugees, and provided a new home for them in North- and South America. David Loewen, the mayor (*Oberschulze*) of Fernheim, wrote, "We thank the Almighty that he brought the right men at the right time to our motherland who would stand against communism" (27) [translations by WH]. Nikolai Siemens wrote, "We thank our motherland for freeing us of slavery almost 12 years ago, accepting us and providing for us a new place to live" (80).

Benjamin Unruh said, "We thank God that he gave the German nation the energetic leader Adolf Hitler who was able to erect a barrier against communism for all of Europe" (46). The cultural achievements of the Russian Mennonites had been recognized in the highest military ranks within the Nazi regime. Alfred Rosenberg, the minister for the occupied eastern territories, expressed to Unruh his admiration for the Mennonites. Unruh wanted to utilize for the benefit of Mennonites the good connections he had been able to establish within the highest circles of the Third Reich (81).

Dr. Fritz Kliewer, who was a teacher at the *Zentralschule* (secondary school) in Schönwiese, held a talk on the theme "The Christian and His Nation" on July 3, 1941. In his speech he said that "nation" and "nationalism" are an order instituted by

God and that Germans of the new Germany certainly also can be Christians (70). When Germany invaded Russia, Kliewer called for a public meeting in which he announced, "Europe's people rose united under Germany's leadership against the satanic power of Bolshevism. The Russian-born German-speaking Mennonites are aware that this battle is not only a test for Germany and Western Europe, but that it also includes the liberation of Russia and our brothers and sisters in Christ for whom we have prayed for such a long time." The evening ended with prayer and a thanksgiving service (80).

The *Völkische* Mennonites (MG) in Paraguay expressed their gratitude towards the new German nation by sending little bags of peanuts to all prominent leaders of the Nazi regime. Joseph Goering's package arrived exactly on his wedding day. The people in Fernheim said the *Führer* should realize that there were also German hearts in the Chaco of Paraguay beating for him. They assured him that they were faithfully standing with him and his mighty nation (28).

The position of the Mennonitengemeinde *on taking up arms*

Fritz Kliewer wrote that the Mennonites in the Fernheim Colony were aware of the fact that they would have to give up their stand on pacifism in case of repatriation, and that they would be prepared to serve their nation and fatherland even if it meant for them to sacrifice their lives (84). Many young males among the MG even signed a vow which stated, "I promise my allegiance and obedience to the *Führer* and the highest military commander of the German nation that I will be prepared to serve this nation as a brave soldier, and that I will keep my promise of committing my life to this cause" (41).

Possible resettlement to the Ukraine

Dr. H. C. Buesing, who visited the Mennonite colonies in Paraguay in May 1938, wrote, "The ideal will be that the *Führer* will conquer the Ukraine. Then they [the Mennonites in Paraguay], who are experienced wheat-growers, would like to return to their familiar Russian soil, working for Germany's food needs" (49).

SS *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, who personally negotiated with Unruh, told him, "I had been in the Ukraine where I met the Mennonites and came to the conclusion that they are the best." During this meeting the possibility of resettling the Russian Germans in the Ukraine had also been discussed (81-2). Unruh advocates in his letters that the pacifist Mennonites should be included in the plan of the "Great German Reich in the East" (82). Himmler believed that the pacifist standpoint of the Mennonites could be utilized by assigning them as "ambassadors of peace" to the Russian nation. A copy of his letter was forwarded to Hitler (83).

Opponents of the National Socialist regime

When the North American Old Mennonite missionary Elvin Snyder visited Paraguay, he presented a lecture against National Socialism. In it he mentioned that NS was worse than Bolshevism and called it "syphilis of the spirit." This triggered a scandal, and some who did not agree with him left the meeting (71).

Other pacifists who opposed the NS group lost their peace-loving attitude for various reasons, armed themselves with sticks, whips and steel-cables, and beat up some of their "brethren in Christ" (*Glaubensbrüder*) who disagreed with them (114). It took many years until the deep rifts could be healed and forgiveness granted.

