



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



Isthmus Range by Neil Peter Dyck

Mennonites on the Move

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Roots and Branches

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Mennonites on the Move

By Maryann Tjart Jantzen

Historically, Mennonites have often been on the move, collectively searching for religious freedom and/or economic security. In this issue, three articles, by Louise Bergen Price, Wilf Penner and Robert Martens, trace migratory movements of Mennonites: from Prussia to Russia, from Russia to Canada, from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay, and from one area of Canada to another.

While this type of movement may still continue in some segments of the ethnic Mennonite world, mass migrations to far-flung geographical locations do not seem in store for mainstream Canadian Mennonites, who currently enjoy exceptional personal and religious freedoms and have largely assimilated into Canadian culture. Many also occupy privileged positions of economic prosperity and social influence.

But Canadian Mennonites are still on the move in other ways. Robert Martens' banquet report and Henry Neufeld's snapshot of a personal experience in a Thailand refugee camp remind us of how Mennonites, through the leadership of MCC, acted with compassion during a particular historical moment: when refugees were fleeing en masse in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. During these years, Mennonites mobilized to assist others to move from desperation to security and from chaos to stability. A motivating factor was the collective memory of the Mennonite refugee experiences in the 1920s and 1940s, when many displaced Mennonites from the former Soviet Union were helped to safety by the deliberate actions of other Mennonites. Wilf Penner writes that "the urgency of the situation [in the early Soviet Union] motivated North American Mennonites to immediate action" that resulted in the "formation of the Mennonite Central Committee" in July 1920.

The world is once more experiencing a refugee crisis; along with the already existing multitudes of displaced persons, the astounding numbers of refugees currently fleeing war-torn Syria stagger the imagination. As in the 1980s, many Mennonite groups, including a growing number of British Columbia churches, are mobilizing to help those displaced by war and/or environmental disaster.

Mennonites are also moving in areas of social concern, replacing a traditional disinclination for change with openness to issues such as, for example, exploring and redefining Mennonite motherhood (see Doreen Wolfs' review of *Mothering Mennonite*) and modelling mindful preparation for death (see Robert Martens' review of Glen Miller's *Living Thoughtfully, Dying Well*). And Mennonites continue to move into prominent roles on the Canadian national stage: Jane Philpott, the new federal Minister of Health, is a member of an Ontario Mennonite church and earlier spent a decade in Niger as a medical missionary.

The mode of movement may have changed, but the challenge for contemporary Canadian Mennonites may well be to find new ways to put Anabaptist values into motion. May compassion triumph over fear and action over passivity.

Upcoming events

Coming soon! Mennonite Heritage Museum Grand Opening, at 1818 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford. Check the Museum website for updates:
<http://mennonitemuseum.org/>

**Art exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Museum:
*Along the Road to Freedom: Mennonite Women of Courage & Faith***

26 Paintings by Winnipeg artist Ray Dirks.

November 28 to January 29.

November 28 @ 2 p.m.: Exhibit Opening.

December 12 @ 2 p.m.: Lecture with Ray Dirks.

Along the Road to Freedom tells the stories of mothers, daughters, grandmothers and sisters who led their families out of persecution and suffering during the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the horrors of Stalin's persecution. Many were part of the Great Trek in 1943 which, in the midst of war, wove its way from Mennonite colonies in South Russia (Ukraine) towards the west. All these women are quiet heroes whose stories should not be lost to history. *Along the Road to Freedom* creates a memory mosaic of the specific women featured in the paintings and asks us all to remember and honour our/their own stories.

A project of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, Winnipeg.



Agatha Harms Reimer painting from Ray Dirks's *Along the Road to Freedom* exhibit

Photo: <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/files/gallery/AlongTheRoadToFreedomTourInfo.pdf>

Letters to the editor

A word regarding the last R&B issue. I always enjoy and read this publication.

On the interview with Ken Ha in the last issue, a couple of mistakes. Ho Chi Minh dies in 1969, 14 years before the North Vietnamese communists victoriously captured the south in 1975. The general credited with the victory is Vo Nguyen Giap. Secondly, it would certainly have been the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) that Ken worked for in the refugee camps. That is not UNICEF's mandate.

I first went to Vietnam 49 years ago and am still much involved there. I authored *Vietnam's Christians: A Century of Growth in Adversity* in 2011.

Reg Reimer, Abbotsford

Dear Goertzen Book Family,

It has been over thirty-seven years since the first Goertzen Book was published. It is my desire to publish another Goertzen Book with updated family tree information. My vision is to produce an artistic coffee table book that would enhance any living room setting and encourage history conversations.

I have already accessed important updated information from the GRANDMA CD, produced by the California Mennonite Historical Society. I am asking for your help in updating the family tree. Please send relevant updated information, along with any corrections and missing information, to the address listed below. Please also send me any new pictures, stories, or information that would be useful for a new Goertzen Book. I am also looking for more detailed information about the pictures included in the 1993 edition,

such as dates, locations, names, occasions, etc. I plan to work at improving existing pictures with today's digital technology

In addition to the above, I am requesting information that would help me to complete three other family lines:

Anna Goertzen and Johan Hiebert (1832-1910) (1830-1907)
Helena Goertzen and Jacob Fehr (1841-1925) (1841-1929)
Isaac Goertzen and Agatha Andreas (1844-?) (1843-?)

At present, I am also working on adding some Reformation history such as the names of ships crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the late 1870s and detailed maps and histories of the movements of Mennonites in Europe, along with photos of what some of these

places look like today. I also want to include original documents related to our history.

Contact information: Peter Goertzen (You can find my name on page 43 of the 1993 Edition.)
6495-184A St., Surrey, BC, V3S 8T1
pcgoertzen@telus.net 604 574 5795
Funding: <http://gogetfunding.com/project/new-family-history-book>

This letter has been edited for length. A document from Mr. Goertzen detailing the outlines of the proposed revised book can be accessed on the MHSBC website.

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By Henry Neufeld

February 1988

She noticed me approaching and came running. As I got off the bicycle she desperately clutched my arm. Her tears, repeatedly wiped with her sarong, told the story. She led me to the bamboo hut near the hospital where her husband's body lay on a stretcher propped up by boxes on a gravel floor. She uncovered his face for me.

He had died in his sleep early that morning; he had been ill for some time. She lit another candle and placed it near the stretcher along with the joss sticks. A coin had been placed between his lips, money for the soul's next journey.

We stood there in silence, her fingers digging into my arm.

A few hours later, she, her three children, two escorts from the camp and I were in a pickup truck on our way to the cemetery. We approached a series of simple concrete vaults for the poor and the refugees in the far corner, well away from the elaborate Chinese graves. Our escorts took us to the vault with the lid partly open so we could see the coffin. Mother and children lit candles and joss sticks while saying prayers. The funeral service had begun.

Initially, the man in the coffin had had tuberculosis that went untreated. Then his high blood pressure made air travel unsafe, and later therapy for lung cancer seemed to weaken his body and spirit. When his

daughter spent time with him in the Bangkok hospital he was mildly annoyed. Her presence meant he was ill; instead, returning to the camp meant that he might be able to leave for Canada.

A few weeks later, as we were leaving camp we noticed him sitting beside the road, alone. He had just returned from Bangkok and lacked energy to walk home after a long and tiring ride. He was dropped off at the administration building; apparently, no one had thought of giving him a ride to his house. We helped him to a table and arranged for one of his daughters to help him home.

The five-minute funeral service was over; our escorts were ready to leave. The teenage daughter rose from her prayer, her eyes scanning the area with one of those "if I ever come here again how I will recognize this place" looks. Her eyes came back to the row of vaults and stopped at her father's. They were numbered. Silently she mouthed it: #51.

In 1985 Henry and Tena Neufeld left their Manitoba home to work in a refugee camp for MCC in Thailand. Refugees from Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia were seeking safety and resettlement in Canada and other western countries. On returning to Canada three years later, Henry was appointed to Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board, based in Vancouver. The Neufelds live in Delta and attend Point Grey Inter-Mennonite Fellowship.

MHSBC Annual Banquet and Lecture, October 3, 2015

By Robert Martens

In a sense, the theme of the 2015 annual banquet fundraiser, refugees and their resettlement, was “preaching to the converted.” Early in the evening, the question was asked: how many of the people here tonight are refugees or children/grandchildren of refugees – could you please stand up? A great majority of the crowd was soon on their feet.

Mennonites, especially those from the Russian stream, are well acquainted with being forced from their homes. Perhaps for this reason they were extensively involved in the welcoming and resettlement of the Southeast Asian “boat people” of the 1970s and 1980s. After a fine meal, the story was told from different points of view in the sanctuary of Emmanuel Mennonite. Mabel Paetkau spoke of her role as the coordinator for the refugee program of MCCBC during those years. A good number of those whom she helped support, along with family members, were in the audience to cheer her on. Henry Neufeld told the story from the perspective of the Thai refugee camps where he was stationed during those years (see *R&B* Jul 2013). He noted that Canada is, so to speak, a “selfish” nation, accepting mainly refugees with needed skills and spoke about the role of MCC in advocating for those who might not otherwise have been accepted by Canada.

Stephanie Phetsamay Stobbe, herself a Laotian refugee during the “boat people” era and now a professor in Peace and Conflict Studies at Menno Simons College in Winnipeg, was the keynote speaker. Stobbe began by affirming the good work of Canadians and their government in helping resettle Southeast Asian refugees. The bulk of her talk, though, was devoted to the story of her own family. They fled Laos, then the most bombed country on earth, in the late 1970s, eventually reaching a large refugee camp in Thailand. In 1979 the family were resettled in Rosa, southern Manitoba, where they experienced the culture shock of forty below zero weather. Here they were sponsored by the local Ukrainian Catholic church which, it seems, reached out with kindness but was inadequate to the job of helping the traumatized and sometimes depressed family adapt to their new setting. The family’s accommodation was extremely primitive and located near a graveyard, which frightened the children who, with their Buddhist background, were afraid that

they might be visited by ghosts. It was an extremely difficult first year in Canada for the Phetsamay family.

When the family moved to Steinbach, they were greeted by an MB congregation that knew how to respond. Volunteers taught the mother English, took care of the children, and sponsored the immigration of Mrs. Phetsamay’s siblings. As Stephanie grew into adulthood, she moved to Vancouver, and then studied at Columbia Bible College before achieving her doctorate. She is married to Karl Stobbe, a well-known violinist.

Stephanie ended her talk by pointing out that the world now faces an unprecedented flood of nearly 60 million refugees. It was a particularly poignant evening: the massive evils of war and genocide were acknowledged, but the emphasis was on the good hearts of those who reach out to help.

The program began with a memorial tribute to Harry Loewen by his friend, David Giesbrecht (see Tribute). At a young age, Harry was a refugee from the USSR. In addition, Richard Thiessen announced that the grand opening of the Mennonite Museum will take place in December (check the museum website and the local media for further information). The MHSBC office and archives will be moving into the upper floor of the Museum and closed its doors at the Garden Park location on October 19.



Mabel and Walter Paetkau and their adopted family, the Chanthabourys
Photo: Khamphanh Chanthaboury

The First Mennonite Migration to South Russia

Part 3 in a series on early Mennonite migration from Danzig to South Russia
(see *Roots and Branches* Aug. 2014 and Feb. 2015)

By Louise Bergen Price

On Easter Sunday, March 22, 1788, at nine in the morning, a group of seven families, including Jacob and Sara Hoepfner and their friend Peter Hildebrandt – who would later write an account of the journey – left their home in Bohnsack near Danzig and started on their trek to South Russia. Friends and relatives accompanied the travellers as far as the church; then, after tearful farewells, the group continued. Most of their belongings, packed in crates and trunks, were entrusted to the Russian consulate in Danzig to be sent by ship to Riga, Latvia, then by *Podwodden* (horse and freight wagon) to the Dnieper River, and finally by boat to Kremenchug and Ekaterinoslav.

It was a perilous trip. The first portion took them across the Frische Haff (a freshwater bay) via a rapidly thawing ice highway. Soon after they crossed, torrential rains turned roads to mud so that wagons bogged down. By the time the small group straggled into Riga, they needed time to rest and recover before



Gregory Potemkin, 1791 (photo of a work by Johann Baptist von Lampi the Elder): Wikipedia

setting off for Potemkin's estate in Dubrovna where they arrived June 24. Here they waited for Vice-roy Potemkin, who was off fighting the Turks in the Crimea.

It must have been frustrating to be over half-way to the "promised land," waiting while spring turned to summer, and then to fall. In the meantime, more Mennonite immigrants joined the group until they numbered about 228 families (over one thousand individuals). No ministers were part of the group, so several men were elected to read sermons on Sunday mornings. But now a problem arose: young people formed relationships, and before long there were twelve couples wishing to marry, but no one among the travellers was authorized to perform the ceremony.

Jacob Hoepfner, along with a number of Mennonite leaders, believed that it was of utmost importance that those migrating to Russia leave their Flemish/Frisian divisions behind and unite into one church. The Dubrovna group agreed, elected several men from their midst as potential ministers, and sent these names to Danzig to be ratified. It so happened that the men with the most votes were from the Flemish group, a fact that would later lead to discord. For the time being, though, church life was harmonious and the group worshipped as one body.

For Jacob and Sara Hoepfner, the year brought tragedy: their only son, three-year-old Jacob, became ill and died. Sara, meanwhile, was pregnant with their fifth child.

A number of enterprising craftsmen, who had left Danzig with no transport of their own, found work among the local population. With their wages, plus the Russian government's stipend, they were able to buy the horses and wagons needed to transport their families the following spring. In the meantime, war continued between Russia and Turkey near the fortress of Ochakov in the Crimea, seesawing back and forth until December, when the Russian army took the fortress by storm. The naval battle on the Black Sea, however, continued.

Spring arrived, and the immigrants must have been anxious to continue the journey. First, though, a group of six “family fathers” led by Hoepfner were to go ahead to Kremenchug to secure the government-promised building logs. From here, the logs would be floated downriver. Jacob Hildebrandt, who liked to be part of the action, joined the group.

The advance party had a slow and frustrating journey. Wagon wheels bogged down in snow, so the men loaded the wagons and all the contents onto sleighs. Before long, snow and ice turned to slush on top of still-frozen ground. Men and horses became so exhausted that they had to interrupt the trip for three weeks to recover, resuming the journey in May. Near Chernigov, floods had formed a lake seven kilometres long, making the road impassable. Russian troops heading to the Crimea were being ferried over this stretch of water; Hoepfner recognized several German-speaking officers he had had met in 1787. A shared bottle of brandy bought their passage. When Hoepfner and his companions arrived on the other shore, they met troops returning from the battlefield, waiting to board.

Between Chernigov to Kremenchug the landscape changed, and Hildebrandt writes lyrically about this section of the journey: “Now we had constant good weather, the fields were green, the countryside flat with large villages, and orchards in full bloom. I liked it here, for from here until Njeshin the area was very similar to our home in the Werder” (32).

At Kremenchug, the group found that the promised logs had not arrived. Worse yet, Hoepfner was summoned to meet Potemkin, who presented him with the news that due to fighting in the Crimea, Mennonites would not be allowed to settle in Berislav, but should settle in the Chortitza area. Potemkin “requested” that Hoepfner immediately inspect the area in question, and report back.

Hildebrandt does not tell us how Hoepfner reacted to Potemkin’s new orders, but it must have come as a devastating shock. After all, the original manifest had given prospective groups the right to choose where they wished to settle, and the document signed by Potemkin had made specific reference to Berislav. Further, at the time of the negotiations Russia had

already been mobilizing: the war with Turkey did not come as a surprise. Why the sudden reversal? There was nothing Hoepfner could do, though, so he set off to Chortitza.

While Hoepfner was off on his assignment, the main body of the immigrant group was making its way from Dubrovna to Kremenchug, some as passengers on barques but most by horse and wagon. In Kremenchug, Sara Hoepfner gave birth to a little girl that she named Catherina. It took four weeks for all of the immigrants to trickle in, giving Sara a time of respite before the next section of the journey.

Although the Mennonites hoped that their friend and advisor Georg Trappe, who had returned to Danzig, would direct the settlement, he did not show up. Finally, the Russian government installed a new director, Major von Essen, and the immigrants were instructed to proceed at once to Chortitza. Expectations were high, and some of the pilgrims hoped to



Neuendorf, the first village settled by Mennonites.

Photo: L. Price, 2012

find an “... Eldorado. A land overflowing with milk and honey” (Epp 77).

Instead, the road from Kremenchug to Chortitza deteriorated from one station to the next. When the immigrants arrived in their promised land, they found not the broad fertile steppes they expected, but a river valley hemmed in by “mountains” on one side, and the Dnieper on the other. The “mountains” were highland plateaus, undulating steppeland. Rivers cut deep tree-studded swaths through these plateaus to

the Dnieper.

Weary from the long journey, the settlers stared in disbelief at their new surroundings. Before them lay a recently abandoned village, the grass around the houses still trampled flat. Former owners, driven out of their homes, had taken with them what they could carry. Houses were stripped to the bone; only a few shacks remained. The scene reminded Peter Hildebrandt of the destruction of Jerusalem: an area now as desolate as it had once been fruitful.

According to legend, the travellers spend their first nights camped under *der alten Eiche* (the old oak), some in hastily erected tents, while others bivouacked in covered wagons. Rain drizzled down on the disheartened travellers. Dysentery began to make its rounds especially among the very young and old. Soon, the first graves in the new settlement appeared.

Now another blow: when the eagerly awaited trunks arrived, many had been broken into and robbed, clothing and implements either gone or replaced by stones. Clothing that did arrive was often mouldy and unusable. Theft was common. Logs disappeared before settlers could haul them onto dry land and transport them to building sites. Horses, desperately needed, often vanished overnight. And promised monies from the Russian government came in dribs and drabs, too little to be of use.

When Hoepfner returned from his consultation with Potemkin, he was confronted by a group of furiously angry men. They would not settle on Potemkin's lands and become his serfs – they had been promised fertile land in Berislav, they insisted, and they would settle nowhere else.

Others looked at the land and, realizing its potential, chose homesteads to settle down on, bought cows locally, and cut grass on fertile meadows. By the time winter approached, the more enterprising set-



Old Oak Tree, 1936. Photo: Kroeker, 244.

tlers, among them Johann Bartsch and Jacob Hoepfner, had built wooden homes. Others dug *Semlin* (dugouts, or sod huts) but many of these were not waterproof and offered little protection for the winter. The Russian government, “like a loving mother, showing pity for her wayward children” (Epp 85), stepped in and provided temporary winter housing for needy settlers in the fortress Aleksandrovsk and in the village of Volochisk near Ekaterinoslav, where they also received provisions of oatmeal, flour and salt.

A number of settlers still hoped the government would relent, and that the promised lands near Berislav would be theirs. They would be sorely disappointed.

Sources (All translations are by the author)

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Major Developments among Canadian Mennonites, 1870s through 1930s

By Wilf Penner

This article is the second in a series by the author on Mennonites in Canada. See “Mennonite Fragmentation in Manitoba 1875-1900,” Roots & Branches Feb. 2014.

My previous treatise attempted to trace the fragmentation of the three original groups of Russian Mennonite immigrants to Manitoba. My original objective in this second article was to continue the narrative by tracing the trends that began to unify Canadian Mennonites. However, while the first attempts at rallying Canadian Mennonites to common causes were made in the 1920s, the few passionate voices calling for unity among Mennonites fell, for the most part, on deaf ears. The concept of mutual Mennonite activity in Canada has had a long gestation period, and the embryo did not form until the 1950s.

A Canadian Privilegium

By the 1870s, the Russian government was threatening to withdraw some of the privileges granted to Mennonites by Catherine the Great and later tsars, especially exemption from military service and control over schooling. Many Mennonites felt betrayed. In the summer of 1872 John Lowe, the Canadian Secretary of Agriculture, sent his agent William Hespeler to Russia to encourage Mennonites to emigrate to Canada; many were all too ready to leave. In Berdyansk, on July 25, Hespeler assured Chortitza Mennonite leader Cornelius Janzen of full freedom from military service for all Mennonite men immigrating to Canada. Subsequently, in 1873, a delegation of twelve Mennonite leaders, along with an entourage, scouted lands in Kansas, Texas, Colorado and Nebraska, and, finally, Manitoba’s “East Reserve,” already earmarked for Mennonite settlement. Eight of the delegates, however, lost interest in Manitoba, and favoured areas in the United States.