Conclusion

Peter Klassen's book is a vivid, well-researched, and thought-provoking contribution to the story of the political tensions among Paraguayan Chaco Mennonites during the time of the Third Reich. It is recommended for those fluent in German – unfortunately the book has not been translated into English – who are interested in learning about the positions "peace-loving" Mennonites in Paraguay held during Hitler's time.

My Father's Last Letter

By Vern Giesbrecht

I sat alone in the living room of my brother's home in Toronto and wept. Among the memorabilia my brother had given me to look through was the last letter from our dying father. The date was December 21, 1950.

Rev. George Giesbrecht was in a nursing home in Abbotsford, very weak from cancer, but had struggled to write letters to us and our mother. I was shocked to discover the letter, since I could not remember reading it before.

"Dear boys," the letter begins, "How are you tonight? I forgot to say thank you for the letters you wrote me, so I'll say thank you now ..."

At this time, my brothers Norm and Wes were eight and four, and I had just turned seven. Our sister Violet, 1½, was not mentioned in the letter, possibly because she would have been too young to write to him.

"I enjoyed your letters very much," the letter goes on. "Well, I often think what my boys are doing." Our father then tells us about an eleven-year-old boy who had come to the nursing home with an injured arm and had "cried very much," but then had settled down and gone home after a few days. His letter concludes, "Take good care of yourselves so you don't get hurt. Don't forget to pray for your Daddy so he may come home soon. Now good night."

I retain only a few memories of my father: listening to him preach as I sat in the front pew of the Clearbrook MB Church, watching him cut my friends' hair in front of our woodshed, going on a picnic in the woods with him, being carried in his arms after I broke my collarbone falling from the attic ... My mother told us he often sang and played the guitar on Sunday evenings, but I don't remember this.

The final memories are the sharpest. We all watched in shock as he was carried out of our home on a stretcher one autumn day. He would never return.

On my seventh birthday, December 10, we visited him in hospital, shortly before he was transferred to the nursing home. He smiled wanly as he reached under the sheets and brought out my present, a fat red carpenter's pencil – he was a carpenter as well as a preacher.

My mother described his final days in detail. Around Christmas, she wrote, "Shortly before we had to leave, he asked me to bring the children to his bed. He told the boys to put their hands on the bed and asked me to put Violet beside him, so he could also touch her. He put his hands over theirs and prayed, mentioning each one by name. This was the last time he saw the children. ... On January 3, Miss Berg, a nurse, met me at the door; she was crying, saying George was in great pain. He still recognized me, saying, 'Tena, I'm so glad you came. I want to say goodbye. The way to heaven is open. There is nothing to keep me from going.'"

My father died at 4 pm, January 31, 1951, and is buried in South Poplar Cemetery in Abbotsford.

I have only the dimmest memory of walking sadly behind the coffin at the funeral service, but the papers I discovered at my brother's place filled in many details. Three ministers presided: the Reverends J. Derksen, A. Toews, and A. Wieler. There were numerous songs in both English and German, including "The Lord Is My Shepherd" and "*Der Himmel Steht Offen*." The pallbearers were John Thiessen, Isaac Redekop, Herman Doerksen, Abe Friesen, Henry Pauls, and Henry Loewen.

My grieving mother, the only one of thirteen children to move away from Montana, sorely missed the comfort of siblings. Her mother, Helena Toews, visited us sometimes, staying a few weeks, and so did some of our aunts from Montana. The support of many church members also encouraged us, but the burden was almost too much for my mother.

"George's illness and death were such a strain that I sometimes had to get alone and relieve built-up tension," she wrote in her journal. "It's hard for children to see their mother cry. I often went into the chicken barn to weep, sometimes late in the evening or early when the children were asleep."

As for me, my Grade 1 year at North Poplar Elementary was totally miserable. I spent many noonhours sobbing on a teacher's lap in the staff room. Sometimes I balked at going to school, and my mother had to force me into a teacher's car. To compound my misery, I had to miss sports day after a large rock landed on my big toe.