Hespeler accompanied the four remaining delegates, representing Bergthal Colony and the Kleine Gemeinde, to the East Reserve. The delegates then traveled to Ottawa where they received a formal statement: a new *Privilegium* similar to that negotiated

with the government of Catherine the Great a century earlier. The Canadian document contained five privileges for Mennonite settlers: complete exemption from military service; a free grant of land in Manitoba; the right to conduct their own traditional schools with German and Bible as the main subjects; the promise that solemn affirmation, rather than oath would be acceptable in courts of law; and a cash grant of \$30 per adult, \$15 per child and \$3 per infant for each individual settling in Manitoba.

Foundational to the understanding of the Mennonite experience in Manitoba between 1874 and 1876 is the fact that Canada was then a very young country. Between the official creation of Manitoba as a province in 1870 and the emerging of the “schools problem” between 1916 and 1922, various adjustments of boundaries and changes in political structure took place.

The new settlers coming into Manitoba assumed that they could follow the pattern of settlement and self-government developed in their previous home, and proceeded to lay out settlements accordingly. Very soon, however, what began as an orderly process became increasingly confused, as East Reserve residents moved in large numbers to the West Reserve.

“Adjustments” to earlier promises

It was not long before the Manitoba Government wished to make “adjustments” in the governing structure of Mennonite villages in the East and West Reserves. Around 1880 the first encroachment occurred when an act of the Manitoba legislature replaced the current system of Mennonite local government with a Canadian-style municipal government. To the ultra-conservative Chortitzer this was totally unacceptable – what had once happened in Russia was now happening in Manitoba.

The second shoe dropped in 1916, with the passing of the Manitoba School Attendance Act, making it compulsory for children to attend either a public or government-approved private school. A series of

delegations of conservative Mennonite leaders failed to change the government's policy, and in the aftermath, punitive fines were assessed on parents keeping their school-age children at home, and several church officials were imprisoned. Soon Mennonite delegations were scouting out parts of Mexico and Paraguay as possibilities for a new home, once again fleeing what was perceived as a land of broken promises.

Between 1922 and 1926, close to 6,000 of the 12,000 Old Colony Mennonites from Saskatchewan and Manitoba settled in three distinct regions of Mexico. Another 1,800 found their way to the Chaco in Paraguay between 1926 and 1930. Although delegates searched, no suitable areas for large-scale immigration were found in the U.S. A few small groups scattered to more remote regions of Canada where they would hopefully be free from governmental and social interference.

The intransigence of conservative Mennonites over the school issue blackened the reputation of all Mennonites in Canada, especially in light of the growing pro-British, anti-German propaganda of the First World War and the increase in prejudice against German-speaking Canadians. This would have profound implications for Russian Mennonites looking for refuge from the Soviet regime's murderous clutches.

The rise of the Mennonite Central Committee

Before the whirlwind of the Old Colony Mennonite resettlement subsided, a new problem arose for Mennonite Canadians: that of providing humanitarian aid to thousands of starving fellow Mennonites in the Soviet Union. The four decades since the departure of the first wave of Russian Mennonite emigrants to Canada were to be, for the 40,000 who stayed behind, a "Golden Age" of growing prosperity and acculturation which ended abruptly with the October Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war. The issue became even more complex after the new Bolshevik government sued for a separate peace with the Central Powers of Europe in 1918. By 1920 many Mennonites were starving and dying of typhus, and the hope of economic recovery was dim.

Fortunately, Mennonite groups in Russia were beginning to coalesce and work as one: a General Conference of Mennonite Congregations met in 1917. A *Studienkommission* (study commission) was created

in December 1919 and dispatched abroad to inform Mennonites outside of Russia about their co-religionists' desperate situation; to secure material aid; and to investigate immigration and settlement possibilities in other lands.

The Commission's visit to the United States was a vivid reminder of the urgency of the situation and motivated North American Mennonites to immediate action. On July 27, 1920, a general meeting of all American Mennonite relief organizations was held, leading to the formation of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). In September, MCC workers Clayton Kratz, Orié O. Miller and Arthur W. Slagel were dispatched to Russia, arriving in Constantinople on September 27, along with twenty-five tons of used clothing that had been donated by American Mennonite churches. While Slagel remained in Constantinople with the clothing shipment, Miller and Kratz travelled further into Mennonite areas to reconnoitre. Miller was caught behind Red Army lines as the civil war raged, and was never heard from again, while Kratz returned to Constantinople. In October an agreement which would allow for emergency feeding in the Ukraine was signed with Soviet authorities, and in January clearance was finally granted by the Soviets for the opening of relief kitchens in the worst affected areas.

Although Canadian Mennonites were helping out in the relief effort, the Americans were leading the way. By May 1921, MCC was feeding 25,000 persons a day, and by August, 40,000. Food was dispensed to all comers regardless of race, religion or creed. Besides the two remaining MCC relief workers mentioned, another dozen or so men and women, mostly from North America, served in the food program, and helped dispense \$2,000,000 worth of food. Thus a crisis was partially blunted through the joint action of North American Mennonites of various stripes – an example that provided the first glimmer of hope that Mennonites in Canada might work together similarly for the common good.

However, to anyone working with the MCC relief effort, it was obvious that what they were doing was a stopgap effort. A more lasting solution would have to be found: the new Bolshevik regime could not coexist with Mennonite faith and free enterprise.

The struggle for emigration

Mennonite leaders in Russia, perceiving a need for a civic organization that could negotiate with the Soviet authorities, organized themselves into the Union of Citizens of Dutch Ancestry (*Verband Bürger Holländischer Herkunft*). After months of negotiation both in the Ukraine and in Moscow, the Soviet government granted a charter to the Union in April 1922, with



Land Ticket Photo: Wikipedia

B. B. Janz, a quiet teacher from Tiede, selected as leader. Janz proved to be a forceful spokesperson for Mennonite people in the Soviet Union, working tirelessly with the Union over four years. During that time he was able to prevent the induction of Mennonite men into the Red Army, to help re-establish the shattered Mennonite economy, and to negotiate with the Soviet government for emigration visas for Mennonites seeking to leave Russia.

Janz' cogent argument in his visa negotiations was that emigration would ease the problem of displaced persons from the just-concluded civil war, and would also help to ease the famine sweeping the Ukraine since there would be fewer mouths to feed. By the close of 1922, Janz had won authorization for 20,000 persons to emigrate, most of whom wished to join their brothers and sisters in Canada. Hard as it is to believe, Janz had been more successful in gain-

ing this authorization from the Soviets than from his Canadian counterparts!

Unfortunately, there was little support in Canada for accepting Mennonite immigrants. Returning World War I veterans needed employment, and it was argued that new immigrants would compete with the needs of the "vets." The Conservative federal ministers under Sir Arthur Meighen were a cautious bunch, and in 1919 passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act which created a series of impediments for those attempting immigration. Beyond that, an Order in Council specifically banned Mennonites from immigration.

In July 1921 a five-man Mennonite delegation from Molotschna, joined by a few Canadian Mennonite spokesmen (including two Swiss Mennonites from Ontario, D. F. Coffman and T. M. Reesor), met with acting Prime Minister George Foster (Meighen was away on business). The delegation explained that the Mennonites seeking asylum in Canada were well-educated and law abiding and were valuable agriculturists who would enhance the economy of the Prairie Provinces. Furthermore, the immigrants would be sponsored by Mennonite hosts and would not exacerbate the post-war social and economic problems in Canada's cities.

Foster offered little hope that the law could be changed. A federal election was in the offing, and he likely feared that his party would lose its parliamentary majority if it supported Mennonite migration.

One glimmer of hope remained: Mackenzie King, the leader of the Liberal opposition in Ottawa, knew and respected the delegates from Ontario. After the delegation left Foster's office, they visited King, who suggested that if his party won the pending election, the offensive Act would be cancelled or altered, and the Order in Council lifted. On December 6, 1921, the Liberal party under Mackenzie King won a majority in the House of Commons.

The doors to immigration swing slowly open

Just when things looked very bleak, support came from a powerful commercial enterprise, the Canadian Pacific Railway. The CPR had been involved in dealings with Mennonites since the 1870s and had found them to be honest and careful to repay their debts. As compensation for the costs of building the transcontinental railway, the Canadian government had granted

the CPR 25,000,000 acres; the company now viewed immigrating Mennonites as prospective purchasers, as well as potential labourers in the construction of its railway. Colonel J. S. Dennis, assistant to the president of the CPR, informed a Mennonite delegation that his company stood ready to grant transportation credits to an initial quota of 3,000 Mennonites. Yet one obstacle after another hindered the proposed migration, culminating in a cholera outbreak in the Ukraine. Due to these circumstances, no Mennonite refugees would arrive in Canada in 1922. Yet the small cadre of determined and compassionate men working on Russian Mennonite immigration to Canada, including B. B. Janz, B. H. Unruh, David Toews and H. H. Ewert, did not lose heart. If Odessa was closed to emigration due to cholera, they would look elsewhere; and eventually a port was found in Libau (Liepaia), Latvia.

On May 17, 1922, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBC) was established to help pave the way for Russian Mennonites to escape the critical situation they were in. The CMBC hoped for wide support from the Mennonite constituency. They were sorely disappointed. Apparently the schism formed in the 1870s between anti- and pro-immigration factions among Russian Mennonites had grown over the years, and many Canadian Mennonites, certain they had made the right choice when they emigrated in the 1870s, seemed to feel that their co-religionists deserved the distress they were in.

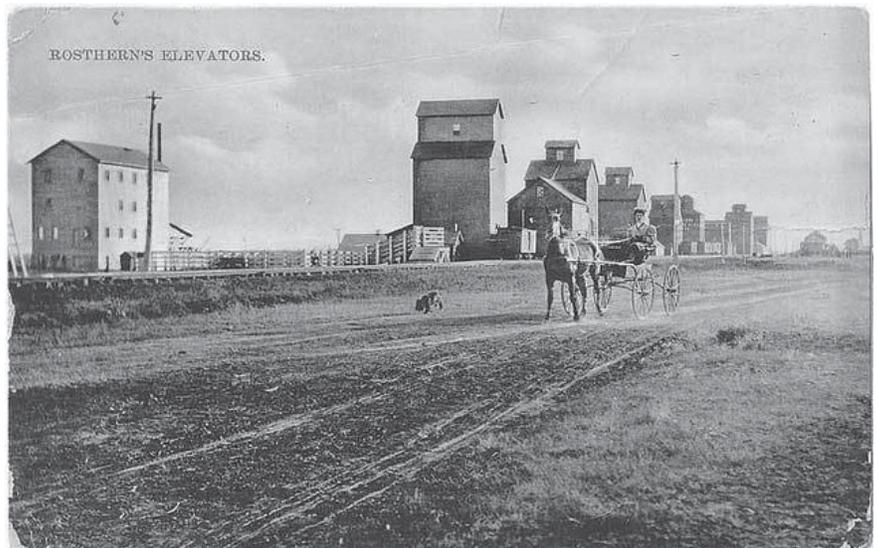
Two key individuals involved in the CMBC were David Toews (Rosthern, SK) and H. H. Ewert (Gretna, MB). There was some rivalry between the supporters of the two, which Ewert tried to squelch by nominating Toews as chair. In spite of his disappointment with the lack of support from the constituency, David Toews, understanding the depth of the crisis in Russia, was determined that the immigration movement would succeed. Toews soldiered on in spite of a large anti-Board protest meeting held in Hepburn on August 12, 1922, that issued this communiqué: "The representatives of the congregations represented refuse to be parties to the contract between the Mennonite Church of Canada and the CPR as already signed by the Reverend David Toews, and ... they

will assume no responsibility whatsoever in any form or contract entered into by other branches of the Mennonite Church of Canada" (qtd in Epp 165). Rallying the Mennonite constituency to support this mission of mercy was more difficult than working out the details of the rescue mission with government and business interests!

Nevertheless, on June 22, 1922, 738 persons left Chortitza by train for a five-day trip to the border town of Sebez, Russia. Here they were subjected to a humiliating delousing process before their departure to Libau, Latvia, where they were inspected by Canadian health officials. (In a tit-for-tat move the Soviet government had denied the Canadian health officials entry into Russia.) There a full thirteen percent of the passengers were detained due to health issues, the chief of which was trachoma. That created a new problem since Russia would not permit the detainees to return. Fortunately, through the efforts of B. H. Unruh, Germany made available a former prisoner-of-war camp in Lechfeld to be used as a detainment centre maintained by German Mennonite Aid. The arrangement was a godsend, although it further burdened the Board's indebtedness.

A warm welcome

On July 21, 1923, the first trainload of Mennonite immigrants from Russia arrived in Rosthern. The roads to town were choked with 450 automobiles, not to mention numerous horse-drawn conveyances, all filled with curious folk from the surrounding coun-



Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Photo: old postcard

tryside eager to greet the new arrivals. It seems that the dissatisfaction with the CMBC policies and personnel expressed a year earlier was forgotten; and in the surrounding Mennonite communities, there was a growing willingness to help the new arrivals.

With actual movement of people underway, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization negotiated with the CPR to bring in more immigrants. The new agreement, completed in April 1923, also allowed for immigrants who could pay their own way, not only those who would travel on credit. With some immediate fare payments, the CPR was able to extend more credit to the destitute. While the transfer of thousands of immigrants was difficult for the CMBC, the hosting Mennonite families and the newcomers, and resulted in a huge *Reiseschuld* (travel debt), the years 1923 to 1926 saw over 17,000 Mennonites arrive in Canada

from Russia. The remaining years of the decade saw a sharp decline in the annual figures, though by 1930 the total was over 20,000.

However, since most of the new immigrants were living in temporary quarters, and still would have to find permanent homes in western Canada, the work of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization was far from over. How the finding of permanent homes and farms was accomplished will have to await a further instalment in a subsequent edition of *Roots and Branches*.

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The Flight from Moscow, 1929

By Robert Martens

On August 5, 1929, the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee declared, for reasons known only to the authorities, that twenty-five Mennonite families would be allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union. The decision was intended as an exception, but thousands of Russians of German ethnicity, including numerous Mennonites, interpreted this announcement as a faint sign of hope. In a desperate, sometimes panicked attempt to flee the increasingly oppressive Soviet regime, 13,000 would-be emigrants gathered "at the gates of Moscow." There they played a dangerous game of cat and mouse with Russia's secret police. Many who applied to German and Russian bureaucrats for exit visas were arrested and deported back "home." Nevertheless, a total of 5,671 individuals, including 3,885 Mennonites, succeeded in emigrating, and over 4,000 of these came from Russian German villages in Siberia.

Since then, Mennonites have felt a deep sense of gratitude towards the German government of that time for its aid to fleeing emigrants. Recent research, however, according to a paper presented by A. I. Savin in Omsk in 2010, paints a different, rather surprising picture. The "archival revolution" of the 1990s, in which a massive number of previously secret documents were released to the public, followed by a more

recent disclosure of files of the Foreign Affairs department of the former USSR, indicates that the German authorities were reluctant to help Russian Germans to emigrate, and in fact initially resisted any involvement whatever.

In a letter of August 1, 1929, German ambassador von Dirksen wrote that the Reich did not favour the emigration of Russian Germans. He maintained that mass emigration was counter to the interests of the Reich, as these ethnic Germans were planning settlement not in Germany but in Canada or Paraguay, and that settlement in Canada would occur in a pattern of "chess board order that endangered the preservation of Germanness" (Savin 1). In October, K. Dienstman, an officer of high rank in the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, informed a Russian official that "it does not meet the interests of the German government to allow further emigration, as there is no possibility to accommodate them in Germany and travel to Canada is very costly. That is why it would be good if the Soviet authorities would take measures to stop such cases in the future" (qtd in Savin 2). Clearly the German Reich had absolutely no interest at this point in helping resolve the desperate state of Russian German emigrants.

Why then did the Germans eventually inter-

vene in the affair? What brought about the change of heart? The Reich reacted, apparently, to a groundswell of European German support for the emigrants. The press was protesting long and loud about the government's inaction on this issue, and Foreign Affairs officers were demanding that the Reich intervene in the "colonist swindle" (2). As a result, Dienstman informed the Soviets on October 15 that the German government was now prepared to finance the travel of emigrants, emphasizing that there was no interest in similar action in the future. The Soviets promised to cooperate only if there were no official appeal from the Germans; in other words, diplomacy was to proceed in tight secrecy.

On October 19, N. J. Raivid, a deputy in Soviet Foreign Affairs, wrote that Mennonites would now be allowed to leave: "Yesterday it was decided to let all of them abroad on the grounds that we don't need to keep kulak elements who desire to emigrate from the USSR" (qtd in Savin 2). This pronouncement was obviously mere rhetoric, propaganda. Why then the Russian change of heart? The Soviets were being internationally damaged by the news of emigrants in Moscow clamouring for exit visas: this situation reflected badly on the "liberating" nature of communism and the idealized collectivization of farms. In addition, economic relations with Germany were vital to the USSR, and fences needed to be mended. So it

happened that, over the objections of the secret police, the doors to emigration were temporarily opened.

Pressure was growing on both sides. The Russians reacted angrily to the publicity given the situation by the European press, and needed to resolve the problem quickly to avoid further embarrassment. Raivid declared that "if the campaign in the press doesn't immediately stop, we would have to reconsider all our decisions regarding letting emigrants abroad" (qtd in Savin 2). The Soviets began setting strict deadlines for any emigration, thus hugely increasing the pressure on the German side; the secret police also began shipping German Russians back to their places of origin, or even "disappearing them" into work camps. The USSR was playing the game well: "The position of the Soviet authorities looked impeccable: it expressed good will by allowing emigration and tolerating all inconveniences pertaining to the emigrants' stay near Moscow, including a danger of mass epidemics or fires, whereas the Western side ... revealed a rare sluggishness and was not ready to receive emigrants" (4). But president of the Reich, von Hindenburg, was personally convinced that action was necessary, and the authorities finally allotted 5 or 6 million marks to the emigration effort. The money could not be released, however, until the Reichstag budget committee session on November 25. The Germans requested a deferral until that date, and got it.

But the Soviets continued the pressure tactics with arrests and forced repatriation. They informed the Germans that three to four thousand colonists would be permitted to emigrate, and reduced passport fees from 220 to 50 rubles. German Ambassador von Dirksen promised in turn that the Reich would influence the press to cease its attacks on the USSR. Events moved at a stunningly rapid pace. By December 7, eight transports had moved 4,000 emigrants to Germany, and another 2,000 were to be evacuated as rapidly as possible. The Soviets did not cease their war of propaganda, however, claiming that refugee camps in Germany were



Johann Jakob Dick family, 1929.

Photo: <http://chort.square7.ch/FB/BAusw29.html>

operating under intolerable conditions. The USSR was by now completely in charge: the Germans were unable to reverse any arrests or to render aid to Mennonites forced back to Siberia.

It must be said that the German nation eventually welcomed the fleeing emigrants with respect and generosity. Initially, however, both the Russians and Germans appear to have been embarrassed into action. The emigration movements placed the Soviet regime in a bad light, and might have resulted in economic losses

in terms of international trade. Because the USSR was not yet fully totalitarian, at this point its bureaucracies were still able to trump the secret service, which clearly cared nothing about global opinion and would happily have exterminated every potential emigrant in Moscow. A few Mennonites, mostly from Siberia, thus managed to escape before Stalin shut the doors for decades thereafter. The Germans, on the other hand, although reluctant to help Mennonites and other colonists at all, were pushed into activity by the denunciations of the European press. Germany and the Soviet Union turned completely totalitarian in subsequent years, at which point international embarrassment was



Soup kitchen in Riga. Photo: <http://chort.square7.ch/FB/BAusw29.html>

no longer any concern to them. Before that happened, though, a few thousand Mennonites managed to “get out” of the emerging Soviet empire. In this they would see the hand of God – but many remained behind and perished.

Source

Savin, A.I. “Emigration of Mennonites from the USSR in 1929 in light of documents from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation.” Trans. Olga Shmakina. Paper presented at *Mennonites in Siberia and Asiatic Russia: A History Consultation in Omsk*, Russian Federation, June 1-4, 2010.

Summer 2016 Archival Internship and Grant

The Historical Commission of the U.S. and Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches announces the Summer 2016 Archival Internship, designed to give a college or seminary student practical archival experience. For five weeks during May and June, the intern will spend a week at each of the North American MB archives (Winnipeg, Hillsboro, Fresno, and Abbotsford).

Each archival site will host the intern, providing orientation to the context and collection, and will involve the intern in its ongoing projects. Airline travel and accommodations will be provided by the Historical Commission. The Internship comes with a stipend of \$2,000. The application deadline is February 1, 2016.

The Historical Commission also announces an Open Research Grant of \$2,000 to promote research, creative productions, and publication on the history and contributions of MB women around the world.

The grant is made possible by generous support from the Katie Funk Wiebe Fund. Projects may include books, articles, lecture series, symposia, and multimedia presentations. The application deadline is April 4, 2016.