However, a summer train trip to visit my grandmother and many uncles, aunts, and cousins in Montana helped alleviate my grief somewhat. In fall, I went to a new school, Clearbrook Elementary,

made new friends, and coped with life as best I could, though I was a timid, quiet child who sometimes stuttered.

I think my siblings and I missed our father the most when we accomplished things that he wasn't around to witness. He wasn't there when I got the top marks in Grade 7 at MEI, for instance, or when Wes and Violet gave their valedictory speeches at graduation, or when Norm received his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto. And dying young denied him the chance to share our joy when we married and had children.

Father's Day was always poignant for me; my siblings and I wore white roses in our lapels to church, while children whose fathers still lived got to wear red roses.

As I continued to sift through the memorabilia, I caught glimpses of our life with him and without him. In their wedding photo, September 26, 1941, Hepburn, Saskatchewan, George and Tena look very happy as they pose with their flower girls, Tena's two youngest sisters, Viola and Bertha. George is 36, Tena, 27. Another photo shows a large crowd of children and adults at the Hague Ferry Gospel Hall, which my father helped build. Others show my dad hefting Norman with one hand; my brothers and I in a rain barrel; all six of us beside our home in late June, 1949, shortly after Violet was born; and a picture taken in our grandma's yard in Montana, the summer after our father's death. Norm and I wear suspenders, Wes has a big grin, and Violet, holding a teddy bear, is smiling too.

Despite the sadness that overwhelmed me, it was gratifying to find the letter and old photos. Not for the first time, I was grateful for the father I had, if only briefly, and for the mother who persevered in raising us with love.

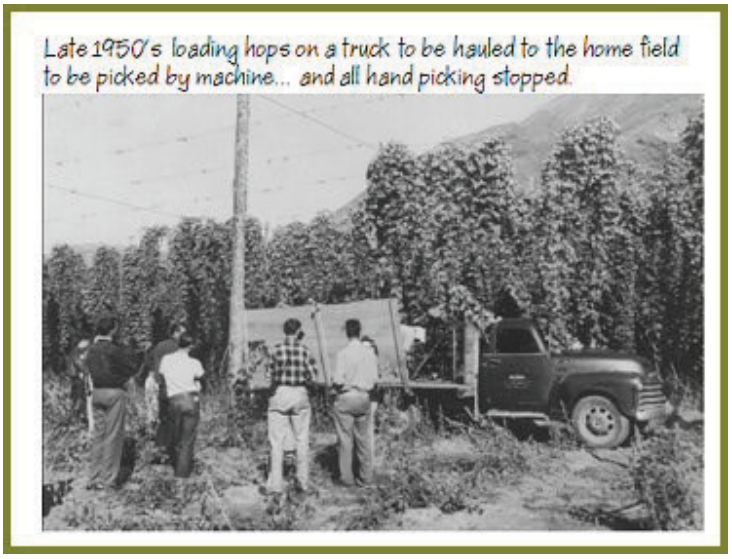
George K. Giesbrecht (1905-1951) was a carpenter and ordained minister who worked for the Western Children's Mission in rural Saskatchewan for several years along with his wife Tena (née Toews), whom he had met at Bethany Bible School. Most of their time was spent at Hague Ferry, populated mostly by Old Order Mennonites. They built a gospel hall with living quarters upstairs and held services for both children and adults. George also taught the "3 Rs" in the hall because there was no public school in the area. Poor health forced him and his family to move to Vineland, Ontario, and then to Clearbrook, BC, where he died of cancer at the age of 45.

Hopyards and the Mennonite Village of Yarrow

By Robert Martens

After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, some 20,000 Mennonite refugees were transported to Canada by Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). These immigrants, who mostly crossed the ocean on terms of credit, were needed by the CPR to settle its vast unoccupied holdings on the Canadian prairies. Whatever the motives of the company, however, its aid was deeply appreciated by Mennonites, and they felt that their financial debt to the CPR should be paid off in full and as quickly as possible. The Russian Mennonites (*Russländer*) who came to Yarrow were thus faced with the need to pay off their loans while living in conditions of grinding poverty. The small plots of land they could afford to buy were usually insufficient even to support their families, let alone pay off their debts. Hence the local hopyards became a lifeline for these struggling immigrants, and by some were even viewed as a gift from God, a small mercy in this hard new land.