For further information, see the MB Historical Commission website at www.mbhistory.org.

Applications for the Internship or Grant should be sent to Jon Isaak (jonisaak@mbchurches.ca), Executive Secretary, Historical Commission, 1310 Taylor Ave., Winnipeg, MB, R3M 3Z6.

A Winter Coat and One Bucket of Beets

As told to Helen Rose Pauls by a Gulag survivor

The Gulag was the government agency that administered forced labour camps in the Stalinist era of the Soviet Union. The term, Gulag, however, has also come to mean the system of camps itself.

We were glad whenever a horse died in the Gulag. The overseers would boil the bones in our daily soup to renew our strength. The meat they kept for themselves. I had a wooden spoon stuck in my boot and pulled it out at meal time. I skimmed the surface of the bowl to push the worms aside as I ate. Mushrooms for the soup were collected in the forest and were often infested.

People in the slave camp were dying of overwork, cold and starvation every day, so I decided that the risk of escape was worth it. One night, I hung back from roll call and disappeared into the woods. In the night, I followed the path from where we had been dropped off a year ago to the end of the train line. By hanging on to ladders and couplings, I eventually came to my home village. Instead of finding a warm welcome, I realized that I would also be destitute in freedom. Because I had no official pass and as a kulak¹ was not allowed to register for one, I could not find work. Anyone caught helping me could be sent to Siberia. I threw myself down in my aunt's orchard at night and cried.

Finally, I found a job with a French engineer who had been imported for the Dnieper Dam project. Being a foreigner, perhaps he didn't know the implications of my circumstances, and I became a maid in his house. After enduring winter in the Gulag in light clothes, I was able to purchase new shoes and a winter coat through him on the black market. It [the coat] was warm wool with stitching on the cuffs and a fur collar. However, I feared for my personal safety in the engineer's home, and I inched a heavy dresser in front of my bedroom door each night. Then the French engineer and his wife disappeared suddenly and it seemed impossible to find a new job.

I rented a tiny room in the home of a Mennonite family and focused all of my energies on looking for a new workplace. I had paid a man to find out about my family. I got news that my parents had died

in the slave camp, but that my little brother, David, who was twelve, had been found barely alive in one of Stalin's orphanages. He came to live with me and I wanted so badly to make us a home together. I pounded the streets. Strong hands were needed everywhere as so many men were imprisoned or had perished in the war. However, I was turned away as it was illegal for anyone to hire me. If I was caught, I would be sent back to Siberia.



A watchtower in the Gulag

Photo: Dr. Andreas Hugentobler, Creative Commons
Wikipedia: Gulag

It was a dark time. One morning I put on my new shoes and fine coat and was brave enough to walk up to the Russian manageress of a small newsstand to ask for a job. She looked me over, examined my beautiful coat and shoes, and shook her head sadly. The manager, a Jew named Katz, came from the back.

He seemed to see right through me. He looked at my chapped hands and thin wrists sticking out of the fancy coat sleeves and guessed at my desperate circumstances. His dark eyes warmed. "Come tomorrow at six in the morning," he said.

Morning and evening I washed the floor. Firewood was scarce and hoarded. It was so cold that the washrag froze to the stone tiles. There were times when I found coins between the tiles or in crevices when I cleaned the kiosk. I always put them in the cash drawer. One day I found paper money and could not believe that a customer did not miss it. I put it in my pocket, glanced around, and immediately turned red with guilt, thinking of my father who had perished in the Gulag. He had been the village miller. I remembered how he had made sure that everyone got the flour from their own wheat back; how he put more flour into the sacks of the poor; how he had said when he saw me preening in the mirror, "Anna, look at your heart, not your face." I returned the paper money to the cash box and after that day, I found none. Soon another girl was hired to do the heavy cleaning and I served customers.

My brother was able to enrol in school and to look after himself during the long days. It was marvellous to be with a member of my family and to talk to someone again, but the rent for the little room was high and food was very expensive. I was desperate to buy better food for us. To save bus fare, I walked the nine kilometres from the village to the newsstand. My wonderful coat kept me warm.

That summer, my neighbour offered to rent me a patch of earth if I would surrender my coat. Being able to find and afford food was our greatest problem, so I made the trade. All summer my brother and I worked in our little garden after my long walk home in the evening. The plants flourished. We made soup out of the tomatoes and new potatoes and waited eagerly for the carrots and beets to mature. But one day I arrived home and the garden was ravaged. When we dug out what was left, we had one pail of red beets. I cried bitterly, facing a winter without food and my warm coat.

Soon after, walking home from work, I was captured by government agents and put into prison in Chortitza². After being interrogated I was forced into a cell filled with hardened criminals and cutthroats, both male and female. All day they took turns brag-

ging about their exploits, gleefully describing how they had stabbed and choked innocent victims under bridges, and detailing their robberies and rapes. I turned to stone with fear. I tried to be as invisible as I could. I dared not sleep. Continually, I worried about my safety, my future and my brother's wellbeing. From time to time I was pulled from the room and interrogated. Screaming at me, my interrogators asked why I had left the slave labour camp before my term was up. They also accused me of teaching Sunday school, something I had never done. They pulled my hair and slapped my face to make me confess. A terrified skeleton, I remained silent. The guard who had brought me in said, "Why not just shoot her."

After a few weeks, I was overcome by nervous exhaustion and a seeping rash and placed in the hospital of the prison. The hospital was crowded and filthy, and I shared a room with a crazed, lice-infested gypsy with matted hair who climbed the walls, and a woman dying of syphilis who moaned all night. I lay consumed with fear that once my rash improved I would either be sent back to the Gulag or shot.

One day my name was called. I faced a stern judge who glared about the room dispassionately. At last he spoke, "You are free to go!" To my utter amazement, I was placed on probation and could return to my home with a three month pass. My room was still available; my brother had been cared for by the landlady. I ran all the way to the kiosk. My job was waiting for me as well.

The manageress took me aside and asked, "Don't you know what saved you?" "I have no idea," I answered. "It was Mr. Katz," she said. "The money you found and returned to the till was a test from him. Your honesty impressed him so much he did all he could to save you from the firing squad."

1 A kulak was someone designated by the Soviet state as a wealthy peasant. The designation was the basis for a great deal of abuse. Many Mennonites perished during this time.

2 The first Mennonite colony to be established in Russia.

Genealogy Corner: The Ties that Bind

An Interview with Robert Hochhalter

By Dolores Harder, Sandi Massie and Robert Martens

The MHSBC office is frequently busy with visitors seeking help with the genealogy of family or friends. Robert Hochhalter, though, was different: he seemed expert in genealogical search skills and would work alone, conversing all the while with anyone in the vicinity who might be interested in what he was looking for or in what he had found. Society volunteers were naturally quite curious about his methods and, after some conversation, Robert agreed to an interview on his approach to genealogical research. His search methods, it turned out, were rather unusual.

The interview by Sandi Massie and Dolores Harder took place in April 2015 and began with the question: why are you interested in your past? The beginnings of Robert Hochhalter's passion for genealogical research were

not very unusual – in fact, they were rather typical. A family reunion in Leamington, Ontario, when he was in grade 11 or 12, had sparked his interest in unravelling the stories he heard there. His grandmother, Katharina Epp, was an “ethnic Mennonite,” but it was the stories of his non-Mennonite German-Russian grandfather, Victor Hochhalter (1909-1988), that caught his attention: “My grandfather spent a number of years in the Gulag and survived that,” said Robert, “... he was carted off in a cattle car.” Grandfather Hochhalter managed to immigrate to Canada with the help of the Red Cross. His birthplace remained something of a mystery, however. Robert's grandmother had mentioned a village called Springfield in Ukraine – but where was that? It took some digging to find out.

There were contradictions. Robert reported that his grandfather's “birth certificate says one thing but that's not the reality.” The first clue was in the EWZ files on his grandfather: the *Einwandererzentralstelle* (Immigration Centre) documents kept by the Third Reich on German immigrants between 1939 and 1945. The flood of German-Russian refugees, many Men-

nonites among them, peaked in 1943 with the retreat of German troops from the Soviet Union. Robert confirmed the EWZ information by first looking up Springfield on Stumpp maps (see following page) and finally, “oddly enough, on Google Earth.” And this is where Robert's passion for genealogical research becomes somewhat untypical. Although ancestral data remains central to the work of genealogy, for Robert, online maps provide much of the information he is looking for: “My grandfather talked a lot about places and I've been trying to connect them to the physical reality of maps at the time.”

The immense dislocations of World War II separated some families forever. “During the Second World War,” said Robert, “everything became disjointed and

my grandfather's family ended up in Herzenberg.” And then – “This is the main thing I've been chasing” – Robert was finally able to locate Herzenberg (later Alexandrovka, Ekaterinoslav province) on a very detailed American army map: “This is where my homework breaks down. I've got a whole bunch of resources in my head now, and I've got tidbits, and I was trying to get it to the point where this is my story to add to this story.”

Questions emerged. Organizing so much information is difficult when place names change over time. A 1928 map of Ukraine proved helpful. “When my grandfather tells his story in terms of the cities that were there in the day, this is the map to refer to, just before everything fell apart,” said Robert. Remarkably, considering the prevailing violence of the era, this map is meticulous in its detail, displaying colonies and their nationalities. Since Stumpp maps of the area, normally excellent, aren't always reliable, Robert “went to the extra work of finding out which is right.” The Schroeder maps (see following page), said Robert, are more accurate. Robert's work has led to some ex-

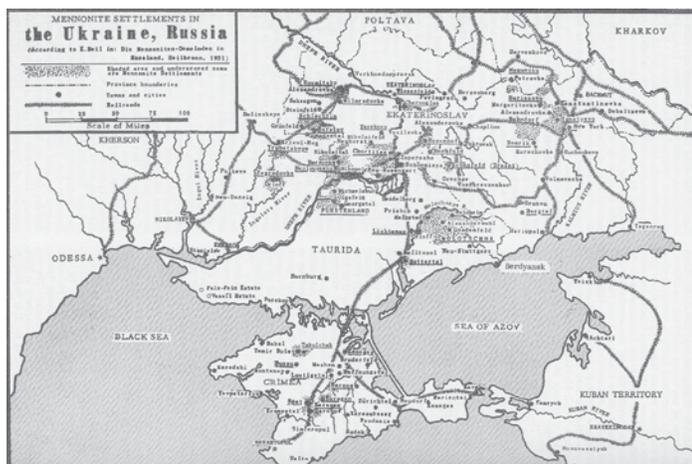
“Organizing so much information is difficult when place names change over time.”

ceptional discoveries. His grandfather had spoken of a town which Stalin ordered to be “starved out” during the war, and Robert was able to match the story with the location. Robert also found a German aerial map of an area in which his grandfather was engaged in battle; even the trenches are visible in this map.

Genealogical research demands a persistence that non-genealogists can only admire. “City to city, location to location, EWZ files, putting it all together, to see this is the story; these are the artefacts of today’s world that we can verify,” said Robert. Online tools such as ACDSee (photo management software) and Adobe Photoshop (digital imaging software) can be hugely helpful. He uses the Photoshop program “where you can overlay the different maps and you can adjust the transparency so it starts to hit you what’s new, what’s the revision.”

For Robert Hochhalter, maps are a changing panorama of cultural and economic landscapes: “The Molotschna River was significant back then” [in the early years of German settlement in Russia]. ... “This was where it all started, and then it progressed, and you can just walk through the maps. ... How they went from the time the river was important to the time the post office was important to the time the railway was important, all through the time our ancestors lived in the Ukraine.”

Ultimately, Robert’s goal is to understand and tell his grandfather’s story: “I’d like to organize it so it’s



Source: *Mennonite Encyclopedia* v. 4, p. 764

“Genealogical research demands a persistence that non-genealogists can only admire.”

presentable, I’d like to merge the new information into my grandfather’s story so I can say, when he’s talking about this, he meant this place.”

A Few Cartophiles (“lovers of maps”):

1. William Faden (1749-1836) was royal geographer to King George III and a publisher of maps. His best-known work is the *North American Atlas* of 1777, but he also published detailed maps of the Russian Empire as it appeared in the early nineteenth century.
2. Adolf Stieler (1775-1836) was a lawyer who worked for the Justus Perthes Geographical Institute in Gotha, Germany. His superb *Handatlas*, which remained in print as late as 1945, included maps of the Ukraine and German colonies inside its boundaries.
3. Karl Stumpff (1896-1982) travelled with the invading German army into Russia where he documented and mapped German-Russian villages and colonies. His work was excellent but his career is tainted by his association with the German SS. (See *Roots & Branches* Nov. 2014).
4. William (Bill) Schroeder (1933-2013) worked devotedly as a volunteer for historical societies and organizations in Manitoba. He is best known, perhaps, for his collaboration with Helmut Huebert in publishing the invaluable *Mennonite Historical Atlas*.
5. *Google Earth*, originally *EarthViewer 3D*, a creation of the American Central Intelligence Agency, was acquired by the giant corporation Google in 2004. It provides satellite views in 2D and 3D of the earth’s surface, and allows searches by address, coordinates, and mouse manipulation. By late 2011, Google Earth had been downloaded more than a billion times.

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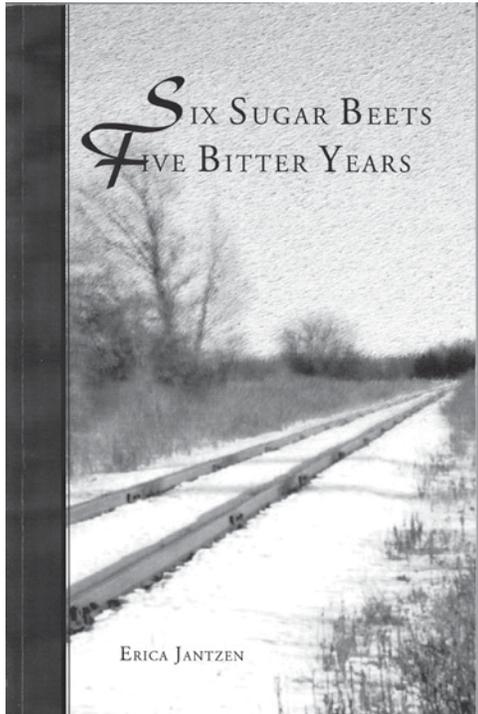
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Book Reviews

**Erica Jantzen. *Six Sugar Beets, Five Bitter Years*.
Kitchener, Pandora, Press: 2003. 186 pp.**

Reviewed by Robert Martens

While Erica Jantzen was working with MCC in Germany between 1990 and 1993, she developed a relationship with Anna Kroeker, the sister of her stepmother. The stories Anna told her were astonishing. Jantzen writes, "What an amazing account of survival and faith! It had to be written down. ... So I set about reconstruct-



ing a few years of her life" (7). Anna Kroeker's story, though, was so strange that Jantzen felt she must tell it in the form of a novel: "To help the reader understand the bizarre events of the Stalinist years, I took the liberty to add some details. I used direct speech. Would Tante Anna Kroeker have said it in exactly those words? Probably not. Therefore I decided to give the heroine of my story the name Mia (Maria) Peters, but it remains the story of Anna Kroeker (1902-1999), a testimony of God keeping his own" (7). "Tante Anna" eventually was able to move to Germany with her family but not before experiencing the nightmare of the Stalinist labour camps which literally drove many insane. Jantzen's novel, *Six Sugar Beets, Five Bitter Years*, tells that haunting story.

The novel opens and closes in Kyrgyzstan, named the Kirgizian Soviet Socialist Republic during the years of the Soviet empire. An independent country since 1991, Kyrgyzstan is nestled in Central Asia

between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China; its people are mostly Muslim. German-speaking people have also lived – and continue to live – in Kyrgyzstan, however, and among them are Mennonites. Author Erica Jantzen's parents were born in its capital city, Bishkek, and Jantzen herself taught English there in 1999.

The Mennonite story in Kyrgyzstan is not well known. German-speaking Mennonites and Baptists first arrived there in the late nineteenth century and established several farming villages, including one called Bergtal – a customary Mennonite name. With the establishment of the Soviet state, Bergtal was renamed Rotfront (Red Front) in 1927, and all religious observances were banned by the Communist authorities. Years of discrimination and hardship followed for Mennonites living in the area. More Mennonite settlements appeared in Kyrgyzstan during and after the Second World War, when Stalin had German-speaking citizens living in the western Soviet Union forcibly exiled eastward, away from the war front. Another wave of "German Russians," attracted by the warm climate, settled in Kyrgyzstan after being released from the Gulag – the Soviet labour camps – in 1955 and over the next few years.

By 1987, four "Old Church" Mennonite congregations were active in villages near Bishkek, and a Mennonite Brethren church was located in a suburb of the capital. These congregations were ably led by Mennonite elders from other areas of the nation, including Tokmak. One such elder (*Ältester*), Hans Penner, translated the Mennonite confession of faith from German into Russian. High German, however, was still being used in church services, and Low German in Mennonite homes. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, church members regained the freedom to practise their faith openly. Rotfront once again became Bergtal and Mennonites live there to this day, conducting themselves according to strict conservative principles and rejecting alcohol, television and dancing. European Germans seem fascinated by the remnant still living in Central Asia; a movie, *Milch und Honig aus Rotfront (Milk and Honey from Rotfront)*, was made in 1995. Most Mennonites, however, have left Central Asia and have moved to Germany and beyond.

At the beginning of Erica Jantzen's novel, the protagonist, a single mother named Mia Peters, is working in the sugar beet fields of a Soviet commune. She makes the terrible error of picking up six sugar beets lost in the mud, intending to help a sick friend feed her family. Mia is betrayed by the village informant and is summoned before a kangaroo court on charges of state theft. Those who sit in judgement are portrayed in the novel as utterly vicious and incompetent, almost as cartoon figures, but the reality is that the portrayal is likely accurate.

Mia, who has a "big mouth" and independent spirit, can't help but defend herself with a righteous rage, and the consequences are tragic: she is sentenced to six years in prison camp, one year per sugar beet. She is in a state of despair in a dark holding cell when she experiences the first of several divine visions: "Suddenly, although her eyes are shut tight, she is aware of a blaze of light around her, as bright as if a thousand searchlights have been turned on. The light blinds her, yet feels warm and comforting. She falls into a heap on the dirty rags in her cell. Slowly the warmth embraces and fills her. She hears a voice, gentle and reassuring, 'Mia, I love your children more than you do'" (37). Later she wonders if the vision was "wishful thinking:" no, she decides, "He loves my children more than I do. I have his promise" (43).

Then her years of trial begin. Along with other political prisoners, Mia is transported first by truck and then train cattle car to the forced-labour forestry camps of Siberia. Some die along the way and many more in the Siberian wilderness. The author writes, "Sometimes she wondered which was harder to bear – the hardship or the monotony of their existence" (67). A fellow prisoner, Yekaterina, driven mad by suffering, commits suicide. At her graveside, Mia experiences another vision: "She had expected to feel an enormous sadness standing at Yekaterina's gravesite. Instead, she was overwhelmed by the beauty of the light and the whiteness around her" (73).

When Stalin dies in 1953, conditions in the Gulag ease in some measure, but Mia falls desperately ill after working in brutal conditions in a coal mine. Eventually, due to her frail health, Mia is given work as a domestic and soon falls in love with the children of her "adopted family." After she has endured five

years of state labour, amnesty is granted to prisoners over a certain age, and Mia is among them. The struggle is not quite over, however: her release is initially denied by a sadistic administrator and Mia, walking the train tracks, overwhelmingly feels that she wants her life to end. Another vision of divine intervention saves her from suicide. With the strength of that vision filling her soul, she confronts the administrator once again; while she is nervously glancing over her shoulder at seemingly empty space, he grants her release.

Many lost their hope and their faith in the prison camps of the Soviet empire. Mia Peters (Anna Kroeker) refused to accede to the bottomless cruelty of the regime. Near the end of the novel, Mia breaks down in tears when, on her journey home, she learns she has boarded the wrong train. A friend asks if she feels God has abandoned her. "I forgot to think about God," Mia replies, "I worried" (175).