Hops had been cultivated in the Chilliwack area since the early 1890s. There were a number of small hopyards located in the vicinity of Yarrow, but the scene was dominated by four large holdings: Haas Hopyards, close to Chilliwack; Hulbert's, in Sardis; and Canadian Hopyards and Ord's, on Sumas Prairie. The latter had Yarrow connections, as John Ord, the owner, had lived for a time in a rather opu-



lent home on Majuba Hill, overlooking the village. Some labourers were in the fields year-round, training the vines along guide wires strung about twelve feet (four metres) above ground to posts forty feet (twelve metres) apart. Others were employed, sometimes in family units, from spring to fall: starting with hoeing, they then trained the vines to strings attached to ground pegs on one end and to the overhead wires on the other. The direction of the vine-training corresponded to the movement of sunlight. Many families stayed at the hopyards for months at a time, living in simple, often windowless cabins equipped with double bunks, benches, straw mattresses, and a wood stove. Then in autumn virtually the entire town of Yarrow was deserted, as its inhabitants flocked to the hopyards for picking season.

Mennonites were working unbelievably hard to earn their money and help their town grow. Truck transportation to and from the fields was available to the luckier ones, who were picked up at 5 or 6 in the morning and returned home some twelve hours later. Hundreds of others swarmed to work on bicycle. Some took turns using a single bike. Many simply walked. When they finally reached the fields, the backbreaking labour continued throughout the day with only a few breaks. Wages were low, starting at perhaps 10 cents an hour, but it was enough to support a frugal lifestyle; until they were twenty-one, children generally handed over all their wages to their parents.

In twelve-hour shifts, teams of 150 to 200 pickers worked in the sections assigned to them. They pulled down the vines from the overhead wires, sometimes assisted by "slashers" with knives, and then stripped the plant of its foliage, leaving only the hops. Hop plants emitted a sticky residue that stained skin and clothing. The residue had an exceptionally bitter taste that would render a sandwich inedible if touched with dirty fingers. Raindrops added to the misery by trickling the itchy secretion between sleeves and collars. When a sack was full, it went to a weigher, whose job held some prestige in the hopyard hierarchy. A checker then punched the amounts picked onto cards, which were carefully hoarded, sticky and smudged, until the end of the

Source for photos: www.yarrowbc.ca

season when wages were paid out accordingly. But the end of a shift did not mean relaxation. Back home the cows might have to be milked. Women had to cook, can, and clean in the evenings. A family was considered fortunate if the mother could stay home during the day and tend to domestic duties.

Yarrow Mennonites – and Mennonites from surrounding areas also travelling to Chilliwack hopyards – at first constituted a rather insular ethnic group. In the early days, for example, women were required to wear long dresses in the fields – not long enough, however, to prevent the men from having a heyday. (Women were eventually permitted to wear jeans.) But the Mennonites' world was opening up. The hopyards were jammed with individuals of different backgrounds and experiences. Many workers in the early years were Aboriginal, staying only for the picking season and keeping mostly to themselves. But though Mennonites and Aboriginals were speaking mutually incomprehensible languages, some contacts were nevertheless made. English was of course the common tongue, and once that was learned, Mennonites adapted far more readily to the mainstream culture and economy.

Change was happening rapidly. Some young Mennonite men, hating the unrelentingly hard labour of the hopyards, were moved to enter the larger Canadian entrepreneurial world. A trucking business was a natural fit. A trucker could transport pickers mornings and evening while carrying out other contracts during the day. Cultural transitions were also occurring among the hopyard labour

force. There was at least one strike, a notion normally alien to Mennonites, that resulted in marginally better pay and working conditions.[1] Finally, the hopyards were a venue for courting and sexual activity, even with people outside the ethnic group.