Additional sources to explore

Klippenstein, Lawrence. "Kyrgyzstan." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1990. www.gameo.org

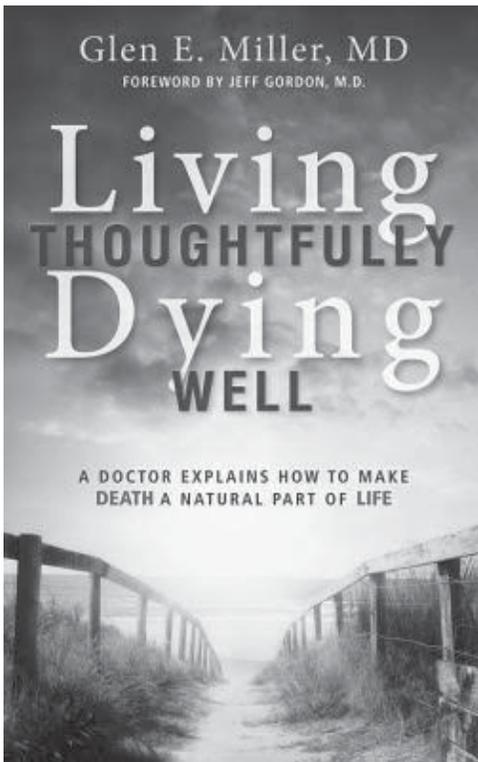
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Glen E. Miller. *Living Thoughtfully, Dying Well*. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Herald Press, 2014. 170 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Martens

His first heart attack took place in Calcutta where his position as director of Mennonite Central Committee India put him in regular contact with Mother Teresa. Some years later, Dr. Glen Miller suffered a cardiac arrest while delivering a speech on the escalating costs of health care. His wife, Marilyn, later said, "I thought you were dead" (21). Luckily, a nurse was on hand to perform CPR on Miller, and an emergency team soon arrived with a defibrillator. Glen Miller would survive.

After he woke from his delirium in a hospital room, however, Miller realized that he was terminally ill, that heart failure would eventually take him from this world. At the same time, he was grateful to be alive, and especially glad that he would not be



permanently disoriented. He could still make decisions about the remaining years of his life and his inevitable demise. Careful planning, he realized, is required for a “good death.”

Living Thoughtfully, Dying Well is Miller’s guidebook to end-of-life care

for the aged. “The way we die has changed,” he writes; before the advent of life-prolonging technology, “death was a relatively simple thing” (17). Today, much more active participation is required by the patient facing the end of life. Miller’s book is not written for those who die young and tragically; catastrophic death, he writes, has been covered well elsewhere. It is written for the aged who need to foresee the possibility that they could die insensate and alone, connected to tubes that prolong a life that has become meaningless. The book is also written, it should be noted, for patients in both the American and Canadian health care systems.

The term, “good death,” might initially seem an oxymoron. “Since we can’t get out of this life alive anyhow,” writes Miller, “it may be an advantage to know you are facing your terminal illness; it provides time and space to prepare for a good death which reflects the values and theology that have guided your life” (32). A good death is one that is well-prepared for: “What I wish for myself, I wish for all: a good death that allows us to leave this world as naturally and positively as possible” (18).

Miller’s book is based on interviews. One story he tells is that of Ezra, whose life was needlessly prolonged as he lay semi-conscious in a hospital room. Ezra’s dying had happened badly, with increasing power handed over to specialists by his distraught family to keep him alive at any cost. Ezra and his wife had

written an advance directive, or what is sometimes called a “living will,” but had not discussed it with their children. The lack of proper preparation resulted in greater suffering for both family and patient.

Glen Miller has worked as a doctor as well as a hospital administrator, and his experience has persuaded him that an important cause of “bad deaths” is the “over-medicalization” of North American society. Around the world, the poor suffer from a lack of health care and frequently endure miserable deaths. Not so for prosperous North Americans: “On the contrary, in our time of dying we may suffer from *too much medical care*” (authors’ italics 54). The health industry has convinced many of us that pills and tests can cure almost anything. Miller writes, “So, as consumers of health care we are convinced that many of the solutions to our life problems can be found in pills or treatment. ... Further we believe that more care is always better – if one test is good, two are better” (56). Useless medical tests are frequently the consequence. Moreover, the threat of litigation from patients, especially in the US, results in “defensive medicine.” A study has shown that 20% of tests in the US are ordered by doctors in order to avoid lawsuits and that nearly all high-risk medical specialists are sued at some point in their career. (In Canada these figures are much lower.) The resulting financial costs are staggering – and emotional costs are high as well, when the lives of dying patients are artificially and unreasonably prolonged.

“My nightmare scenario,” writes Miller, “is to die in an ICU with tubes, catheters, and wires attached, a tube down my throat, my hands tied down, and speech impossible as I struggle for awareness through a haze of illness and sedation” (144). In simple practical terms, Miller suggests some avenues for avoiding the “nightmare scenario” and achieving a “good death.” Be prepared: the family should ask themselves what the patient would want, and even *do nothing at all* if the situation calls for it; the patient’s dying should be discussed well before a health crisis takes place; a family spokesperson should be appointed; and information should be gleaned from every source possible, including the Internet. Furthermore, bearing in mind that the doctor is a figure of power and influence, do not be unnecessarily swayed, writes Miller, by the physician’s recommendations. Perhaps most important is the advance directive. Write it well

before medical crisis; establish who will have power of attorney; be completely clear on any medical interventions; discuss the directive with family; ensure the directive is properly signed, distribute multiple copies, and review it at least annually; and finally, inform the doctor on the advance directive when the health crisis arrives. A key here is the patient's clarity of mind: keeping in mind that delirium can be triggered simply by hospitalization, if the dying person seems *permanently* confused, the advance directive should always trump "heroic measures" for resuscitation.

The final pages of Glen Miller's book are devoted to the spiritual aspects of dying: "I expect that my dying will be treated as the *spiritual* event that it is" (author's italics 137). He is grateful for his Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage and for the emphasis it places on community and service. A chapter, however, is allotted to differing religious points of view on death and dying: Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Pentecostal, and finally Mennonite. Miller goes on to suggest that an "ethical will" might be written, a document that would pass on to younger generations the dying person's values, guideposts, and wishes. He cites a palliative doctor who says that four basic topics need to be covered in an ethical will: "Please forgive me; I forgive you; Thank you; and I love you" (105).

Glen Miller's book comes with appendices on abbreviations, role-playing, and resources, thus ending with that keen sense of practicality the writer has displayed throughout. Before that, though, the main body of the text concludes with a kind of "ethical will" for the reader, and it is eloquent: "When my pacemaker is turned off, the heart monitor will reveal the erratic beat of a too-often injured heart, a heart whose weakness from physical injuries was sublimated to a heart in love with life and made joyful by gratitude for a good life. To the sounds of a final lullaby from family members, the monitor will show the jagged lines of the QRS complex of the heart gradually lengthening to the straight line of a heart that has finally found its rest. I will then enter into the next great adventure that ushers me into the presence of the one who created me" (147).

Living Thoughtfully, Dying Well can be found in the MHSBC library in Abbotsford. It is also available for sale online.

Rachel Epp Buller & Kerry Fast, editors. *Mothering Mennonite*, Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2013. 312 pp.

Reviewed by Doreen Wolfs

As I sit down to reflect on *Mothering Mennonite*, I am self-consciously aware that I am still wearing my apron. I have just finished braiding dough that will accompany a nice pot of homemade borscht, and I laugh out loud at this stereotypical feminine Mennonite image. I briefly contemplate removing my apron – a visible reminder of my domesticity – before I engage with some serious scholarly work. However, I swiftly reject this intrusive thought on the grounds that I want to embody my belief that domesticity and intellectual pursuits are compatible. My husband has taken our three children ice skating, and I have a few delicious moments to reflect on a book that has meaningfully delivered on its back-cover promise to "[meet] a need for mothers like myself who live with the tension of being independent, thinking, artistic mothers who live to varying degrees within a conservative religious community."¹ Not only is this book juicy, insightful, and timely, but it evokes an awakening that meets a deep need for authenticity and for inner reconciliation between self and community, past and present, and duty and vocation.

This intimate anthology of multidisciplinary essays, creative writing, and poetry tackles the (de)construction of women's identity in the ethnic Mennonite culture, especially related to women's roles as mothers. Through deeply personal accounts, the authors grapple with the expectations of Mennonite women, analyze their sociocultural context, and/or pay tribute to various maternal figures in their lives (including themselves!). Using a feminist lens, the contributors dissect relations of power and reveal their consequences for women. While the authors pay variable attention to the patriarchal nature of ethnic Mennonite communities, they also emphasize how mothering is an empowering experience: the power of Mennonite women in their role as mothers comes from their place "at the heart of perpetuating and determining Mennonite identity" (Buller, Fast 7).

Mothering Mennonite is divided into four sections: "Picturing Mothers and Daughters," "Mothering across Generations," "Challenging Mennonite Motherhood," and "Mothering in and Around Culture(s)." An overarching theme throughout the anthology is



the special role of mothers in the transmission (and/or creation) of culture and religion in their communities. The essays explore identity questions such as “How do assumptions about our female ancestors influence our own identity as women?” “How has the perception of the ‘ideal’

mother developed among Mennonites?” And “what are the consequences of this perception?”

Other topics explored include the construction of Mennonite feminine identity, the tensions that arise when multiple meanings of “Mennonite” and “Mother” are intertwined, how “Mennoniteness” might enrich a woman’s career, and how cultural contexts shape the experiences and expectations of Mennonite mothers. Poignant essays about singleness and childlessness invite the reader to consider his or her part in sustaining a culture that idealizes motherhood and devalues the role of women who are not married

or who do not bear and raise children. Overall, the reader of this anthology becomes more self-aware and is left to ponder how she – and her mother and grandmothers – complied with or resisted particular social expectations, and how she plays a role in perpetuating or determining maternal and Mennonite identities.

This anthology is geared toward Mennonite women and those who are interested in exploring questions of cultural transmission of maternal identity. *Mothering Mennonite* takes some time to savour since the content is rich, thought-provoking, and written in the type of academic language necessary for the authors to build a scholarly case. Overall, I was impressed by the breadth and depth of Mennonite scholarship represented in this book. The editors certainly achieve their goal of presenting a diverse – yet cohesive – account of how Mennonite culture has shaped experiences of mothering (and vice versa). Readers will appreciate the authors’ range of expertise, their authentic engagement in the subject matter, and their evocative narratives.

¹ Alana Ruben Free, playwright, *Beginner at Life and other Eden Plays*, and founding editor of *The Mom Egg*.

This book is available at www.demeterpress.org/motheringmennonite.html as well as in the MHSBC office library.

Dorolen Wolfs is a member of Highland Community Church and is on faculty in the School of Nursing at Trinity Western University. She loves to read, write, and teach about how to integrate faith with nursing.

Call for Volunteers

The Mennonite Historical Society of BC and Mennonite Heritage Museum will soon be moving into a beautiful new location. There will be many opportunities for volunteers to participate in both the MHSBC and MHM. We are looking for individuals who thrive in positive work environments, love to serve and create community, and are willing to learn new skills if required. We value our volunteers and work with them to find a good fit for each person’s skills, interests, and availability.

MHSBC volunteers are passionate about Mennonite history and about making a contribution to community stories. To sign up, please fill out the MHSBC insert in this issue, indicating your area of

interest.

MHM volunteers are eager to serve in the running of the new facility. To join our team, please fill out the MHM insert, indicating your area of interest. Currently, we are especially interested in growing our volunteer base for the café and bookstore.

Please mail your forms to Diana Hiebert, 1818 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford, BC, V2T 5X4, or drop them off at the new museum building.

We look forward to meeting you!

Diana Hiebert
Volunteer and Office Manager

Mennonite World Conference 2015

By Helen Rose Pauls

“Walking with God” was the theme of the latest Mennonite World Conference (MWC) held last July 21-16 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, at the giant Farm Complex, a large exhibition center. This was the sixteenth world conference since the first one was held in Basel, Switzerland, in 1925, to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the Anabaptist movement. Since then, MWC conferences have occurred every six years and twice in Canada: Kitchener, Ontario, in 1962 and Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1990. The next one is being planned for Indonesia, in 2021.

Originally an American and European event, MWC is now a global village. Mennonites in Africa and India have far surpassed North American and European Mennonites in number. Africa now has 736,000 baptized members of Mennonite churches; Canada and USA, 682,000; India and Asia, 431,000; Latin America and the Caribbean, 200,000; and Europe, where it all began, only 64,600 members. Sadly, many members from developing countries who had hoped to attend the conference could not be there because of visa difficulties.

The goal of MWC is to facilitate community among global Anabaptist traditions. Four inter-conference commissions – the Deacons Commission, Faith and Life Commission, Missions Commission, and Peace Commission – facilitate fellowship, service, worship and witness within this diverse group. Indonesian Mennonites must function in a Muslim context; those from the Netherlands find themselves in a sophisticated post-Christian world; American Mennonites are swayed by the prosperity gospel; and some African Mennonites struggle with civil unrest.

This year’s event gathered a total of 7,500 people from sixty-five countries; in addition, a pre-assembly Global Youth Summit brought together four hundred young adults from around the world. Additional youth joined for the actual conference and rumour had it that many who were billeted at local Messiah College played Dutch Blitz into the wee hours. No doubt these young people are all now connected on Facebook and Twitter, connections invaluable to the future church.

Each conference day featured a geographical area, with speakers and music reflecting Africa, Asia, Europe or North America. Morning worship included a speaker, a responder from the “young Anabaptist” group, and inspiring singing. Joining an optional multicultural friendship group each morning was enriching for many. In our group, a member had just got word of her father’s death in Paraguay, and we were able to surround her in support.

After lunch, a daunting task for the staff of the Farm Complex, attendees could choose from numerous workshops or could browse through the many displays. Ray Dirks from Winnipeg featured his newest paintings that honour Russian Mennonite women who kept their families together during World War Two. Other options were bus excursions organized by the hard-working host group to local sites of interest such as Amish farms, Amish businesses, former Underground Railway slave routes, Lancaster County, Intercourse (an Amish village), historic Philadelphia, and the town of Hershey and its chocolate factory, to name a few.

After supper, worship was enriched by music: an exuberant choir from Zimbabwe; a tenor’s voice soaring above the European group of which he was a part; the American song, “As I Went Down to the River to Pray,” sung by the entire assembly; and of course the iconic Mennonite hymn, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” which united us all.

Each night we received greetings from leaders of different faith groups. Chilean Martin Junge, representing the Lutheran World Federation, said that God’s word was too large to be comprehended by any one person or faith tradition, emphasizing that we need each other for the larger view. The final speaker, Bruxy Cavey, a Canadian pastor and author of *The End of Religion*, praised Anabaptists for maintaining the centuries-old message that love for others is the essential element of a peace church: the element that unites us all.

In Memoriam

Saying goodbye to Harry Loewen

By Royden Loewen

Harry Loewen (1930-2015), the founding Chair in Mennonite Studies, author of numerous books, a beloved colleague to many of us, a loving husband to Gertrude, and a devoted father and grandfather, will be missed. Harry accomplished a great deal in his life, but more significantly he was an inspiration to many young scholars as a teacher, publisher and writer for many decades. His ability to reach both popular and academic audiences has been remarkable. He has written on a wide range of topics, including comparing 16th Century Anabaptism and Lutheranism, early 20th century work on Mennonites in the Soviet Union, and his own story of coming to Canada with his widowed mother. He has also addressed more contemporary topics such as Mennonite literature and Mennonite identity in his collection, *Why I Am a Mennonite*. Harry showed a commitment to scholarship in many other ways: as the founding Chair in Mennonite Studies (1978-1995), he pioneered the idea of teaching Mennonite history in public spaces; and as the founding editor of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (1983-1995), he also pioneered a platform for Mennonite scholars in Canada to engage in valuable academic discourse. Harry was always a friendly and engaging scholar. Perhaps most importantly, he has consistently been an inspiration to the generation that follows him.

Royden Loewen is the Chair in Mennonite Studies and Professor of History at the University of Winnipeg. In that capacity he is also editor of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* and director of the Mennonite History Graduate Fellowship Program.



Photo: Dr. Harry Loewen just before being appointed Chair in Mennonite Studies in 1978.

And farewell to Mary Ratzlaff Froese

By Robert Martens

Mary Ratzlaff Froese was a kind of “people’s historian,” a living archives of the Mennonite village of Yarrow. She was born in Saskatchewan in 1927 and lived for a time in Vancouver, but spent most of her years in her beloved Yarrow. Mary and her husband, Abram (Ed) Froese, were pranksters and partygoers in their youth and perhaps that experience was instrumental in Mary’s keen and objective appreciation of the Mennonite community. In earlier years Mary was a constant source of welcome and aid to new immigrants to Canada, including Mennonites after World War II and Hungarians after the abortive rebellion in 1956. In 1959 she and Ed recommitted themselves to church life and became loyal members of the Chilliwack Alliance Church. Like many others at that time, they decided against Mennonite church involvement because of perceived institutional legalism; the current German/English language dispute was also an issue. Nevertheless, Mary was an invaluable source of eyewitness testimony for the Yarrow Research Committee, which published five volumes on the rise and fall of the ethnic Mennonite community in that village. In later years she led a drive to restore the badly deteriorated Yarrow Cemetery.

Mary was a mover and a talker, and could light up a room. The last time I saw her at a Chilliwack hospice, she was still sitting up in bed and telling stories of old Yarrow. Mary Ratzlaff Froese died August 26, 2015.



Photo: obits.dignitymemorial.com

Pointing my finger towards beauty: Thoughts on art, landscape and on growing up Mennonite

By Neil Peter Dyck with Louise Bergen Price

I believe that I was born with the affection for artmaking. A trait, like any other. As we age these traits change, evolve, mature, and become more elaborate. The most significant aspect of this growth, for me, is possibly understanding the present, and being thrilled about the future. We don't know what we have control of in our lives, and the existence of any control is debatable. And so when I paint, I find the experimental and educational aspects of artmaking a fascinating way of learning. I also just really have an incredible amount of fun doing so. I'd like to think that that shows.

I grew up in Abbotsford but I roamed all over the valley, into the mountains, on the ocean, loving islands. I appreciate solitude, with space and silence to ease my mind and increase concentration. Artmaking is one part of me, connected to all the others. So my attraction to rural settings where the main stimulation is nature seems to cover it all.

I've lived in Winnipeg for another significant part of my life, as well as being born there. Both sides of my family go back as far as Mennonite families probably go in southern Manitoba. So to live in a rural setting in the outskirts of Winnipeg, as I do now, is a natural connection between that heritage and my landscape-based paintings. And it really doesn't take much of a switch in perspective to recognize the complexities, below or right on top, of the plains on par with the mountains - the complete equality between the two, and their existence within one another. I went for a hike this afternoon in the woods along the La Salle River, and when I made it up back to the wheat field, the wind had the field moving like a body of water. And that prairie wind is a current.

When I think of my Mennonite roots, and how that may influence my life and art, it primarily goes back to the Canadian landscape that I've already written about. What I have gathered from my family, and the small church community that I grew up in, is that compassion is the name of the game. Another knowledge acquired is that there are many people from other families and communities with wonderful ideas who can coexist peacefully. I was taught to respect and to learn about ideas outside of my family or church community and to appreciate the incredible variety of cultures that come with those ideas.

cont'd next page



Neil Peter Dyck Photo: Jess Reimer

From Neil Dyck's bio: As he works intuitively on hard board to create non-representational paintings, Dyck's rudimentary investigations embrace a harmony of collage and painting. Dyck's works are organic in their construction and explore fundamental ideas taken from nature and life around him. His dream-like, fragmented compositions are the result of a process of augmenting, reducing and concealing abstract forms, a multi-layered execution that simultaneously exposes an expressive freedom and calculated restraint.

Dyck has exhibited across Canada, including the Toronto International Art Fair, and was awarded the Heinz Jordan Prize in Painting in 2004 and 2005. He has previously been represented by Jeffrey Boone Gallery in Vancouver. Dyck currently lives and works in Sanford, MB. (www.actualgallery.ca/neil-peter-dyck-1)



Just Stick Around by Neil Peter Dyck

I believe the true focus of my painting came about while I was living in La Rivière in the Pembina Valley, near where my Grandmother, Laura Friesen, grew up during the Depression. I had never been there before. Every week or two, I would go to Winnipeg to share a meal or cup of tea with Grandma and listen to her stories. Most memories she shared were not positive, although some were.

While Grandma's life in La Rivière had been hard, mine was not. I was a painting in a gorgeous valley, wandering the hills, cooking beans over a fire. She was very happy for me. My grandmother passed away a few months ago - I write this today on what would have been her 93rd birthday - and I'm listening to Leonard Cohen's album *The Future*. Cohen's line "Love's the only engine of survival" really clicks with how I knew my grandmother, how I know my family, and the land I'm compelled to appreciate.

I hope, at the very least, some might find my art, and the fact that I share what I do, to be a compassionate way of pointing my finger towards some beauty. Pre-existing, perhaps where you are, out of my imagination, or out of yours.



10 Miles East of La Rivière by Neil Peter Dyck