Despite increasing prosperity, Mennonites continued to work in the hopyards through the Second World War and beyond. Some war refugees counted themselves lucky to find employment there. Work in the hop fields was, however, a constant source of controversy among Mennonite church leaders and members. Individuals from the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church, which did not countenance alcohol, sometimes rationalized that the hops picked were only used for yeast. John (Johannes) Harder, long-time minister of the Yarrow MB congregation, was more forthright. "Whatever God allows to grow in this world," he said, "that I will work with" (cited by Loewen).

1. The author's mother, Sara Enns Martens, was a young girl at the time of the strike. Since she was part of the labour force, she lined up with striking workers along the road, where they listened to a speech made by one of the organizers. "Gentlemen," began the strike leader – and then paused. "Gentlemen and lady," he corrected himself. Sara remembered this incident with fondness.

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A Postscript: Picking Tobacco

Tobacco picking seems to have been a more controversial issue among Mennonites than working in the hopyards. Many, however, found employment in the tobacco fields in Sumas Prairie, west of Yarrow. Wages paid were much the same as in the hopyards, and teams of workers often bunked together in cabins on site. Young tobacco shoots were nurtured in greenhouses, then replanted in season and later harvested and dried in kilns.

Among members of the Yarrow United Mennonite Church (as well as among other General Conference congregations in the area), where smoking was not forbidden, employment in the tobacco fields was not an issue. The much larger Yarrow MB Church, which regarded both smoking and drinking as sinful ("worldly"), was for some reason more antagonistic towards working on tobacco farms than in the hopyards. Arguments ensued, and many refused to have anything to do with tobacco plantations. Even so, for years to come, there were Mennonites who continued to work in tobacco fields. (Sara Enns Martens did not recall any opposition to her employment working with tobacco.)

Growing the weed, however, was another matter. A local Mennonite farmer was threatened with excommunication if he continued cultivating this profitable cash crop. Under such pressure, he felt compelled to shut down production, even though his wife insisted that tobacco could be used for medicinal purposes.

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Tobacco: still growing in Lancaster County fields, Photo: www.shirleyshowalter.com

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In Memorium: Agatha Elfrieda Klassen

October 25, 1921 – October 6, 2014

By Robert Martens

Photo: Esther Epp Harder

It was with deep sadness that I learned of the death of Agatha Klassen. She was an associate and friend of mine for many years.

Agatha was born to David and Katharina Klassen in Wohldemfuerst, south Russia. The fourth child in a family of five, she travelled with her family to Canada in 1924. She graduated from Normal School in 1948 and began teaching in the Chilliwack School District. Agatha was an independent person who very much chose the roads she walked: she called off an engagement when she saw that marriage would very likely make her own teaching career impossible.

Her independent spirit motivated her to make some adventurous decisions. She often recalled with fondness the one-year MCC teaching stint she did in Twillingate, Newfoundland. In mid-career she returned to university to earn a library science degree.

Agatha's determination was matched by her tolerance and respect for others, and that was perhaps a factor when she became the first woman in the Yarrow MB Church to become a member of the church council.

After retirement, Agatha volunteered to help set up and manage a library at a Christian university in St. Petersburg. When she returned home to Abbotsford, she became involved in translation work, and became very good at it.

Agatha had a keen interest in history, and in 1976 published an extensive "coffee table book," *Yarrow: A Portrait in Mosaic*, on the history of the village in which she had grown up. I later worked with her on the Yarrow Research Committee; her presence was invaluable.

Agatha Klassen spent a great deal of time volunteering at the Mennonite Historical Society of BC.

We will miss her.

Barbara Boldt - Her Gift of Sight

Barbara Boldt, 2004, *Bones of Stone*

God made me a painter of seas and of skies,
Of mountains and moods, and He gave me eyes
To observe and remember the colours and light,
And daily I thank Him for the gift of my sight.

Poem by Barbara Boldt

Barbara Boldt, 1987, *Summers of my Youth.*
The painting depicts flowers from her mother's and Oma's gardens, and the woods around her home.